

TITLE: Disciples' Call

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Author: Dr. James Paul Humphries

Editor: Lorn Bergstresser

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Forward

Foundations are always the most critical part to every structure that is built. You see so little of foundations because they are buried away in the ground where they are not visible. They say about the CN Tower in Toronto Canada that there is as much concrete under the ground, keeping the tower firm, as there is above the ground.

It is the same with spiritual foundations. We need to build on a firm foundation of the word of God to know and understand all we can about Him. In real life, often the foundation builders are a different group of people than those who build the superstructure. The one group has to rely on the other, but what keeps everything on track is the architect who oversees everything.

Then years pass by and the structure that was begun in faith comes tumbling down because the foundation was not inspected or built right by the original builders.

What the church needs are craftsmen who are mature and can inspect and teach others about foundation building. When it comes to the things of Christ, we are always one generation away from not knowing truth about foundation-building.

Most spiritual structures in the world today are weak and frail. They have cracks and are crumbling. They cannot withstand the winds and the waves of life and of the world.

The Lord tells us to pray for the laborers but the kind of laborers that are needed today for kingdom-building are foundation-builders, people who know how to build strength, maturity and firmness into people's lives.

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As a discipler, I see the need to go out and be a foundation inspector, to make contact with people's hearts and to make sure that what they are building is firmly grounded on the rock of Christ. There are no short cuts, Jesus gave us a way to build, one truth that teaches us the building code and one life to do it in.

The first task of a builder is to set the foundation of the building. We, too, as disciples, must affirm within ourselves, how to acquire a true disciple's heart - one that is committed to follow Christ. This takes us right back to the first day when we heard and accepted Christ's call on our lives.

This book is an attempt to help guide the disciple through a journey of examining the foundation stones of our call in Christ. Our desire is to make sure that the structure is firmly established and built on the foundation of Christ who is our Rock.

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Preface

In times of old, specifically amongst the Jewish people, a ram's horn would be used to call out the people from their homes and their places of work to gather together at a prescribed site. The ram's horn was known as a shofar. This instrument was used to mark times and seasons; it was used to call people together for worship as well to battle, and also to celebrate when the battle had been won. In every case, it had to sound a clear and a powerful call.

The challenge to disciples today is hear the call of God now. We need to hear His call clearly so that when it comes we will know where to look and be ready to go off to battle.

In the last days, when Christ is about to return, there again will be a clear call sent out from heaven, calling out God's people, the Church, to meet Him in the sky.

The hymn writer penned these special words:

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound,
and time shall be no more,
and the morning breaks, eternal bright and fair;
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,
and the roll is called up yonder,
I'll be there
(When the Roll is Called up Yonder by James M. Black, 1856-1938)

God is calling. Are we hearing His call and are we ready to go forward with Christ when He calls each day and, at the end, will we hear when He calls His church into His very presence?

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Introduction

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. II Timothy 1:8-9

Can, and does, God the Creator of all the universe take time to call out to every man, woman and child of this world and invite them to walk in fellowship with Him? Does He have time and interest in us? Has God been calling out to you, and if so, what does that mean to you today?

The subject of God's calling has been a subject of great debate among theologians and people throughout time and history. However, by taking the time to study this subject one will soon find the answers to the question of how God calls us. This question of how God calls us may well lead to more questions.

Moreover, this topic is a key foundation stone to all that a disciple may or may not do with his or her time and life. The call is basic if we hope to see any type of revival in our lives or in our churches. Disciples are touched daily by this one word, "Call".

Throughout history God has been calling out to men and women, touching their hearts and changing lives in dramatic ways. God's call on lives has even altered the course of history extraordinarily.

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The very first call came from God to Adam and then to Eve. It was a call to fellowship and love, to walk and work together. They were called by God to even give names to the animals (Gen 2:19). Nevertheless, the lines of communication were twisted, because of man's disobedience; man's intimate and personal relationship with God was damaged and corrupted. Even after this sad event took place God called out to them again, "*Then the LORD God called to Adam and said unto him, where are you?*" (Gen 3:9)

It was not long after that when man began to call out to God. Genesis 4:26b says, "*Then men began to call upon the name of the Lord*". Often when man took time to call upon the name of the Lord, and altar would be built ... A place of holiness, a place of sacrifice, and a place to praise his God (Gen. 12:8 & 26:25 & Psalms 116:17). Calling upon God also bore witness to others of the existence and presence of God here on earth (I Kings 18:24).

The word "call" means to cry out, to call aloud, to roar, to proclaim, to summon, to invite, to appoint, to praise, to celebrate, to be named. The idea of call means that someone is clearly and specifically speaking directly at someone else, to summon that person to a specific task (Gen 12:18; Ex 2:7; Isa 55:5; 65:12) (See appendix for a more in-depth definition of the word "call").

Mankind saw the need for a relationship with God, to have a focus and bigger picture that was outside of their own selves. No matter what man tries to do to fill that need, it can only be met by God.

The Old and New Testaments are full of historical examples of God calling people out from humankind to serve Him.

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Abraham:

God called Abram to move to another land, to take up his family and move to an unknown place. This required a huge step of faith. He even has his name changed by God from Abram to Abraham. Moreover, God gave him a promise that He would make him a blessing to many nations. God also promised to walk with and, in a personal relationship, be with him and his descendants. Abraham entered into this pledge and took the first step of working out his love for God, but it was birthed from a call ... a call that went to the heart of who Abraham was.

Joseph:

God called Joseph by dreams which directed and challenged his way of thinking. These dreams went against cultural traditions. His father Jacob also knew the call of the Lord and how God keeps His promises. God took Joseph, the second youngest in his family and brought him through many negative and sometimes heart-breaking challenges. He was sold by his brothers into slavery, then spent several years in prison, before being elevated to the second highest leadership position in Egypt. God had called, Joseph had faith, and together they "walked the call".

Moses:

God had a plan for Moses, a slave's baby, born in a time when the Pharaoh was killing all Jewish babies two years of age and under. The call came through his mother and father and moved on through to one of Pharaoh's daughters who intervened; she took baby Moses as her own and raised him as an Egyptian. However, the call did not stop there. In due season and through many twists and turns, God raised up this man who had little faith in himself (and sometimes little faith in God) to lead the Jewish people out of a life of slavery into the promised land. God reaffirmed His call to Moses the shepherd by way of the burning bush and by the staff he had in his hand. Sometimes we struggle with God's calling on our

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lives, but we must understand that when God calls he will also provide and enable us to walk that call out with Him.

Samuel:

Samuel was called as a boy through a dream but even before that time God was calling out to his mother, with the mother asking God to give her a son, and in turn she would give him back to God. Samuel became a disciple and student of Eli whose own sons were sinful and wicked. Nevertheless, God shaped Samuel out of those challenges for ministry to His people. He grew up knowing how to hear God's voice. He would become the one who would anoint Saul the first King of Israel, and later he would anoint the second king, who became part of the genealogy of Christ, King David. God's call on one's life is for a purpose, and how we respond to it will affect others around us, both now and in the future.

David:

David, a shepherd boy, the youngest of the family, the last on the family tree for receiving any special blessing, was called of God to do a variety of things throughout his life. When Samuel was seeking God's man to anoint as king over Israel, David's father presented all the other brothers before Samuel asked whether there were any more in his family. David was not even thought about by man, yet looked for by the prophet Samuel and then called and anointed by God to be the next king of Israel.

He was a man who was going to have to learn patience and timing through the school of hard knocks and to be able to lead his followers and specifically teach them lessons about God, whom he served and loved. David would be one who would be part of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, and God described him as one whose heart was after God.

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Isaiah:

Isaiah was called of God to be a prophet, to speak out to Israel, to be used by God to predict the future as God spoke to him in prayer and visions. He was God's spokesperson to announce both judgments and blessings to the people. He would also be the one God would use to pen for us the book of Isaiah, telling us of the heart of a suffering servant who His people would discover hundreds of years later coming as a servant, Jesus Christ; the promised Messiah who, in Himself, would bring together the line of the priesthood and the line of the kings. Jesus would come the first time as a servant, but he would come the second time as King.

After Christ's first coming, God continued to call mankind to Himself to serve and to be ambassadors of light to a lost world.

Disciples:

During Christ's presence here on earth He personally called men to follow Him. From their places of work, they were called to leave all and follow Jesus. Fishermen, tax collectors, students, and even a thief were called. Again, Christ takes the ordinary and through His power and equipping turns them into extraordinary servants of the King of kings, joint heirs with Christ - people who are called out to impact the world for Christ, each one personally answering the call of Christ and walking with Christ for the rest of their earthly lives.

Peter:

Struggling with his call from Christ, Peter became an example to us of God's love and grace. Peter wanted a king, one who would deliver Israel immediately. But the truth was that Jesus came first as a servant. And Peter discovered that he, too, would have to develop an attitude of servant-hood.

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Peter was the one who denied Christ, the one who spoke before thinking, but who became the one Christ used to begin to build His body, the worldwide church. We should never give up on God's school of training. The Holy Spirit was able to mold Peter into what Christ had intended for him to do.

Stephen:

As a deacon Stephen knew the call of God on His life. Yes, he was chosen to wait on tables and to serve the poor and widows, but he would also become the Church's first martyr at the hands of the religious Pharisee named Saul. Even at his death, he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. He was so sure of his calling he asked Jesus to forgive those who were stoning him to death.

He also used his God-given gifts to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ; his testimony has touched many disciples, even to this present day. Our commitment to Christ's call can make an impact on history for all generations.

Paul:

Then came Paul, the murderer and persecutor of the disciples of Christ, a teacher of the teachers, educated by the best. Despite his training, he was not able to see the hand of God on Christ Jesus, until the day he was knocked off his mount and clearly heard God's voice and call. He was then able to fulfill his destiny here on earth as an ambassador of Christ to the Gentiles, bearing Christ's message of grace and righteousness to a lost world.

Paul's call cost him everything, but the fruit that came from this call was lasting and eternal. God called, Paul answered, and together they walked hand in hand to begin the task of changing the world for Christ.

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Even in the church age, many, many people have been called by God and have given Him their total commitment, including their very lives, in order to carry out and fulfill that call. Since the time of the apostles God has continued speaking and calling people to serve, even to the point of sacrificing their lives for a higher purpose. These committed disciples want to serve Christ wherever he leads and directs them.

Church Fathers:

These were men who were called to systematize the doctrines of faith, people who were not perfect but were called, driven by love and hope. They worked to compile the Old and New Testaments as we now have them; they continued to train and equip disciples for the growing church worldwide.

Persecution and hardship were all around them. Sometimes they wavered and struggled about their call, but in the end the church of Christ became firmly established. They left us an example of how God loves and cares for His people and for His church.

Martyrs:

From the time of the church Fathers to the present the voices of the martyrs give to us examples and testimonies of what the call of Christ is all about. It is a personal relationship with Christ Himself. It is walking, living and working with Emmanuel, “God with us”, every day no matter what the cost might be.

These were men and women who laid down their lives to become stepping-stones for those who would follow after them; they were torchbearers for the Kingdom. And through each generation God has called people to rise up and carry the torch for His glory.

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Martin Luther: (Catholic Priest)

This disciple of Christ found God's call through studying and teaching God's word. He wanted to be true to the Scriptures and by doing this he found himself at odds with the Roman Catholic Church to the extent that it almost cost him his life. He was shunned by leaders and friends because of his stand. Nevertheless, because of this stand, he is now seen as one of the fathers of the reformation. He believed that "the just shall live by faith".

Luther was not perfect and made many mistakes, but he was a vessel that God could use to open a door to a truth that brought life back into the church. He inspired others to step out, speak up and follow the call and direct leading of Christ.

Adoniram Judson: (Missionary)

Here again was a man called by God to go, despite not having the backing and support he needed. He wasn't even totally clear as to where he and his family should be. He had the call to go out, but it was not until he was on the way that it became clear where God meant him to be.

He took his wife and headed off to India. Then, after they got to India, he was not allowed to stay in India. He was rejected and sent away, again not sure where he should be. Nevertheless, God directed his pathway to Burma (Myanmar). He and his family would undergo extreme hardships; his wife and some children died. He was even imprisoned and suffered great trials, but during those "valley times", he would translate into Burmese both the Bible and a hymnbook, which are still in use to this day.

The fruit that he saw in his lifetime was very sparse but what came afterwards became a great harvest. He may not have

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reaped many earthly rewards, but he did reap an abundance of eternal rewards because he was obedient and faithful to the call.

Dr. Ola Hanson: (Missionary)

Dr. Hanson, while still very young, arrived in Burma with his family in order to answer the call to the Jinghpaw (Kachin) people. He gave 30 years of his life to give to the people a written language, a dictionary, and a hymn book. His greatest work was translating the Bible into the Kachin language.

He and fellow missionaries suffered great hardships and often did not see a lot of fruit for their labors, but they never wavered from the call, and in the end a great harvest came forth for God's glory and honor. The call of God was clear and foundational to their effort to bring forth a work that was built on the Word of God.

D. L. Moody: (Pastor)

A shoe sales clerk, Moody was led to Christ while at work selling a pair of shoes to a customer who introduced him to Christ Jesus. God ignited a fire that called him into a place of being a preacher and an evangelist for God's truth. With powerful expository preaching he touched the world with the gospel of Christ.

God used Moody to bring about revivals, to see churches born and to see them grow. He also became the builder and founder of the great Moody Church and later became the president of the Moody Bible Institute. Moody went from small beginnings to one who moved mountains for God's Glory, but it all began with a call from the heart of God to his heart. His life changed because he said yes to Christ's call.

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Billy Graham: (Evangelist)

We know Graham as an evangelist, but do we know his failures, his shyness and the challenges he faced with a wayward son? God laid a call on his life as a young man and, although he made many mistakes over the years, he never gave up or stopped trying. God took this country boy and raised him up to be a statesman in the world, all because he was willing to humble himself before God and heed his call.

Graham has met with leaders of the world and has preached evangelistic crusades world-wide, all because he stayed true to the call of God. If you stay true, even though you may not have the ability to do it all yourself, He will raise up people to walk with you, to help and encourage you to keep on going.

All these people, plus many thousands of others, started in obscurity; God raised them up to impact and touch the world for Christ. For these people the call of God was the foundation stone on which they built and directed their whole lives. He called them to a purpose. He gives to us a race to run, a call that is impossible to fulfill in our own strength, but with Christ all things they believed were possible.

The Bible exhorts every believer concerning the importance of having, knowing, and understanding what a call from God is. Scripture tells the disciple to be clear about one's call and diligent in understanding that call.

Peter tells the disciples and the church-at-large these words.

II Peter 1:2 -11

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life

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*and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who **called** us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His **calling** and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble. For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

Definitions:

There are four key words that come to us from this passage of Scripture that will help us to understand what the call of God means; these words will also lay for us a foundation for the rest of this book.

The first is the word **call**, which means to “announce, to summon, awake, invite, ordain, to invoke solemnly”. (See appendix for large definition)

The second is the word **knowledgeable**, it means to be acquainted, aware, conscious, familiar with,

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understanding, well informed, educated, intelligent, learned.

Next is the word *diligent*, meaning active, attentive, busy, careful, conscientious, painstaking, persevering, tireless.

Lastly we have the word *partakers*, meaning to engage, enter into, participate, share, take part, consume, eat, receive, share.

Now read again 2 Peter 1:1-11 again, reflecting on these words while you read. As you read, hopefully you will see the importance for the disciple of keeping God's call on his or her life in the forefront of their thinking and action.

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, one of His first miracles which He performed was the calling of the disciples. Walking up to men who were working, running a business, securely established in what they were doing, He "called" them and they left all to follow Him.

The last words Christ spoke to his disciples are known as "the great commission", sending them out to proclaim the good news. (Matt 28:19-20 "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*") Just like the disciples of Christ's time, we are also called to go out to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ, and to make disciples from all nations, tribes and tongues.

There is nothing more important to the believer than this one thing: to make sure that we have a clear call. I Corinthians

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14:7 says, “*Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear **call** who will get ready for battle?*” He calls us so that we can be used by God to call others.

Christ’s call is life-changing. His call leads to a lifestyle that reflects and models true discipleship. But the center of every disciple’s call must be a totally committed Christ-filled heart.

How does God call to us today? God's call can be likened to a telephone conversation. Telephones can be used to call or receive calls from around the world. Telephones contain a receiver as well as a transmitter. When both receiver and transmitter are functioning correctly, communication occurs. Similarly, God calls us and wants to be in touch with us moment by moment.

God calls to us by His Holy Spirit. But we need to be willing to listen to Him regardless of the information he wishes to impart. He speaks and shows us His will and plan. Everything He has to say to us is relevant to our times and to our daily walk. We just need to have the faith to trust that He knows what is best for us.

The questions of "when, where, why, who" and "what" all have at their centre the word "call" as a starting point. When this is clearly understood all our questions then become answered. Our struggles and challenges come mostly because we do not have wisdom or understanding as to how the Creator of the entire universe wants to personally call us and work through our hearts and our lives.

Paul tells Timothy about his calling and how it is the vital foundation for what he will be doing as a servant. II Timothy 1:8-9 states,

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*“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and **called** us with a holy **calling**, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”*

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 challenges us to consider our call.

*“ For consider your **calling**, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He might nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.”*

The call of God starts us out on our journey from the same starting point as Christ’s disciples: **called, then sent out.**

What follows is an overview of what being called by God entails for the disciple in today’s world. We need to both recognize and grasp God’s call and to let it "get a hold" of us. We need to make sure that our call is firmly founded on the word of God.

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Chapter One

Called to Follow

*“For you have been **called** for this purpose, since Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to **follow** in His steps.”*

I Peter 2:21

To be called to follow in someone else’s footsteps requires great faith in the person you have chosen to follow. It may mean leaving behind life as you know it, even changing your lifestyle and your beliefs. As His disciples, Christ leads, we follow. He goes before us like a shepherd before His sheep.

Step number one in our calling as disciples is to be followers. Jesus is our teacher and Lord; His desire is that we surrender our wills and follow Him. The dictionary defines following as, “come after, come next, step into the shoes of, accompany, act in accordance with; be guided by, comply, conform, give allegiance to, heed, mind, note, obey, observe, watch, adopt, copy, emulate, live up to, to pattern oneself upon, take as an example, to devoted to, support”. Do you see the bigger picture?

A man came to Jesus one night wanting to know how to be a follower of the true God. Jesus then explained to him that he needed to undergo a new birth and to begin walking in that new understanding or light that he would now receive.

Later Jesus told the disciples they were to follow Him as the only Way, the only Truth and as the only Life. This may seem to some to be a very narrow path, but it is the only way to achieve a deeper relationship with God. A road map helps us to find our

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destination, but we must follow the road and signposts if we hope to arrive at our destination.

To follow, one must give up the reins of leadership to another; one must be willing to humble oneself and hand over one's own desires and pride to Christ. We must trust that Christ knows what is completely best for every area of our lives. Jesus gives us a new life and He is the bridge to that new way of living. It takes a step of faith, but once that first step is taken the road ahead begins to take on an all-new meaning and purpose.

The very idea and concept of discipleship means that you are willing to come under the teaching and direction of a leader, a teacher or a mentor. Paul underscored this concept when he asked the churches "to follow him as he followed Christ".

The journey begins first by answering the call of Christ and then committing oneself to following wherever He leads.

Scripture Signposts:

Scripture is the foundation-stone on which we are to build. It is our hope that these Scriptures will take you deeper into what the call of Christ is, and the importance of understanding why we need to be deeply committed to following Christ each day. A call to follow can only be carried out by having a personal relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Leviticus 18:3-5 (NIV Bible)

*"You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not **follow** their practices. You must obey my laws and be careful to **follow** my*

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decrees. I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.”

Moses was trying to prepare the people by pointing out who they were and how they should follow after the God who had delivered them. They now knew that they were God’s chosen people and that He had called them to be His own. But he also wanted them to know there would be conditions attached to this call to follow.

God was making it clear that they should not practice the old ways of the Egyptians because He had called them out from under this bondage and slavery. He also was leading them into a new land and Israel had to be warned not to take up the ways of the people of that land.

What God wanted them to understand was that He was leading them into a new way of living and that they were going to have a new truth to follow. They had to turn away from the old and deliberately follow Him. This would take a commitment on their part – of trusting and walking with Him each day, just as we must also walk trustingly with Christ.

Ruth 1:16

*But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from **following** you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”*

Naomi and her husband and two sons had left the country of Israel during a famine, seeking to make their living in the land of Moab. The sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, even though it was not custom or tradition for an Israeli person to marry

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outside of their culture and people. Sometime later Naomi's husband and two sons passed away. The one daughter-in-law decided to stay in her own country but Ruth felt a call to move back to Israel with her mother-in-law.

While they were traveling back to Israel Ruth made a pledge to Naomi. Naomi tried to warn Ruth what might lay ahead for both of them, but Ruth insisted on following her. Even though Ruth was a Gentile, she was determined in her heart to follow the God of Naomi. She saw something in Naomi's life that showed her that there was one true God. Even though she saw the death of her father-in-law, her husband and the death of her husband's brother, she was determined to follow the God of Israel.

Look what Ruth states to Naomi:

First she urges or begs Naomi not to send her away, even though she probably knew that back in Naomi's homeland she would very likely be treated as a second class citizen. She also knew that because she had already been married, no man from Naomi's people would want her. Next, because of her determination, she tells Naomi that she will follow her wherever she goes. She clearly tells her, "*Where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge*". But then she makes a bold statement of faith, "*Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.*" She was now going to leave behind her entire Gentile culture and tradition. She was now going to follow and trust the God of Israel. This was a bold step of faith on her part.

Because of her words of faith and her willingness to follow Naomi and her God, Ruth becomes grafted into the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5-6). She marries Boaz who becomes the father of Obed whose son was Jesse, the father of King David.

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When we make a decision to follow Christ, it changes the direction of our lives forever. We, like Ruth, are to leave everything behind and walk forward into a "new land" and join up with a new people – the Church. We move from a state of owning our own lives and possessions to a position of stewardship, where all that we have becomes His possession. Our role is to follow Him.

1 Samuel 12:14

*“If you will fear the LORD and serve Him and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue **following** the LORD your God.”*

God was now going to allow a king to be put in place over Israel. And, at Saul's coronation, Samuel speaks some key words, both to the people and to the new King. His words remind us that if we want God's help in and on our lives, we must clearly hear and follow His call. Samuel commands that they must choose with all their hearts to follow the Lord their God. And, how are they to do that?

One, they must fear and serve the Lord. This would mean "dying to themselves" and committing their lives to serving the one true God only.

Secondly, they must listen to His voice. This would mean taking time to pray and meditate on His word, waiting upon the Spirit of God to direct, guide, and teach them.

Thirdly, they must not rebel against the commands of God. Rebellion is turning one's back on authority. It is being disobedient to God and His Word. It is following after the ways of this world. It is living a life of sin.

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Fourthly, they must **follow** the Lord in all that they do. To follow is to decide in one's heart to walk after, or in the steps of, another. It is determining in one's heart that wherever God leads me, I will follow, no matter what the cost may be. After all, I have died to myself and I now live totally for God.

We can see from history that people have always had great difficulty keeping to their promise of following God. These Israelites had been called out by God into a promised land and, if they expected to continue to have God's blessing, they would need to keep focused on God and follow Him with all their hearts.

It is no different today. We must determine in our hearts to die to self and serve Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is our true Lord and King. There is none other – only Him that we serve with all our hearts. The prerequisite is having a personal relationship with Him as our Lord and Saviour.

I Kings 11:6

*“Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not **follow** the Lord fully, as David his father had done.”*

Here we have a verse that states the problem of a son who became king after his father's death. To most people Solomon was known as one of the wisest men of the world. He gave to us the book of Proverbs, providing us with much wisdom and direction for life. But what we need to remember is that he was not a committed follower of God as was his father.

David was a man after God's own heart. He wanted more than anything to be a true follower of God. Yet, now in the very

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next generation, Solomon, living on the blessings of his father's faithfulness, did not follow the Lord completely. We are told that he actually did evil in the sight of the Lord.

People in every generation need to establish their own personal relationships with Christ, and then to "walk with Him", committing their hearts totally to Him. History is replete with examples of "next generations" falling away from God and His truth. Theology and godly practices are "watered down" and people begin to do evil in the sight of God; where there is evil there can be no blessing from God to either the individual disciple or upon the people who make up the local church.

Matthew 4:18-22

*“Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, **Follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men. Immediately they left their nets and **followed Him**. Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he **called them**. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and **followed Him**.”*

These men were all immediately touched by Christ's call on their lives. They heard, rose up, and followed. When Christ spoke, action and movement took place in His hearers' lives. They were ordinary men who had a trade (fishermen). Christ wanted to use their knowledge and ability of fishing for fish into fishing for men. It took a step of faith, a movement on their part to get up and follow Christ. Jesus wanted these fishermen to be on His discipleship team. These men were hard workers, most likely

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accustomed to dangerous weather and circumstances, and had learned much patience because of the nature of their trade.

Matthew 9:9

*“As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He said to him, **follow me!** And he got up and **followed Him.**”*

Here we have a despised person in the eyes of the Jews, Matthew, himself a Jew but a tax collector for the Roman government. In the people's eyes Matthew's occupation was helping the enemy to keep the people in slavery and bondage. Nevertheless, I believe that because of the ability of Jesus to see man's heart and not just the outward appearance, He knew that Matthew's character would be needed to carry out the establishing of Christ's kingdom here on earth. Matthew must have been shocked that this teacher, with some of His disciples around Him, would even talk with him. Christ's call not only touches people's hearts, it totally changes their attitudes as well as their hearts.

Matthew got up, left the work he knew and followed Christ. He moved outside of his comfort zone. We have the same challenges from Christ's call today. Christ's call demands a dramatic change to everything in our lives.

Matthew 16:24-25

*“Then Jesus said to his disciples, If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and **follow Me.** For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*

In this passage Jesus speaks of the cost of following Him. When Jesus spoke these words, death on a cross was the Roman

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government's penalty for a capital crime. Many, if not all, of the disciples may have witnessed criminals (specifically non-Roman citizens) suffering the agony of death on a cross. In terms of discipleship we are to "die to self", being willing to give up our needs and wants. We are to put away the old and put on the new. The call confronts us to move from our ways and will to His ways and will.

We are to take up our cross, as Christ has called us to do, and follow Him. There is nothing too big for Christ to handle. We must bring everything to the cross. The cross is the symbol of letting go and letting the issues and challenges of life die with Christ. We do not need to be bound or enslaved to the things of the world. We need to recognize that our sins have been nailed to the cross of Christ, so that the work he has called us to do will be accomplished.

John 12:26

*"If anyone serves Me, he must **follow me**; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."*

Following means serving; Christ came to serve and not to be served. The way of the cross leads to servant-hood. Following entails humbling oneself and taking on the "ministry of the towel" such as Jesus demonstrated in his washing of the disciples' feet. It is taking our gifts and talents and using them to serve the body of Christ. It is not easy because there is invariably a lot more giving than receiving. Nevertheless, in so doing, the relationship with Christ that we can personally enjoy is very special and unique. We take on a friend who will never leave us or forsake us. He will lead and guide us, if we just willing to follow.

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A master takes care of His servants. Following also brings us into a deeper relationship with the Father. Christ knew it was going to be hard for us to serve because it goes against our nature. That is why He sent the Holy Spirit to empower us for service. The power is not for ourselves only, but it also gives us the ability to serve others and follow Him. In serving Christ we honor the Father with our lives.

I Peter 2:21

*“For you have been **called** for this purpose, since Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to **follow** in His steps.”*

Christ has a purpose and goal for us, but we need to spend time in personal communication with Him to know where the target or finish line is. Christ has gone before us and has set the example that we are to follow. Jesus wants us to walk “*in His steps*” and, when we do so, He empowers us with His Holy Spirit so that we can carry out His will and ministry here on earth.

Do we have the faith to follow Him, or are our life journeys constantly stopped or hindered by fear? We are, by nature, afraid of any kind of suffering or hardship, but these challenges are part of disciples’ lives. They cannot be avoided. These hardships are what deepen our roots, giving us strength during the storms of life.

Resolution:

There is always a time of transition when one moves from one way of living to another. Jesus gives us new life; He is the bridge into that new way of living. If we will take that first step of faith, and are willing to follow Him, we will need to experience three specific truths as outlined for us in John 14. Jesus declares, “I

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am the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father but through me.”

1. He offers a new way of living to follow.
2. He gives us truth to follow.
3. He gives to us a new life to follow.

He does all of this through grace and love. He pours Himself into our lives so we can be poured into the lives of others. Freely we have received and now, freely, we give. He models for us so we can be a model to others.

There will be challenges and the road will not be easy. Many people say they will follow but their actions and hearts demonstrate a different reality. The disciples heard the Master's call and left everything and followed Him (John 1:35-51).

Just as a map gives you direction for travelling from one place to another, the Scriptures are a road map that will guide you in the way you should go, the kind of truth you should believe, and the kind of lifestyle you should live. However, it all starts by a choice to follow His calling.

Testimony:

I will be the first to admit that following Christ is not easy. It is a journey that is full of mountaintop experiences, but also has many, many dark and gloomy valleys. These valleys often can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. We feel that we are walking alone. Discipleship is not easy because we are under the discipline of God Almighty. We need to see that He has nothing but our best in mind for our lives. We cannot see or understand what God is doing. I know that during these times I have struggled with anxiety and depression. It sometimes hurts so much inside, but Christ

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wants to move us to a higher plain. He wants to deepen our roots so that we can grow taller. He wants us to experience the joy of bearing fruit.

I have followed Him now for 36 years and I have learned that I would rather be a follower than a leader. Being the first in line, one has to blaze the trail, but I am so grateful that Christ has gone before us. The hardest thing for me is to “let go and let God”. It seems that I have a short memory and forget to look back at the history of my life and see how He has always been faithful in bringing me through all those challenges and opportunities that I have faced. I forget that my journey here on earth is just a small preparation time for what I will be doing in heaven for all eternity.

As a human being I think I also have a nature of rebellion. I like, once in a while, to do things my way; God lets me, but I soon realize that what I plant and how I plant can not only affect me but many other people around me. I need to ask God daily in prayer that He will help me to see the bigger picture, and then to fully trust in His purpose and plans for my life. Each day the biggest challenge I face is dying to myself, but when I do, there is a peace and joy that passes all understanding.

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

How have I answered His call in my life?

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Relevance:

What have I left behind in order to follow Jesus Christ? How have I answered His call in my life?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that God's will be done in your life, and not your own will. Pray that His Holy Spirit will guide you and help you to walk in the steps of Christ. Pray that your commitment to follow will be securely anchored in Christ.

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Chapter Two

Called to Friendship

*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his **friends**. You are my **friends** if you do what I command you. No longer do I **call** you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have **called** you **friends**, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

John 15:13-15

A call to friendship has at its center an intimate relationship with Christ. God has desired throughout all history to have a relationship with man. Sin broke that relationship in the Garden of Eden and man has tried to find a way back to God ever since. The problem is that man cannot provide the way. It was only possible for God to provide a way to restore us and He did so by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us and to pay the debt that we could not pay.

The dictionary defines friendship as, “affection, alliance, attachment, benevolence, closeness, good fellowship, harmony, intimacy, love and rapport.” With this understanding, we can see why so many of our churches are struggling: we rarely or possibly never get past the point of basic greetings. We do not take time to get past the mask to find out who that person really is. Christ wants to go deeper into the hearts of men and women, way beyond the obvious. The above Scripture tells us that there is a much deeper commitment as friends – friends who are willing to lay down their lives for each other. In addition, friends do not keep secrets from each other, but are open and honest. We will never achieve harmony and unity in our churches until we deal with the deeper issues concerning friendship. Good friendships form a strong root

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or foundation that will keep a church strong and healthy, even during the hard times.

The world wants to keep us enslaved, but Christ wants us to be His friends. A friend knows the attitude and the heart of the one whom he or she has befriended. True friends can actually get to the point of knowing the needs of the other without saying a word.

We are not to be isolated islands with no one to talk to or walk with, but we are to become part of a family. We have a heritage. We have brothers and sisters all around the world – people with whom we can cry, laugh and rejoice. Accountability and strength develop when we open the door of friendship. We become like a three-stranded rope that is not easily broken. We are individual strands, but being woven together with others is what gives us strength.

The key to friendship is that a true friend loves at all times. They may not always agree with or like what the other is doing, but they remain friends. Jesus desires this kind of friendship with us. He truly does not like the sin of man, but he does love the sinner, and He has laid down his life for us. Love is the cord that binds friends together.

Jesus does not want to have us as mere acquaintances or some kind of slave, but he desires a deep and lasting friendship with us. True friends know our needs and may even know our thoughts without a word being spoken. So, it is with God.

Scripture Signpost:

The following Scriptures, hopefully, will take you even deeper into what the call of Christ involves, as well as demonstrating the importance of friendship with God which comes

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as a result of a personal relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to act as the Spirit leads.

Exodus 33:11

*Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his **friend**.*

The Scripture gives us glimpses of how desirous God is to be friends with His called ones. Both Moses and his young lieutenant, Joshua, would approach the very presence of God. They walked and talked together, hearing each other's hearts, wanting the best for each other. The Scripture points out for us that they would speak, as it were, face-to-face, intimately and openly. Moses would hear the words of God. They would communicate verbally with one another. Moses could go into the tent, meet with God, come out, and give direction to the people. Like Moses, we need to have a meeting place separated from the comings and goings of the world. Moses had a place where all could come to him for advice (Exodus 33:7). Friendships are built by meeting together.

Another interesting note about friendship is that Joshua would often stay behind in the meeting place. The church should also be a place where we enjoy staying behind, so we can soak up more of the presence of God. Our churches should be known as meeting places for friendships.

Proverbs 19:4

*Wealth adds many **friends**, but a poor man is separated from his **friends**.*

True friendships are not affected by one's status or wealth but are built on genuine love and commitment, no matter what challenges the friend may be experiencing. We are not to be, as is said, "fair weather friends", but we are to be committed for the

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long term – through the good and/or the bad. Jesus is committed to us, not for what or who we are, but because he loves us just the way we are. The road is not easy and, because we have chosen to answer His call, the road is one that is less traveled by others. Other friends may back away but He is committed to us.

People with mere worldly friendship may walk away when we are going through financial trouble, or trouble with the law, family problems, or in times of sickness, but these are the times when Christ draws even closer to us. He wants to take us up in His arms and hold us and, if need be, even carry us. He cares about every one of the sheep in His fold, as well as those who are outside the fold.

Matthew 11:19

*The son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a **friend** of tax collectors and sinners! Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."*

It seemed that Jesus' style, and the way he ministered, confused the religious people of His day. However, Jesus wanted to show them that if they intended to reach and help people, they first needed to befriend them in some way. In reality, their comments about His friendship with sinners was a compliment! He had told the disciples that he did not come for those who are healthy, but for the ones who were weak and sick. Jesus did not love or agree with the sin of humankind, but He did come to this earth to love the sinner, whoever they were and wherever they would be found. He told the disciples to go out to the highways and find them, befriend and love them. We are disciples because others befriended us. People may not be happy with what we do and who some our friends might be, but the only true friendship that really counts is the one we have with Christ Jesus. And, like

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Jesus, we need to seek out the lost and love them into the Kingdom.

Luke 5:20

*Seeing their faith, He said, “**Friend**, your sins are forgiven you.”*

Friendships build faith; likewise, faith builds friendships. As Christ saw peoples' faith in Him He assured them of His friendship. One other thing that must have impressed Jesus was the commitment and diligence of the paralytic's friends. People would not move aside or help but that did not stop them because they were this man's true friends. They were going to do whatever it took to get their friend to Jesus, even if it meant taking the roof off the house. Their actions are an example to us of total commitment – Jesus gave us the ultimate example of love, going to the cross and dying for us. There is no greater love that one person can give to another than to lay down his life for them.

The religious people sat back, watched, and criticized Jesus' methods and the way He cared for the sick, but the needy knew that Jesus could be counted on, and that He would not turn His back on them but would instead extend his hand to help them.

John 15:13-15

*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his **friends**. You are my **friends** if you do what I command you. No longer do I **call** you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have **called** you **friends**, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

Jesus, now in His last hours, was going to teach the disciples what true love and friendship was all about. He wanted to

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make sure that they understood what kind of relationship they had with Him, both now and in the future. He wanted the disciples to see themselves, not in a relationship of slaves to a master, but in a true relationship of friendship in which they would know Him, hear what He was saying, and understand what He was doing and planning.

The key truth for them, and for us today, is to know that we are not called to be slaves, but to be personal friends of Christ; because of that wonderful reality, we will be able to speak and minister on His behalf. We have now been grafted into Him and, because of our relationship with Him, we can now begin to bear fruit that will glorify His name. Because of this friend relationship, if we have some need, we can just ask Him. A friend always wants to help a friend in need.

Christ wanted His disciples to know that, even though He was leaving the earth, He would still be with them because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He would not leave them comfortless.

James 4:4

*You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that **friendship** with the world is hostility towards God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a **friend** of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

James now gives a warning to the church telling, them to be careful what kind of friendships they have. He wanted to teach them that wrong kinds of friendship could bear the fruit of bondage, destruction and death. We would become enemies of God if we become friends with the world. However, being friends with God opens the doors to an eternal hope and life with Christ.

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Whom we focus on and "hang out with" will determine what kind of relationship we have with Christ. We need to be watching how we use that which God has given us, both in terms of possessions and the people around us. If we are of the world, we will bear fruit of the world, but if we are friends with Christ, we will bear fruit of His Kingdom here on earth.

Resolution:

The world wants to keep us enslaved but Christ wants to call us to friendship. A friend knows the attitude and the heart of the one whom he has befriended. We know many details concerning that friend and, as a result, often know what causes them to do what they do.

We are no longer a lonely island with no one to talk to or walk with, but we have become part of a family. Such a family relationship can build strength and maturity into each individual. There is accountability between friends as well as a deep desire to help and bless one another. Friendships are built through time and communication. Friends have much in common and there is a strong foundational root system that holds them together. A friend will even lay down his life for another friend.

We choose to love and to give, not because we have to, but because we want to; our motivations are born from a heart of love. Christ desires us to be as close to Him as any friend could be.

Our bodies can picture for us what friendship is all about. The different parts of the body form a relationship with each other. Like body parts, we work together as a unit or team. This unique relationship becomes possible as we work together as friends. As a body of believers, we need to understand that we are not to have the "them and us" attitude, but rather an "us and us" principle that

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allows us to function harmoniously as friends. We need to work together in unity with one another. Christ is the head and we are the body. Being friends with Christ and each other within Christ's Body is vital to our growth and the growth of the church.

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

Relevance:

Am I open and transparent with at least a few of my closest friends? Do I have a close friendship with Christ? If not, how can I make it better?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that you can enter into a clearer understanding of what being a friend to Christ means for your walk today and every day. Pray that you will also see fruit from your friendship with Christ and with others.

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Chapter Three

Call to Sinners

But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Matthew 9:12-13

Why call sinners? Because of God's love, and because He does not want to see us remain in bondage and sin.

The Bible, from cover to cover, is a book of relationship. God wants to have a relationship with mankind. The key is to know that things we say, or do, can either build a strong relationship with God or erect a wall of division between us.

In this chapter, there are two key words that we need to define and understand. These two words are vital in the relationship to which Christ is calling us. Our attitude is important in creating our character which, in turn, determines the type of person we will be. The first word to understand is *sin*: a crime, error, evil, guilt, misdeed, offence, transgression, trespass, unrighteousness, to go astray. The second word is *sinner*: an evildoer, offender, reprobate, transgressor, trespasser, and wrongdoer. Both these words represent a position or the condition of an unredeemed person's heart. "Sinner" is the description that represents a person who has not yet been made alive in Christ. It is the condition into which everyone is born rather than simply describing the evil things that one does. "Sin" describes the things that a sinning person does because of their fallen nature. Most people do not like talking about these two "S words".

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Scriptural Signpost:

Hopefully the following Scriptures will take you even deeper into an understanding of the call of Christ as well as emphasizing the importance of understanding how a sinner comes into a personal relation with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Numbers 32:23

*But if you will not do so, behold, you have **sinned** against the Lord, and be sure your **sin** will find you out.*

God was giving a command to the tribes of Israel that they must cross over and fight for the land with their brothers who had not yet entered into their part of the promised lands. The sin would be one of disobedience if they did not do what God had commanded them to do. This same sin is common in the church today. God speaks, and we too often begin the process of justifying and giving reasons to others why we should not obey and move forward according to God's will.

The Israelites were also warned that they should not think that no one would notice whether they would obey or not. God warns that in due time their sin of disobedience will be obvious to others and to God. We may think we can hide our sin, but somewhere and sometimes it will be noticed by others and God.

This verse also gives a hint that people can sin as individuals as well as sinning as a group. Most often, we think about individuals' sins, but nations, communities and churches can also corporately sin against God.

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Psalms 25:8-9

*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs **sinner**s in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way.*

God is not desirous of leaving humankind in his sinful state. Remember that God cannot have fellowship with a person who has not been redeemed from sin. Sin is the wall that keeps us from having a relationship with Christ. That is why His word and His Holy Spirit instruct us about what sin is, and how it can affect us, as well as others around us - if we do not deal with it and confess it before Christ. Sin blocks personal and corporate communication with God.

Ignorance is not bliss. We cannot stand before God on the Day of Judgment and say, "I did not know". We will be held accountable for our thoughts and actions as well as for our lack of action. The work of the Holy Spirit is to teach us and instruct us in all things, but we need to be careful that we do not harden our hearts towards the voice of God.

Matthew 9:12-13

*But when Jesus heard this, He said, "it is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire compassion, and not sacrifice, for I did not come to **call** the righteous, but **sinner**s."*

Mark 2:17

*And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to **call** the righteous, but **sinner**s."*

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Jesus came for a purpose: to call sinners to repentance from sin so they can fellowship with Him. The problem is that most "good-living" people do not see themselves as sinners. In the physical realm it's only the sick that need a doctor, not the healthy. In the spiritual realm, if you do not have Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you are very ill and will be spiritually dead for all eternity.

Jesus told the people to go and learn to understand what He was saying. Make sure to find out about this truth because the sin-cursed plague on humankind is killing millions each day.

What people may think is healthy living can turn out to be an eternal mistake. The fruit/evidence of truly healthy living is a person who has compassion and is willing to lay down his life for another. We cannot plead ignorance before God. We need to learn, know and understand what sin is all about.

Luke 5:32

*"I have not come to **call** the righteous but **sinners** to repentance."*

Those who may call themselves righteous do not see their need to be redeemed. Some see themselves as having no need for help from without. They are their own gods. Those who see themselves as righteous have a major struggle to overcome their way of thinking and how they see themselves, because they do not see themselves as sinners having a need for redemption. Their situation can be likened to that of a person who is an alcoholic. If they do not see themselves as being desperately in need, they won't see the need for any help.

Many do not want to look into the word of God because it acts as a mirror, reflecting their true sinful nature. Having seen

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what they are really like, they would have to do something about it. However, sometimes when people do see the truth of their sinful nature, they still use their free will to walk away, as if they saw or heard nothing. They can become blinded, as if they had scales on their spiritual eyes, and become hard-of-hearing because of the buildup of wax within their spiritual ears.

We have to see before we can be set free.

John 15:6

“If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned”

This verse speaks about relationship. Those of us who are carnal and sinful are like a wild branch. We produce only the fruit of the world. However, Jesus wanted the disciples to know, and truly understand that they did not need to remain "wild branches". They could call upon the name of Christ, become grafted into Him, and begin to produce the eternal fruit of righteousness.

Branches that do not produce, or are "dried up" because of the things of this world, will be gathered up and burned. They become eternally dead. To avoid this terrible prospect, we must become joined to Christ, being one with Him. Then it is no longer I that live, but Christ Who lives in me.

John 16:7-10

*“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes will convict the world concerning **sin** and righteousness and judgment; concerning **sin**, because they*

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do not believe Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will no longer see Me;

When Jesus left to go to be with His Father and to begin to prepare a place for those who would be His own, He told the disciples that He would send One who would comfort and also instruct them. One of the Holy Spirit's key ministries to this world is to convict people of their sin. He speaks into people's hearts and shows them truth concerning their "righteousness", and teaches them that there is a cost resulting from sinning. He clearly taught and reminded us that there will be a judgment day when we will stand before God and have to give an account for our thoughts and actions.

The greatest sin is the lack of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit works in unison with Christ to teach, train and discipline us concerning the truths of Christ. His work is to make us more like Christ. The Holy Spirit is our equipper and helper.

Romans 3:23

*For all have **sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.*

It is very important that we accept the reality and understand that we are all sinners. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We need to become aware of our position, accept it and then learn how we can be redeemed from the destination of destruction and death. We are not able to enter into this personal relationship with God by our own efforts. We needed someone to pay the price for our redemption. That price was paid by Jesus who was sinless, shedding His blood and dying so that we could be washed, cleaned, and clothed - not in our own righteousness, but in His righteousness.

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In the end, we will not be presented to God with these earthly bodies, but Christ will present us to the Father in our new, recreated, and glorified bodies.

Romans 5:8

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet **sinners**, Christ died for us.*

The blessing of understanding our own sin is that it brings us to a place of dealing with it. God is not trying to condemn us. He is trying to love us into His Kingdom. He took the first step. We did not ask Him, but by His own volition, because of His great love for us, He demonstrated that love by sending His son to die for us.

We did not deserve this act of kindness and mercy. We were still sinners, deserving judgment and damnation with no hope or way out of our predicament. He came to this world, physically taking on human form, and then demonstrating His great love, making it available to any willing to see what He has done for humankind. What sin in the Garden of Eden had destroyed, God now brought back through Christ. God wants that personal relationship of love with man. God's focus is not to judge and condemn, but to love us and redeem us from Satan's powerful hold on our lives that would lead us to destruction.

I Corinthians 15:1-4

*Now I make known to you, brethren, the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believe in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our **sins** according to the*

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Scripture, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

Paul wanted to remind the Corinthian Church of what Christ had personally done for them. Our human nature tends to forget. It's as if there's a constant battle to stay in Christ's will and to keep our wills subjected to the will of Christ.

The disciples and the Church seem, over time, to forget the truth of what Christ has done for us. This is why the church is called to have Communion regularly, so that we do not forget. And, we must also teach our children what Christ has personally done for them as well. We sometimes "fall asleep", seeming to forget the significance of what Christ has done for us. If we are not careful, such forgetfulness can result in our falling out of that loving and personal relationship with Christ.

Paul gives people the answer to how to escape our sinful state and its curse of eternal death. It is simple and to the point. Christ died for you; then, on the third day, sin and death could not hold Him, and He was raised up out of the grave to eternal life. All we have to do is believe and commit to this very key truth. We confess with our mouth our sinfulness, and on the basis of that confession, He then comes into our hearts to personally dwell with us.

I Timothy 1:15

*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners**, among who I am foremost of all.*

Paul gives his own testimony to Timothy. Paul realized that before he became a believer in Christ, even though He had been a Pharisee and a teacher of teachers, he felt that he was also the

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greatest of sinners. Many would not see him that way. To many he had it all, but Paul knew the wickedness of his own heart. Without the grace of God in one's life there is no hope.

Paul was trying to teach Timothy, and us, that if we do not see ourselves a sinner, we will not get help. Nor will we be able to show and help others out of a desperate place of bondage and death.

Paul wanted Timothy to see that he was called to a ministry of reconciliation, helping people to come back into a right relationship with the Father. As disciples, we can help set the captives free.

Resolution:

When sin became the wall that severed our personal relationship with God, God provided a way of escape through Christ Jesus, but that way could only be realized through believing that He is the only way, truth and life. We all have a one-way ticket to eternal death and destruction, because we are born in trespasses and sin. That one-way pathway to destruction is avoided by believing in Christ's atoning sacrifice, and turning from our wicked ways. We must first recognize that we are sinners.

Repentance is making a 180-degree turn from the way of the world by running in the opposite direction into the loving arms of Christ Jesus. We must understand that sin separates us from a loving God.

John 15 tells us that He wants us, no longer to be a wild branch, but to be a branch that is grafted into Him, for He says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." We relate to Him because we are now part of Him and the life that flows through Him now flows

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through us. However, each branch (each believer), as an individual, must be personally grafted into the vine.

He calls sinners like you and me to a personal relationship with Him. These relationships will clothe us in His righteousness, and not in our righteousness – which this Scriptures describe as filthy rags. We will begin that 180° turn in our lives, from our way to His way.

A fruit tree reproduces that which, by nature, it is. An apple tree produces apples. All fruit is produced from the seed and the tree on which it is borne. The fruit comes from the relationship that it has with the roots, the trunk and the branches. If you are "a tree of the world", you will produce the fruit of the world. If you are a tree of the kingdom of God, you will produce the fruit of God. We demonstrate our fruit daily. What fruit are you producing? We are told that by our fruit we shall be known. We need to be bearing the fruit of Christ's grace and righteousness; the only way that can happen is by walking in obedience to Christ so we can then bear the fruit of righteousness.

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What is Christ calling you to do or confess in your life? What needs to change so that you can get back on track to His will for your life?

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RELEVANCE:

What actions and habits need to be changed in my everyday walk with Christ? Do I give out more compassion to others or do I focus on what I am sacrificing or giving up as a disciple?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that you can enter into a clearer understanding of what it means to you in your daily walk to be a sinner saved by grace. Pray that you will be given wisdom and understanding about your life as a sinner and what it means to be redeemed from that life.

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Chapter Four

Call to Sanctification

*For God has not **called** us for the purpose of impurity, but in **sanctification**.*

I Thessalonians 4:7

Once you see yourself as a sinner and accept Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, the next step is sanctification. Sanctification can be described as "the process of becoming holy". God calls us to holiness. The challenge is to humble ourselves before God, to come before the cross of Christ daily and confess our sins, acknowledging Christ as Lord and surrendering our will to His will. When we confess our sins, we are forgiven and clothed in Christ's righteousness. When we have Christ's righteousness, we are declared sanctified and holy before God. God then sees us as holy because Christ is holy.

There are three words that will help us to understand what it means to be called to sanctification. The first word is "confession" which can be defined as an admission of guilt or obligation in a matter pertaining to oneself, acknowledgement of sin or sinfulness, acknowledgement of belief or profession of faith. Synonyms include acknowledgment, admission, disclosure, revelation. As disciples, this is the place we must start our journey with Christ. Second, we have the word "sanctification", which refers to the process by which God cleans and consecrates a person, bringing that person into a declared state of holiness, making that person fit to be in relationship with a holy God. Synonyms of sanctification are words such as absolve, anoint, bless, cleanse, consecrate, purify, and set apart. We, as disciples,

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must understand that sanctification is a daily process by which God molds us into the image of Christ so that we are seen as holy before God. Third, we have the word "holiness" which means to be set apart, and dedicated to the service and worship of God. Synonyms are words like consecrated, dedicated, devout, faithful, God-fearing, pious, righteous, saintly, blessed, dedicated, sanctified. Holiness is what allows us as disciples to stand before a Holy God. We are holy because He is Holy. We are able to come into the Holy of Holies – the very presence of God – because of Christ's love as demonstrated on the cross. But, it all begins by accepting His plan; after all, Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Only by accepting that reality, can anyone begin the life-giving road to sanctification and holiness. Go to sleep go to sleep

We must understand that we will not be perfect while here on earth; only Christ is perfect, but we must become clothed outwardly, and then inwardly, with Christ's righteousness. We can enter the Holy of Holies, not because of who we are, but because of Who He is and what He has done for us.

Sanctification is a daily process of humbly bowing ourselves to the Lordship of Christ. We must confess Him as Lord and, just as the potter works the clay, Christ then begins the process of making us new from the inside out.

We need not to be afraid of what will take place during the process of sanctification. In faith, we simply let Christ do His work of grace and love in our lives. It is a life-long journey, one that starts on the day we confess our sins, and continues until we meet Him face to face. Sanctification grows out of a personal relationship with Christ through prayer, reading and studying His word.

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Scripture Signposts:

Nehemiah 1:6

*Left Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, **confessing** the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.*

Often the key to confession is seeing ourselves as we really are. The process of sanctification, whether for an individual or for a nation, starts with one person confessing on his own behalf, and then on behalf of others. Nehemiah had been keeping his ears open to what had been going on in Jerusalem, even though he was the cupbearer of a king in another country. His heart was still full of concern for the city of his God, and for his people.

True sanctification comes by getting in tune with what God is speaking into your heart. One needs to humble himself before God, and then cry out to God to make the appropriate changes in one's own life as well as in the lives of those around him. We have to be aware of what is going on both inside and outside of our lives. God does speak to His people by His Spirit and He gives to us wisdom and understanding on how to deal with our sins and the sins of others.

We have to be open to see ourselves as God sees us; we need to look into the Word of God and see ourselves for the way we really are. We fall short and sometimes things seem hopeless, but with God all things were possible. Because Nehemiah was open to pray and confess that which was on his heart, God began to move in the heart of the king. Also, shortly thereafter, He began moving in the hearts of the people who were living in Jerusalem.

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Revival and change often begins with just one person getting things right with God, and then allowing the sanctifying and washing power of God to penetrate his life. Nehemiah's heart was in tune with God – we can all learn from him. He not only sensed something in his heart, but then turned it into a prayer of confession, humbling himself before God, becoming a servant for God, all of which led to major positive changes in his homeland.

Psalm 32:5

*I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will **confess** my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin.*

David was a man after God's own heart. His desire, above everything else, was to love and serve the Lord, but like all humans, he struggled with the desires of his flesh. He occasionally fell into sin and, because of that, he went through some deep challenges emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Sin can block our relationship with God and with others. Sin affects everything in our lives, but when we confess our sin and walk the road of daily sanctification, God's love and hand are there to accompany us through our daily needs and challenges.

Many places in the book of Psalms we are told that David came before the Lord and openly told God about what was going on in his heart. Sin affects the condition of the heart. David acknowledged to God clearly and openly that he had sinned. For a time, he had thought that he was able to hide this sin in his heart, but he then realized, that if he was going to have true friendship with God, he must confess his sin openly to the Lord. His outward sins were obvious to him and many others, but what really lay heavily on David's heart were the transgressions of his "inner man".

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Another thing we learn from David's life is that there is no place for secret sin. David thought he had gotten away it, but because he did not deal with his sin, God revealed it to someone else who then confronted David about it. Why did God do this? Because He loved David and didn't want anything to come between Himself and David. And so it is with us. We do not sin in a vacuum, and sometimes God will use others to bring us to repentance.

The truth that we all need to realize is that when we do confess to God, there is a complete and total forgiveness for us. He puts our feet back on a firm foundation. When we come to Him in true repentance Christ, because of his shed blood, cleanses us from all our unrighteousness. The process of sanctification continues on, drawing us closer to Him each day, making us fit for the ministry that He has called us to.

Matthew 10:32-33

*"Therefore everyone who **confesses** Me before men, I will also **confess** him before My Father who is in heaven." ³³
But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My father who is in heaven.*

Christ desires us to be free from sin. We are to see that He is the only one Who can save us from our old sin nature and the destruction to which it would lead us. We have to understand that, from the moment of conception, we are already corrupted by a sin nature because of what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

This verse communicates the reality that if we deny who Christ is – Lord and Saviour – He then cannot be our advocate before the Father in heaven. We must confess Him with our mouths. What we know to be true in our hearts needs to come out

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as a testimony from our mouths. Our journey with Christ starts by believing and confessing that He is God. We must submit ourselves to the truth of the Gospel, believe in our hearts and confess this truth to others.

Our actions can speak louder than our words, so Christ cautions his followers as to how they live their lives here on earth. Once we confess Christ as Lord, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit begins in us, cleansing us, maturing us, and molding us into the image of Christ. That doesn't imply that we are perfect because we know that there is only One who is perfect and that is God; however, with Christ in our hearts, we then "put on" His holiness which allows us to be able to come before the Father. Each day our lives need to bear testimony that we are children of the King, Jesus Christ Himself!

Acts 26:18

*... to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been **sanctified** by faith in Me.'*

Paul was giving testimony as to how the Lord had called him into service. Before God changed His name to Paul he was known as Saul, a very religious man who was highly educated and a respected member of the Pharisees. He knew the Hebrew Scriptures inside out and was a teacher of those Scriptures, but there one thing missing in his life and that was an encounter with the true God of the Scriptures. He had not yet had his eyes opened and he was still living in darkness.

Then God *called* him and Saul became Paul. He became a disciple of Christ and now he was commissioned to lead people out of darkness into the glorious light of Christ. He began to tell

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people that they, too, could have forgiveness of their sins. Not only could they receive forgiveness of sin, but they could also receive an inheritance from God. They would become part of the special family of Christ, the Church.

Sanctified by faith in Christ was how it all started. No longer did people have to belong to the dominion of Satan. God, through faith, would set them free from the bondage of sin and death. Just as Paul personally received Christ as Lord and Saviour, others now could also be washed and sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. Christ had personally, once and for all, paid the price for them.

Romans 6:22-23

*But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your benefit, resulting in **sanctification**, and the outcome, eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The best way to look at daily sanctification is that it is an ongoing process of washing and cleansing us of our sins. Paul wanted the Roman believers to know that they had been eternally freed from the penalty of sin, but they still needed daily washing from the effect of those sins. We have now been released from the slavery of sin and death. We are now freely and willingly enslaved to God because of His love for us.

Sin has a cost. It comes with a price tag and that price is eternal death. But fortunately, when we confess our sin, and come under sanctifying power of God, we are given the free gift of eternal life with Him.

We become a new creation and old things are passed away. The benefit of coming to Christ, we are told, is sanctification. He

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begins the process of cleansing us and consecrating us for that which lies ahead. As long as we live here on earth, we will need this type of ministry from God because of our human nature. The world is dirty and corrupts, but God washes us and cleanses us each day. Our role is to come to Him in prayer and submit ourselves to the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

We must not take God for granted. We come to him only once for salvation, but we need to come to Him daily to strengthen our relationship with Him. He desires to walk with hand-in-hand with us as we move through life. After all, this earth is where we prepare for eternal life in heaven with Him.

Romans 10:9-10

*That if you **confess** with your mouth Jesus as lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he **confesses**, resulting in salvation.*

What we say often bears testimony of who we are in our hearts. God is not so concerned what goes into our mouths but is concerned about what comes out of them. What are our words saying about Jesus Christ? What do our words and actions tell others concerning our commitment and faith? Do our mouths, as Paul addressed the Roman believers, confess Jesus as Lord of our lives? Do we truly believe in our hearts that Christ died for us and was raised from the dead?

God examines our hearts and mouths to see what we think and feel about Christ. Our believing results in righteousness. It is not a righteousness of our own, but we are clothed in Christ's righteousness. When we testify with our mouths we are bearing

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witness to our belief. That confession is what results in salvation, proving that our belief is real.

We cannot underestimate the importance of these two verses for the disciple. The central point of the gospel message is that Christ came to die for sinners, then rose again for their justification. The way into heaven and eternal life can only come through faith and believing that Jesus Christ is Lord of everything, including us personally.

This is the practical application for our lives of what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have done for us, but our reception of this promise of eternal life is demonstrated by confession from our mouths and unwavering belief in our hearts. We cannot just know *about* Christ, but we must personally receive all He is, without reservation, into our lives. Confession moves from the outside to the inside, to the very core of who we are. The results will be changed thoughts and transformed lives.

I Corinthians 1:2, 30

... sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling ... But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption -

Paul challenges the church in verse 26 to consider their calling. He told them that it was not on the basis of who they were (whether wise, mighty, or having a long line of nobility) that they got into heaven. No, God took them (and us) as sinners, and made them good so that they (and we) could glorify God. We cannot boast in our knowledge or ability. All we are, and all we do, must flow out from Him into us, and then be demonstrated in our daily walk.

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What Paul wanted the church (then and now) to know was that the first step was, and is, to be established in Christ. Christ becomes our wisdom and our righteousness. He is the one Who sanctifies us and, because of that gracious act, we have redemption. We turn all we are over to Christ; He then takes us, with all our weaknesses and strengths, and molds us into His image. As we mature in Christ, He strengthens our characters, making us more and more like Him. Since we have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, we are now saints by calling. We are part of the Church, His body. We are called by Christ into this wonderful place of fellowship and communion with Him.

I Corinthians 6:11

*Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were **sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

In this passage Paul is reminding the Corinthian believers about how Christ washed them and sanctified them. The picture of washing relates to taking that which is soiled and dirty and then scrubbing it until it becomes clean. The sin stains of our past life have been washed away and removed – as far as the East is from the West. We cannot be forgetful from where we have come. Nor should we look at others and judge them. Christ and His Kingdom demand holiness; we cannot go on living in willful sin.

The Corinthian people received and believed in Christ, but their lives were still bearing the fruit of their former lives. If there has been a true change inside our hearts, it will change our thinking and actions. We are sanctified and justified, not by anything we can do, but these transformative actions come through the Name and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father sends the Holy Spirit to empower our lives so that we can overcome the

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things of this world and stand before the Father, clean and sanctified.

We need to treat each other in the church, as well as those around us, with the love and grace of Christ Jesus. We need to remember from where we came when Christ called us. We are sanctified only because of the grace and finished work of Christ.

I Thessalonians 4:3-4

*For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in **sanctification** and honor,*

Christ sanctifies us and forgives us, but it is our responsibility to walk on the pathway of obedience. Paul told the Thessalonian church how they should walk in Christ. He had given them instruction and now he was praying that they would do what they had been taught. He encourages them to keep on growing, excelling in their walk with Christ. Sanctification is a process of growth and nurturing that will bear much fruit. But it will take time and effort if we hope to be overcomers.

We are like a vessel which needs to be kept clean from all of the impurities of the world. We should not let the desires of the flesh and sin nature overcome the will of God for our lives. We are in a daily battle, but we are not alone, Christ loves us and desires to wash and sanctify us for growth and service. Christ knows what we need, and what is best for us, but we need to be willing to die to self and put ourselves in His hands to wash and sanctify us.

This Scripture emphasizes that we need to understand how to possess (control) our own bodies; Christ gives to us the ability to overcome the things of this world. To Christ, we are a treasure in an earthen vessel, unique and special. The challenge that we face is

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determining what will be housed in that vessel. We are the gatekeepers and maintainers of the vessel that God has entrusted to us. We are stewards of the temples (our bodies) that we use to worship God. One day the Owner will return and will settle up our accounts with Him.

II Thessalonians 2:13

*But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through **sanctification** by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

A vital work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is sanctification. We need to thank God for the sanctification process in our lives, as well as in the lives of others. Daily, we need to understand what the Holy Spirit is teaching and showing us, and then we need to thank God for what He is doing in and through our lives.

We also need to be aware of what will happen to those who do not receive His love and truth and will not therefore accept His sanctifying work in their lives. All kinds of delusions will cause them to believe things that are not true. They will take pleasure in wickedness. Their end is that they will be judged on the basis of their not believing in the truth of God.

We need to thank God because when He called us, we followed and were willing to come under the sanctifying work of His Holy Spirit. We need to have faith in Christ and trust that the Holy Spirit knows what is best for us. He is the one who holds the keys to our lives and we have to let Christ mold us into His image to accomplish His purposes for us.

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James 5:16

*Therefore, **confess** your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

We are not an island unto ourselves, but we are called to help minister and encourage each other in Christ. Confessing one to another is part of the disciple's walk. It is also part of the sanctifying process that God uses to draw us closer to each other and to Him.

Confessing to a fellow disciple is a humbling process in itself. It makes one vulnerable and transparent, but it is also one of God's ways to help us grow and to bring healing into our lives. Confessing is good for us as disciples; it lessens the burden on us, and provides fewer opportunities for the enemy to accuse us.

Confessing is like a chalk board – the more we confess, the cleaner the board becomes as God erases our sins; and the more we are sanctified through the cleansing power of the blood of Christ. Our sins, we are told, are recorded and, one day, they will be brought to light, but if we confess them here on earth, they are removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Christ has no desire for us to live under a cloud of condemnation, but He wants us to live under the full sunshine of His love.

I Peter 1:15

*but like the Holy One who called you, be **holy** yourselves also in all your behavior;*

Peter challenged the believer to live a holy life before the Lord. The idea of "holy" is the same as being sanctified. Christ is Holy so we are to be holy. For disciples to enter into the Holy of Holies (the very presence of God), we must be first washed by the

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blood of the Lamb. His blood cleanses us from all our sin, sanctifies us by Christ's righteousness, and enables us to enter personally into His presence.

Peter tells us to be holy, not just on Sunday or at midweek Bible study, but in all our behavior each moment of every day. Everything we do and say should demonstrate that we are living a sanctified life. Moment by moment we are to exemplify the Holiness of Christ to others. Whether a parent, teacher, worker, student, homemaker, business person, or a leader in the church, when people see us, they should see the holy sanctifying work of Christ flowing out through our lives. In all we do, we should be "seasoned" by Christ's holiness.

This walk of holiness and sanctification may look like an impossible mountain to climb, and sometimes one may feel like giving up before even starting. But the key is to walk deeper in prayer and commitment. We should also do as Paul exhorts us to act – pray and ask God to fill us with His Holy Spirit daily. He is the One Who empowers us to overcome the weaknesses, sins and bondages we face. Place yourself in His hands and watch what He will do in you and through you. The word of God is full of hope and encouragement for the disciple.

I Peter 3:15

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

As disciples of Christ, living godly lives here on earth will be one of our biggest challenges that we will ever face. The process must start by having our hearts sanctified by Christ. He

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needs to become the Lord of all things in our lives, in relationships and possessions, but most of all, in our thoughts and actions.

Godly living is not possible on our own, but that is why Christ tells us not to lean on our own understanding or strength, but to lean totally on Him for all that we need. When we have our hearts right before the Lord, we then will be able to face those who would attack us and accuse us about our beliefs and in Whom we believe.

We will be able, with a clear conscience, to give an account of the sure hope that we have in Christ. With reverence, and in gentleness, we will be able to provide a positive account. The more we walk in the sanctifying presence of Christ, the more His Spirit can flow through our lives, touching the lives around us.

I John 1:9

*If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The key to a sanctified walk is to be faithful in confessing our sins to God. When we do so, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us, but He then takes it a step farther – He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Each day we must walk in the light of God's truth. John tells us that we must practice walking in truth. We have to build up our "truth muscles".

Confession is good for the soul. Confession is the starting point for the washing and sanctifying power of Christ in our lives. The greater the cleansing, the greater the anointing, and the greater God's activity will be in our lives. As we draw closer to God, He will draw closer to us.

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If we focus on developing a strong personal relationship with Him, all other relationships that we daily face will be affected. Sanctification involves us in the mind and will of God. Ask God for the faith to trust Him for whatever He brings into our lives. After all, He has our best interests in His heart.

Resolution:

Sanctification can be a difficult word to comprehend because it is not immediately understandable. It is not used in normal everyday communication between people. Too often it is easy to assess our own level of sanctification when we compare ourselves to others and what they may or may not be doing. The true measuring stick should not be people, or even the church, but that which the Word of God instructs us to do.

If, as disciples, we do not understand the importance of sanctification and then allow the Lord to "make it happen" in our lives, we will still face the bondage of the stumbling blocks of sins and shortcomings. Sin entangles and hinders spiritual development, but confession brings freedom and life. We are in a battle with a real enemy who desires to destroy and to kill. We need to claim the shed blood of Christ and surrender our will to His Lordship; at that moment life begins to change and have new meaning. Our lives are a lot like a house with many different types of rooms with closets and cupboards. This house might have an upstairs and a full basement underneath, and even an attached garage. We need to understand that when we invite Christ into our lives or "house", He (figuratively) may enter the living room, but what He desires is that you will ask Him to go with you, and work with you, cleaning all the rest of the rooms and spaces throughout the house. He desires to get rid of all the dirt that would otherwise hinder your effectiveness and control you for the rest of your life. In each room we need to "let go and let God" do His work. When

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we are washed and cleansed, our house becomes a beautiful dwelling for God's glory.

Each day should begin with ensuring that any spiritual filth is cleaned up and washed away; then we need to take time to put on the full armor of God. Just as one prepares for the normal tasks of one's day, we also need to prepare spiritually for what we may encounter. We must take time to let the Word of God wash and sanctify our hearts.

We must remember that the call to sanctification is not just a onetime process, but that it has to become part of our daily lifestyle. Our personal testimony is one of the greatest weapons that we have against the enemy. No one can destroy the testimony of the heart sanctified by Christ Jesus.

The enemy desires to bring dirt and corruption into our lives so that we will not have the victory or power to move forward. Satan loves to lie and deceive people, making us live under condemnation and guilt. Christ is not the author of condemnation, but the giver of grace and peace.

We also have to understand that we are connected to the body of Christ; what we do, or don't do, affects disciples all around us. There is no excuse for refusing to confess to God or to our fellow brothers and sisters. Confession of our weaknesses provides a powerful testimony of God's love, grace and strength to others. A step of faith begins at all. Do not listen to the lying voice of the enemy who only wishes to condemn and make guilty. He will do all he can to condemn you, but Christ has come to "set the captive free". We do not need to be enslaved to anything; we just have to surrender to the sanctifying blood of Jesus Christ.

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Today, sanctification is desperately needed in the lives of individual disciples as well as the church. We are in need of a revival of sanctification! The teaching of sanctification needs to be preached from the pulpits of our churches today. For the church to move forward, the doctrine of sanctification needs to be *resurrected* into each believer's life and into the very heart of the church.

Take time to ask the Holy Spirit to open up your mind and heart so that you may see where change has to take place. Each step of sanctification is another step toward maturity. God's washing and cleansing removes the stench and filthiness of sin. He desires to make you white as snow, a vessel that will shine for His glory. This all begins with a simple prayer, inviting Christ in by the power of the Holy Spirit – to gently walk with you in love, for His desire is always to mold you more and more into His image and character.

PERSONAL DISCIPLESHIP REFLECTION:

Thinking about this chapter, what do I hear God saying to me? How can I apply these Scriptural truths to my life? Make an action plan - a covenant with the Lord - of how you will set out on this journey of sanctification. As this maturing process occurs, your life will affect all those that around you.

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RELEVANCE:

What truth has the Holy Spirit spoken into your life and what steps do you need to take to bring about a sanctified walk as a disciple? What needs to be confessed and washed with the blood of Christ? How can I plan to have others work with me on my journey of daily sanctification?

PRAYER DIRECTIVE:

Pray that God will reveal areas that are sinful or not "in step" with His will. Through studying his word, pray that God will enable you to see things in your life which need to be washed and confessed. Prayerfully consider how the people with whom you associate may be helping or hindering your walk with Christ. Pray that things of the world will be "poured out" and the things of Christ "poured in". Pray that He will bring to mind those whom you have offended, and that He will give the strength and grace to make things right. Pray that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit will work its way all through your life.

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Chapter Five

Called to His Purpose

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are **called** according to His **purpose**.*

Romans 8:28

Sometimes it is hard to grasp that there is a reason for us to be here on earth. We are not just to take up space and make waste; our lives are divinely planned by an all-knowing and loving God. The key to understanding this is to recognize that we are His workmanship. He desires to mold us into the image and character of His Son – to make us more like Him. He is the potter and we are the clay. The struggle is to let the potter do the molding, submitting to forming process of His hands. We also need to understand that the potter knows that not every vessel will be the same – each one is unique and different. His ultimate purpose is to make each of us more like Him.

God knew you before you were born. He knows the number of hairs on your head and is intensely interested in you. He desires to call and speak with you each day so that you will fulfill His specific purpose for your life. He desires above everything else to have a personal relationship with you.

The word “purpose” has many synonyms, which are important if we hope to understand the bigger picture of God’s calling in our lives. Synonyms for purpose are: aim, design, function, idea, intention, object, point, principle, reason, desire, goal, hope, target, single-mindedness, steadfastness, will, and

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result. These words all point in a direction and demand some form of action on our part.

For many years, the church and disciples generally have been determined to find out the nature of their spiritual gifts. However, we tend not to clearly understand that all gifts are given for a purpose. They are not just given to the individual for his/her own edification, but for ministry to the total body. The gifts are to be used as a tool to help carry out God-given purposes for every believer's life. Gifts are understood as an outward expression of what is in your heart. Everything has a reason for being, including your talents, gifts and personality.

It is also important to see that God has a divine purpose for you, for your family, and for us as a Church, the Body of Christ. Our Lord endeavors to teach us how we can walk and live out His purpose for our lives. In order to accomplish this purpose, He gives us the power of His Holy Spirit.

What follows are some signposts which we find throughout the Bible, assisting us to learn of God's power and purpose for our lives.

Scripture Signposts

Scripture is the foundation-stone on which we are to build. It is our hope that these Scriptures will lead you deeper into the meaning of Christ's call, and the importance of understanding God's purpose for your life. Let us hear from the Word and commit ourselves to act as the Spirit leads.

Job 36:5 (NIV Bible)

*God is mighty, but does not despise me; he is mighty, and firm in his **purpose**.*

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As already stated, one of God's main goals for us is that we become more like Christ. He is firm in His purposes and is never-changing. With this reality in mind, we realize it is us who need to be changed, and us who need to discover His purposes for our lives. God's purpose is not to enslave us, but to bring us into alignment with His will. This frees us, giving us hope and a reason for living.

Job's life was full of challenges, yet he knew in his heart that God had a plan. As Job continued to trust God, God proved Himself mighty to him and to everyone associated with him.

Psalm 57:2 (NIV Bible)

I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me.

David's life was full of all kinds of twists and turns, but as he yielded his life to God, he knew the Creator of the universe would see him through. God would keep all His promises and covenants with David. Likewise, our lives are full of challenges, but if we take hold of God's hand, He will walk with us.

We can look at Christ's example as He cried to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane, "... yet not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). We all come to a crossroads in our lives where we battle out who will be in authority. The question we must answer is whether we have the faith to trust the He knows what is best for us. The challenge is whether we are willing to die to ourselves. Jesus said that a grain of seed must go into the ground and, unless it dies (or is broken open) it will produce nothing (John 12:24). He wants us to break open, get rooted, sprout up, and produce a plant that will bear fruit for His glory. God's purpose is that you walk in His power and strength, producing fruit and proving that you belong to him.

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David's life often mirrored the character of God, demonstrating through all kinds of struggles and trials, a personal walk with Him.

Psalm 138:8 (NIV Bible)

*The Lord will fulfill his **purpose** for me; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands.*

David, like all people, struggled with “letting go and letting God.” Some days God's leading probably didn't make sense to David; still, David firmly believed the fact that God loved, cared for, and would guide him. He knew that God had only the best in mind for him; all he needed to do was rest in the Lord's loving arms.

David prayed that God would not abandon His purpose for him. He asked the Lord to keep molding him. Often, we want to be the potter and not the clay. We want to mold ourselves into our image and not into God's. The hardest bridge to cross is to “let go and let God.” It is hard for us to see and to comprehend God's bigger picture for our lives. However, we need to remember (as David did) that God does have a divine purpose, and because of His great love, He will not leave us or forsake us.

David's desire was that God's purposes would prevail. He wanted, and desired to stay, in step with God's will for his life. David was not perfect, and he made many mistakes, but with God's help, he was able to focus on becoming a true friend of God.

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV Bible)

*Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's **purpose** that prevails.*

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Solomon tells us that the pain and struggles that we face are used to accomplish God's divine purpose for our lives. If we look at a potter working on a lump of clay, we can see it takes time to form something beautiful. The Master Potter has to shape us, adding water when we seem a little dry; other times it looks like the Potter is starting all over again. However, we must remember the Potter carries within His mind the image of what that lump of clay can become.

When we let God's way prevail, there may well be pain and frustration, but the final result will be worthwhile. He will not give up on us, so we need to remember not to give up on Him.

Isaiah 49:4 (NIV Bible)

*But I said, "I have labored to no **purpose**; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God."*

Isaiah struggled with the idea of whether God really knew what He was doing with his life and with the lives of the Israelite people. He examined his life and felt that he had labored for no purpose. Many pastors, teachers and missionaries often struggle with this same question. Did my years of labor have a purpose or value for the people to whom I ministered? Did I do anything to touch those around me or to impact my world? Paul had to remind the church that some people planted, others nurtured the crop, and still others brought in the harvest, but it is always God who brings the increase.

We all want to have purpose in our lives. We desire to make a difference, but cannot always see what is happening to the seed which God has planted. Even years after our home-going, the purposes of God will be fulfilled because God has promised it. Whatever we sow, we shall reap.

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We should not focus so much on a reward here on earth, but know that there will be an eternal reward for those who have laboured for the Kingdom of God. The key is that we must not grow weary in well-doing. Remember that the Lord has everything in His hands. God misses no detail at all.

Isaiah 55:11 (NIV Bible)

*...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the **purpose** for which I sent it.*

We can be assured that when God speaks, it will happen. What He plants will bring a harvest. There is no power here on earth or in the heavenlies, that can prevent God's purposes for ourselves, and the world, from being accomplished. He is Creator of everything and all things are in His hands; the power of His spoken word will achieve what He purposes it to do. The challenge for the disciple is to see God as God, to let Him do His complete work in and through our lives. He has our best interests in mind.

We need to have the faith to believe in His purpose. The centurion commander knew this when he told Jesus that He did not have to come to his house; He just had to speak the words. He knew that if Jesus willed for the paralyzed servant to be healed, it would happen (Matthew 8:5-13). What God speaks, His words will be realized as fruit for His glory, and will accomplish His purposes.

Luke 7:30

*But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's **purpose** for themselves, not having being baptized by John.*

The religious leaders in the Gospels could not understand what God was doing. John the Baptist was teaching a baptism of

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repentance; Jesus was teaching about the Kingdom of God, and that He was the only way that one could get to heaven.

Jesus presented steppingstones to His disciples – stepping stones that would lead to maturity. Our journey today is no different. It starts by being faithful in little things (humbling ourselves) and by taking the time to discover God’s purpose for our lives. These religious rulers were being called by John to repent, be obedient, and then follow through with the step of baptism. Baptism seemed humiliating to them. They would watch others, but their pride kept them from taking part. Because of this, they found themselves outside of God’s purpose for their lives. The religious leaders could not see how this step would lead to a deeper walk with God.

Life with God starts by being obedient, and taking the first step toward fulfilling His purpose for your life. We should not reject God’s will but accept God’s divine purpose for us. The first step begins a journey that will affect our lives for all eternity.

Acts 5:38-39 (NIV Bible)

*Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their **purpose** or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God*

The disciples remained steadfast to their call to go out to preach and to teach the Gospel wherever they went. They clearly knew God’s purpose and went about, busily accomplishing it. The 12 apostles caused all kinds of challenges for the religious leaders of their time. Because of what they were saying and doing, they often found themselves in trouble with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and even with the high priest. As a result, they were beaten,

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whipped and often imprisoned. It was obvious that they were "stirring up trouble" by causing people to examine their thoughts and beliefs.

One religious leader, Gamaliel, did express concern that his fellow leaders be careful in their judging of these disciples of Christ. He said that if they were not careful, they could find themselves going against the purposes of God. He knew that God has a purpose for what He does and that He is active in the affairs of humankind. From this wise counsel, his colleagues limited the amount of punishment they gave the disciples.

The disciples knew that they were doing the will of God. Therefore, when they were jailed, whipped and beaten, they continued to praise the Lord. They knew they were following God's plan and felt honoured that they could suffer for the cause of Christ.

Acts 26:16-18

*But get up and stand on your feet; for this **purpose** I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.*

Christ came for a purpose. He called Paul for a specific purpose, and He does the same with us today. We are not here by accident – there is a real calling behind our existence.

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God's purpose is to get us to take a stand for what we believe. We are also called by God to go out into this lost world and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. One of Christ's intentions is to get us out of our comfort zones, and to do things His way.

The early church was called into being for a purpose – to be a light in dark places. We are to shine daily wherever we are, and wherever we go. We are to rescue those who are being held captive. The world is in bondage and we have the truth to set the captives free.

As ambassadors, we are to demonstrate God's plan and purpose. We need to share the Good News that everyone can receive forgiveness, and that there is a wonderful inheritance for all those who receive Christ by faith. We have the power (through Christ) to overcome Satan's army and dominion. We need to take back what Satan has stolen from us.

We are able to overcome. All we need to do is put on the full armour of God, look to our Lord and Saviour, and move forward according to His purpose for our lives.

Romans 8:28

*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are **called** according to His **purpose**.*

Getting in line with God's will is key to experiencing His blessing and love. Paul told the Romans that the various challenges they endured would all work together for their good. As we begin to understand God's love, it impacts our attitudes and actions. Frequently, we see only a small segment of our calling, but God understands the bigger picture. As we abide in Him, God paints a

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beautiful picture of our lives for the purpose of bringing glory to the Father.

Timing is also an important factor in working toward His purpose. Often, we are in a hurry and, instead of waiting for God's timing, we try to make things happen on our own. For the disciple, self-directed actions can spell disaster. It is important to continue to watch and pray for God to direct and guide us through the events of the day. As we rely on Him we will see, at the end of each day, how His hand has guided us.

Tradition and culture often dominate our lives – yet God tends to work outside these parameters. Paul gives an Old Testament example of birthright and blessing that the father gives to his children. Normally the eldest son would be served by the younger. The eldest would receive most of the inheritance and would have a prominent place in the family. Nevertheless, God often operates outside tradition. His purposes supersede man's goals and purposes. Paul illustrates that God's ways are not our ways. In (NIV) Romans 9:11-12, we read "*The older will serve the younger.*" Before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad – in order that God's **purpose** in election might stand: not by works but by him who **calls** – Rebecca was told.

When God speaks, we must yield to His ways. In the example of Jacob and Esau, God was calling the second-in-line to accomplish His plans.

From conception on, God works in our lives. He shapes us for His purpose while we are being formed in our mother's womb. He is the God of details. Nothing is too small or unimportant for His eye to see. Each one of us is called for a purpose and we need to understand what God desires for our lives. We are not alone – He wants to walk with us every step of the way.

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2 Corinthians 5:5 (NIV Bible)

*Now it is God who has made us for this very **purpose** and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

God is a God who creates. He created us for a very specific purpose and then called us to fulfill that purpose. Paul taught the church of Corinth that God gives the Holy Spirit to be a witness to the covenant between man and God.

God gives us the Holy Spirit to teach us, comfort us and show us God's divine purposes for our lives. The Holy Spirit takes the Father's purpose for our lives and empowers us to fulfill it.

God is the God of the past, the present, and the future; He wants us to see things through the eyes of the Holy Spirit. We need to understand that He has been in our past, He desires to be working through us in the present and He has a purpose for our lives in the future. We are not on a directionless pilgrimage, but we are on a journey in which our steps are ordered by God moment by moment, and day by day. He knows what is to come.

Ephesians 3:10-12 (NIV Bible)

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal **purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

The church is one of the key elements used by God to fulfill His call in our lives. God works in us as individuals, but He also has purposed to work in us through the church. Our purpose and the church's purpose should line up. We are not an island but

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are part of a body created by Jesus Christ. At times we may not agree with what is going on in the church, but God has chosen to work out His plan through this larger group of disciples.

One problem the church faces is rebellion. Sometimes leadership (or disciples) can rebel against God or disciples may rebel against the leadership. Very often, rebellion is the root of dissension amongst believers. Our personal wills battle each other. In such times we should call for prayer and fasting, so we can seek God's face and become united with His divine purpose, both for our lives and for the life of the church. When we are in line with God, there is deliverance and freedom for both ourselves and the church.

Christ is an example to the church, showing how God fulfills His purposes through people. Every detail of Christ's coming – His life, death and resurrection – all were in step with God's timing. God is a God of details and, although at times the picture may not make sense to us, we have to trust that God will accomplish that which He desires.

Philippians 2:13 (NIV Bible)

*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good **purpose**.*

God desires to work in and through us. When our will gets in the way, a battle can ensue. Will it be our desires that we follow or will we surrender to His will? We struggle with this because we are not confident that God truly knows what is good for us.

He works in our lives according to His good purpose, and always has our best in mind. God wants to have a personal relationship, walking hand in hand with us each and every day. The question is whether we will let Him do it or not.

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He desires to use our lives as a conduit, flowing through us, channeling His power and message through our lives. The book of Acts is the account of the Holy Spirit flowing through the church in accordance with God's will. The disciples, through prayer and action, discovered the Lord's purpose for them, both as individuals and as a corporate body. The disciples, as well as the church, needed to get in step with God's purpose.

God has an eternal purpose for our lives. He desires voluntary submission to His eternal will. Understanding this, and walking in obedience to God's purposes, will give freedom and confidence. However, the key is to trust, and to have the faith that He knows what is best for us, so that we can become more like Him. God's desire is to accomplish very specific purposes in our lives – purposes that will cause us to grow in maturity with the aim of glorifying Christ Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 1:11 (NIB Bible)

*With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of His **calling**, and that by His power He may fulfill every good **purpose** of yours and every act prompted by your faith.*

We need to clearly understand our calling. Prayer is the key to its discovery. As we draw closer to God, He has promised to draw closer to us. It is then that we will be counted worthy, not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

God desires His power to flow through us, fulfilling in our lives what we cannot do on our own. We could say that God has a “**power purpose**” for each one of us. He gives not only a purpose, but also provides power to realize that purpose.

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God wants to fulfill the desires of our hearts. But it is important to remember that these desires, through faith, must come from His prompting. We need to trust His purposes for our lives. This is the key – to be in step with His **“power purpose”** for our lives, as well as for the life of the church.

Paul says to let every act be prompted by faith. God wants to give us the desires of our hearts, and He wants these desires to result in action. We need not to be afraid, but simply have faith. Do not try to do it "all at once". It is very important that we take that first step and the Holy Spirit will give us the power to continue, one step at a time.

RESOLUTION

These signposts of Scripture have shown us keys as to how the Holy Spirit wants us to understand our discipleship. Today you can take the first step by surrendering and saying, “Yes, Lord, here I am.”

Many have a hard time understanding and accepting the purpose of God for their lives. This is often because people are reluctant to accept instruction from God. Although He wants to make His counsel clear in order to fulfill His purpose for us, it may seem to run contrary to what we want or desire. Many times, we do not see the bigger picture. We may think that God is putting up unnecessary roadblocks in our journey, but He is really showing us detours that will help us get around certain problems so that we can keep moving forward. All instruction is for a purpose – to help us build the character we are hoping to see develop in our lives. God's instructions sometimes move us outside of our comfort zones; He may move us from an attitude of indifference to one of being involved. Once we stop being involved and growing, we become stagnant, producing fruit that will not bring glory to God.

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God's desire is to send us out as lights into a lost world. God's goal is to build a personal relationship with us so that we will feel comfortable to go on the long journey with Him. His purpose is to walk hand-in-hand with us through every day of our lives.

We need to understand that life is not only about us, but about others as well. God purposes to mold us in such a way that we can go out with the power of the Holy Spirit to minister to and serve others. He wants to touch us so that we can touch others with His love and redemptive power.

God's purposes are bigger than ours. We need to be seeking Christ to understand His larger calling or purpose. Will our individual purposes mesh with those of our fellow disciples? What is His purpose for the children he gives us? As we add children, does our family not have a specific purpose to carry out His purposes in church as well as in the world? What is His purpose concerning work and ministry? Is there a reason for our being here? We need to take time to examine all these areas, because they affect us as well as our ministry. All things are for a purpose – to instruct, and to bring us to an understanding of who we are to be in Christ.

God has a “**power purpose**” for our lives. He wants to grow and mature us so that we can build up and encourage others. He empowers us to fulfill His divine calling, one that will change and mold us into His image. The result causes us to move outside of our comfort zone. Becoming more like Christ involves ongoing change – He empowers us for change. It is important to remember that if we are not changing, we may well be out of alignment with God's will for our lives. If we keep trying to do things by our own strength, we will never change, nor will we completely fulfill God's calling in our lives.

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TESTIMONY

Some days it is not easy to understand God's purpose for my life, and it is even harder to understand how God's purpose for my life relates to God's purposes for other members of the body of Christ. But as I enter into the Holy of Holies with Christ, He gives me specific instructions from the Scriptures, or He may speak to me "loudly" or in a "still small voice". My path is not always clear, and this is where I need to step out in faith.

In March 2005 my first wife, Irene, passed away from ovarian cancer. We had been married for 33 years and served God with all our hearts and to the best of our ability. For a time, I lost my focus and direction in life and how to line up to God's purpose for my life and ministry. Over a period of time inner healing began to take place through much prayer and fasting. I began to see things in a new way.

One thing that came to light was that our bodies are only vessels; what really counts is the treasure inside the vessel. The treasure in Irene had just moved on to be with her Creator and Lord.

It was not long before I began to be open to dating but only if God would show me that He approved of it. I needed to see how the past was going to link up to the present and how everything that everything in the future would fulfill His purposes and will for my life.

Eventually I met a beautiful woman from Myanmar named Hkaw Win. Instead of just dating with the hopes of getting married, I went to God for another reason. I asked God if this relationship lined up with His divine purpose. I could see that He had a call for Hkaw Win in her country, and He had a call in my

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life for Project L.A.M.B.S. International. We both wanted to make sure that our personal desires did not get in the way of what God was doing in our lives. We had to determine if God was bringing us together for a combined purpose; if not, we would not go any further. Time began to show that there was a divine call to come together as husband and wife and serve Him in the country of Myanmar. This meant many changes, but because He was directing us, He would also teach us how we were to move forward.

God is a God of details. Hkaw Win and I needed, in faith, to let God work through these details, and then obey Him in what he had called us to do. Although the road was not easy, it is because of this road that our relationship with God and with each other will grow stronger.

In order to hear the voice of God, as disciples, we must take time to pray and fast. If we do not, we will "burn out" and come to the point of wanting to give up. God is not trying to drain life from us; He is trying to give us life "more abundantly". There is enough time in each day to fulfill His will and purpose for our lives, but it will mean saying "No" to a lot of distractions and saying "Yes" to what God has called us to do.

Please, please take time to step back and look carefully at your life and the things that you are doing. Lay it all at the throne of Christ and let Him tell you what to delete and what to move forward on. When you do this, your life and the lives of those around you, will be liberated. You will feel a freedom never experienced before. God created us. Then He calls us and empowers us for service.

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Personal Discipleship Reflections:

Take a moment just to sit back and reflect on what the Holy Spirit might be saying to you concerning one specific call. Write down a few ideas here as a remembrance of how God is leading in your life.

RELEVANCE:

Do I have a purpose-driven life? Do I seek counsel from God and others to determine what my God-given purpose is?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that you can enter into a clearer understanding of what your God-given purpose for your life is. Pray also that the Holy Spirit will empower you and help to understand this purpose, so you will be able to fulfill it.

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Chapter Six

Called to a Body

*“There is one **body** and one spirit, just as also you were **called** in one hope of your **calling**;”*
Ephesians 4:4

We are called by Christ to become His body. This body is known as the "church"; the church is worldwide. Christ is our head and we are His body. However, to be a body that will function and produce fruit, we need to work in harmony and be in unity with one another.

God's call entails, first, His communicating with us as individuals, and then involves us in working with other disciples. As disciples, we are interconnected. We are not islands but are joined together by His Holy Spirit under the Headship of Christ. His calling is for action; that action may involve taking someone from where they are to a ministry place where they need to be, either in their thinking or their geography.

The word “body” is defined as a form, frame, shape, association, bond, collection, company or corporation. All these words imply that there are individual parts which need to be connected in order to form some type of structure. Materials are just a pile of supplies until a master builder puts them together; at that point, those components become a building designed for a specific purpose or use.

God is calling us to a "body ministry", connecting us with others to carry out a divine purpose for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The reality is that we are, as a church, composed of many

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members, each of whom has specific functions and purposes within the body. But there is only one Body and one Spirit Who gives life and direction.

Scripture Signpost:

I hope that these Scriptures will take you even deeper into an understanding of the call of Christ and the importance of being part of the body of Christ, which is His church. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Matt. 6:22-24

*The eye is the lamp of the **body**; so then if your eye is clear, your whole **body** is full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole **body** will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*

We have to make a choice: to be in Christ's body, or to be in the world. We cannot do both. We cannot serve two masters. One leads to destruction and the other to life. If we don't belong to the light, we will find out that we belong to the darkness. Trying to serve two masters leads to hopelessness, despair, and anger which, in turn, may result in division and destruction. We are called to be people of the light. Jesus came to bring light into darkness. He told the disciples that He is the light of the world. Because we are His body, we are to follow His leadership and example. After all, He is the head and we are the body.

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Matthew 16:18

*I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My **church**; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

Jesus gave Peter a challenge. He told him to build upon the rock of Christ. Christ knew that Peter's name meant "rock". He challenged Peter to build the church (Christ's body) upon the true rock which is Christ himself. Christ's body would consist of believers who were called out by the Holy Spirit; these believers were to come together in harmony and unity for the purpose of building Christ's church, the firm foundation of which is Christ himself.

Christ would empower these disciples; not even the gates of hell would be able to withstand the power of God. His might would overcome the stronghold of Satan. We are not to be defeated, but we are to be overcomers through Christ Jesus. Remember, "Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world". When the church is built upon The Rock, it becomes a mighty fortress from which disciples can do battle.

We are called to join a body of disciples who trust Christ with their all; disciples have personally made Him their head, their Lord, and their King. We stand on the foundation of the church; there we are empowered and strengthened to go out and do battle with the enemies of Christ.

Matt. 26:41 (NIV Bible)

*Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the **flesh** is weak.*

As disciples in the body of Christ, we need to be on alert because our enemy moves about like a roaring lion seeking whom

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he may devour. We are called to watch and pray as individuals and also as a body. Our purpose in doing so is that we do not fall into temptation.

Christ is calling us to flee from temptation and then to stay away from it as far as possible. Temptation is the first step on the downward road, taking us out of fellowship with God. Jesus tells us that the Spirit of God is willing and able to help us, but the problem is that our flesh is weak. Weakness can be prevalent in the physical, mental and spiritual parts of our lives. If we ever hope to be victorious, every aspect of our lives needs to get in tune with the will and leading of the Holy Spirit.

As individuals and as a church, we can be overcome by the enemy when we are not heeding the call of God which is to "watch and pray". If we are not alertly keeping our eyes and ears open, we can be afflicted by all kinds of challenges and pains. As a body, we need to be on guard against the enemy's tactics.

Mark 14:22

*While they were eating, He took some bread, and after a blessing He broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take it; this is My **body**."*

Through an object lesson, Jesus showed his disciples the importance of fellowship and communing together. He told them that His body was going to be broken and poured out for a purpose: that His broken body was going to bring deliverance and freedom from sin for the disciples who would then be able to overcome the world.

Christ was about to be "broken and poured out" for all mankind. For a time, these disciples were going to be broken up and separated from one another until the time when Christ would

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empower them to be the foundation stones of His church. On this foundation would be built the church, Christ's living body here on earth.

Following Christ's resurrection, He and His disciples enjoyed a time of deep communion and fellowship. What they were about to go through would shake the very foundations of what they believed about Christ. But the coming and power of the Holy Spirit in the upper room would now help them to overcome the challenge that they would soon face as they served as Christ disciples. These unique people would now become part of the body of Christ, engrafted and joint heirs with Jesus.

Communion would serve to remind them that Christ was the Head and that they were called to be His body.

Romans 6:12-13

*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal **body** so that you obey its lust, and do not go on presenting the members of your **body** to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Many of these verses deal with us as individual members of the body of Christ, but what happens to an individual can also be an example of what can happen to the church as a whole, if we are not careful. Sin is like a cancer that can spread throughout an individual body, but it can also spread throughout our local church body.

The enemy wants us to lust after the things of this world, to get us to desire those things that bring pleasure and comfort. But Satan's ploys are just tools of deception, intended to hurt us and to hurt the churches of which we are a part.

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We are to demonstrate that we are no longer dead in sin, but alive in Christ, and letting Christ live his life through us. No longer is death the conqueror (1 Cor. 15) because we have personally believed and put our faith in Christ Jesus. We live because Christ lives in us! Because of His righteousness we are able to overcome the bondage and strongholds of the devil and his demons.

As disciples, we are to be members and instruments of Christ's body. We are clothed and covered over with His righteousness. We are to present ourselves to Christ as vessels for His purpose and honor, not for ours.

Romans 12:1

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your **bodies** a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

Paul urges us to understand the mercies of God and, on the basis of those mercies, to present our bodies as a holy and living sacrifice to God. We are called to give all we have to God. We sacrifice now, as children of God, we will inherit so much more.

Our bodies are instruments of worship for God. Our lives can praise and glorify Him if we are willing to use them to serve Him. As individuals, we can serve; in addition, as a body of believers, we can all serve as we sacrifice our wills to His will.

Each day provides a new opportunity to serve Christ, but it may well require sacrifice on our part. The gift of sacrifice in God's eyes is a gift of our love and worship of Him. Our willingness to bring the sacrifice of praise to Him each day demonstrates our love for Him.

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Each day Christ's call to our hearts is a call for sacrifice.

Romans 12:4-5

*For just as we have many members in one **body** and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one **body** in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

As body members, we are called to work and minister together, to build up and support each other. We are all unique and we have a variety of functions, but we are still all part of the same body of which Christ is the head.

Again, the key to our understanding is to recognize that we are one body, a "family", carrying out the will and desire of Christ for our lives. Paul wanted us to see that our individual differences are what make us uniquely strong. As individuals, we work in harmony and unity with one another; that solidarity gives strength in life and ministry.

Many of Paul's books teach on the "one another" factor. He wanted to remind us that we are connected together in "one body" because of the work of Jesus Christ. The day we entrusted our hearts to Christ was the day we became part of this unique body, the church. We need then to work at getting along with one another. We have two ministries; one is reaching out to a lost world, and the second is reaching out to help and support our fellow disciples.

We need to work at a growing relationship with Christ, as well as with each other if we expect to see good things happen in His church and throughout His kingdom.

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I Corinthians 6:19-20

*Or do you not know that your **body** is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your **body**.*

A temple is a holy place, sanctified as a center of worship. Our bodies are to be a dwelling place where Christ resides, and where we have sweet communion with Him each day. Paul wanted the church to know that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit. They needed to remember that their bodies/temples belonged to God every moment of every day. We were created by Him so that His presence could be with us and in us. We are stewards, not owners, of our bodies. He has given us bodies which we, as disciples, give back to Him. We were bought with a price, a price which His Son, Jesus Christ, lovingly and freely paid for us.

Because our bodies do not belong to us, we then should work at giving praise and thanks to God for our use of them. Each day we should strive to glorify God through our thinking, our communications, as well as in our actions. The same is true for the church of Christ. The church is His; He has sent His Spirit to empower it and to use it for His glory. He is the Head, we are the followers.

He calls us to sacrifice our bodies and wills so that He can fill us with His Spirit, fulfilling His will. We are then called and empowered for service.

I Corinthians 11:18 (NIV Bible)

*In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a **church**, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.*

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One of the tactics of our enemy is to bring division into the body of Christ. He wants to divide our heart's loyalties. Then he wants to divide our families, and finally, he wants to divide Christ's church; he knows that if he can divide us, then he can conquer and destroy us. In order to divide the church, he knows the division needs to originate within individual minds and hearts.

Paul heard that there were problems in the Corinthian church. He had heard that when they came together as a body of believers there seemed to be divisions amongst them. He wanted to point out that Christ is not a God of division, but rather a God of unity and harmony. Division among the members of the body is like cancer; it takes that which was once good and turns it into something that divides and destroys, hurting other members of the body. The enemy shows no mercy to anyone.

The local church must always deal with divisions or rumors of division very quickly; failure to do so will make that part of Christ's body weak and ineffectual. The strength of a chain is always limited to its weakest link. A powerful current of electricity requires the conduit of a strong electrical cable; if a weak wire is used, it will overheat or short out. Similarly, if the members of a local church are divided, the church may "overheat or short out", becoming ineffectual conduits for the Holy Spirit's work.

I Corinthians 12:12-13

*For even as the **body** is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the **body**, though they are many, are one **body**, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

There are some key words in this verse that must be burned deeply within the disciple's heart. First, we are together called to

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be one body. Second, there is only one Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit is the One Who keeps us all connected as a body. Yes, we are many different members, but we are to be all working together as one.

Our different nationalities and cultures, or our various stations in life do not affect our place or call into this one body. However, what is important is that we are all baptized into Christ's body, and that we all drink of the same Spirit which Christ has freely poured out, making Him available to us as individuals, as well as to the church. We must be willing to die to ourselves, humbling ourselves before Christ, and becoming partakers of His Spirit. We are called as His body to yield to His Spirit and to walk in His power and anointing.

The unredeemed are enslaved to the cultures and traditions of this world, but through Christ's death and resurrection, as disciples, we have been set free. Freely you have received Christ Jesus; now freely share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

I Corinthians 12:27

*Now you are Christ's **body**, and individually members of it.*

This verse is just reminding us to Whom we belong, Who is guiding us and Who is in charge. Again, we are individual disciples, but together we are all part of one body which is Christ's.

Each day we need to remember that we are Christ's Body, regardless if we are at work, at home, or just walking along the street. We have a purpose and a goal: to shine and to be an ambassador for Christ to a lost world. Christ has given us meaning and hope; as members of his body we are of great value to Him. We may not all have a prominent part or a place that gets much

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attention, but we are all of great importance in the functioning and working of Christ's body.

When we look in the mirror each day, we need to remind ourselves that we are truly a part of the body of Christ. We make a difference in this lost world because Christ, through the power of His Holy Spirit, dwells in us and is always with us.

Ephesians 4:4

*“There is one **body** and one **spirit**, just as also you were called in one **hope** of your **calling**”*

We are called to a hope that results from being part of the body of Christ. Although Christ calls everyone, not all hear His voice because they are too caught up in the call of this world.

Everyone who receives Christ's call is adopted into His body. The apostle, John, told us that we are grafted into the vine (Christ) so that we can receive His life, and bear fruit that will touch and encourage others. There is only one body (the church); the Holy Spirit has been sent by Christ to empower that body to live and move as He directs.

Our hope for life, both temporal and eternal, comes because we trust God to do what he promised. He knows what is needed in His body and in our lives as individual members of that body. Serving Christ is not a life of hopelessness but, rather is one full of hope and peace.

Ephesians 4:25 (NIV Bible)

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbors, for we are all members of one **body**.*

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The character of the body members is important because it affects those that are in the church as well as those who are our neighbors. Every member of the body must avoid falsehood; lying hurts our personal testimony as well as the testimony of the church. It has been said, "Truth hurts," but that is what tough love is all about. We do need to speak the truth in love one to another as well as to our neighbor.

The key thought in this verse is that things done by individual members affect the whole body. Sometimes even our actions speak louder than our words.

Paul challenges us to put off the old self and put on Christ. Positively answering the call of Christ brings about a changed mind and a changed heart. As the heart is changed, attitudes, speech, and actions will change.

The body is called out of the world to be changed. We are to become a new creation that will exemplify the heart and character of Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 5:23

*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the **church**, He Himself being the Savior of the **body**.*

In this verse Paul explains to the Ephesians that the body life of the church can be compared to marriage. In marriage, two become one, but they are still two different people. They are one in marriage, but within the marriage, have two very different functions to fulfill.

Marriage, Paul explains, is a beautiful portrayal of the church. In marriage, the husband functions as the head, giving

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leadership and direction; he is the protector of his wife and family. Similarly, Christ is the head of His body, the church. Christ gives leadership and direction to the body and He is its spiritual covering (protector).

In the next few verses Paul indicates the attitude that the two should have toward each other. The husband (the head) needs to be willing to lay down his life for his wife; in turn, the wife follows His leadership, just as the church follows the sacrificial leadership of Christ. The wife (Christ's body) needs to be willing to submit to the husband (the head), Jesus Christ. Each assists the other, being called to give and sacrifice for one another.

Ephesians 5:30

*Because we are members of His **body**.*

We care for one another because we are members of one body, called to live and dwell together in unity. Our focus needs to move away from ourselves to Christ and to others.

As we see ourselves as members of Christ's body, we will become more actively involved in the lives of those around us. No longer is it “them and us” but now it is “us and us” ministering together.

Each day we need to remember that we are members of His family, the body of Christ; because of that glorious reality there are special privileges that come with being part of that family. We are joint heirs with the King of Kings. We are part of a royal family. We need to act differently because we are now a new creation and we have been adopted into a new family.

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We also are to nourish and cherish each other because we are all part of the same family. We need to see each other in a new, caring, way.

Philippians 3:21

*Who will transform the **body** of our humble state into conformity with the **body** of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

A butterfly starts as a worm. The worm must go through a metamorphosis if it ever hopes to fly. As citizens of Earth, we must go through a transformation if we hope to become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Not only do we need to be transformed, but also the group of people with whom we fellowship (the church) must also be undergoing transformation.

We cannot be changed through our own strength and ability, but are called to change through His strength and ability. We are transformed by the power of Christ, Who empowers us by His Holy Spirit to go beyond our feeble abilities so that we can walk in His ability and power.

The Father has placed all things under the authority of His Son, Jesus Christ. Everything is under subjection to Him. Christ desires that we act and live like Him; only He can empower us with the ability to do so.

The disciple must recognize that transformation, leading to change, is the result of Christ's call to be part of His body. He is called to die to self, living for Christ with a new mind and attitude.

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Colossians 1:24

*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His **body**, which is the **church**, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.*

This verse adds another dimension to what being part of the body means: we will reap both positive and negative results. Just as Christ suffered for us we, too, will go through challenges and suffering for Him. The road of life will have many twists and turns in it; there will be deep valleys and high mountaintops to scale. However, Christ will be walking with us all the way.

Paul saw suffering as a blessing, a privilege resulting from being part of the body of Christ. He hoped that Christ would find us worthy enough to draw alongside of Him, being willing to suffer with Him. Suffering is not easy or something anyone enjoys, but Paul saw the bigger picture. He knew that the suffering lasted only for a short time and that God would use it to advance His kingdom in the world. Others can see Christ brightly reflected in the lives of His disciples when they endure suffering for Him.

In times of suffering, the flesh cries out in pain, but the spirit is strengthened and built up. There are times when individual disciples, and even the whole body of Christ, will be called to suffer. Further, we are called to bear each other's infirmities. We do not carry the sufferings alone – because we are part of Christ's body, we carry them together.

Resolution:

"Body ministry" is the focus of I Corinthians 12:12-27. When we read this chapter, we can focus too much on spiritual gifts, whereas the emphasis should probably be on the word "BODY". Paul used the word "body" 13 times in this passage to

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emphasize a point to the church – how important interconnectedness is needed as we work together for the cause of Christ.

We need to see that God desires to work in and through us, so that we can touch others and that others can touch us with the love of Christ. Chapter 12 verse 18 states, “But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as he desired.” God is a God of detail and, in the making up of the body of Christ, He calls people with certain talents. He then gives them spiritual gifts so that they will be able to effectively serve and minister to each other, using their talents in the body. However, His desire does not end there. The next step is that the whole body, with a great diversity of talents and gifts, will be able to minister and serve people who are in a lost world.

One of the goals of body ministry is to care for one another. God has called us to care, helping to bring our fellow disciples to a state of maturity. Verse 25 of chapter 12 states, “so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.” We should be asking ourselves and asking God, "How can we minister and support each other in Christ's body?" This verse clearly indicates that our heart's purpose should be to minister to one another. We all live in a 'cause and effect' society. In one way or another, our actions affect others, and the actions of others affect us. We can "touch the world" by what we do, or what we do not do.

We are called, not to be simply individuals or just islands to ourselves, doing things in our own ability; rather, we are called to work together through God's body, the church. We need to work as a team. We are many members with a variety of functions, all to be used for one purpose and goal – being Christ's living body and testimony here on earth.

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that you can enter into a clearer understanding of what it means to be called to be a member of the body of Christ. Pray that God will help you to find a church and to get involved with the other members of the Body. Pray that God will use you to bring harmony and unity to the body of Christ where you fellowship. Pray that you may get a larger vision of what body ministry is, both locally and worldwide.

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Chapter Seven

Called to Transformation

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

Romans 12:2

The fruit of true discipleship in Christ brings about changes in one's life. When Christ calls us, He begins the process of changing us to be like Him in character. When we come to Christ through repentance (making a 180° turn), our hearts and thinking undergo change, leading to changes in outward behavior. Even what we say and do begins to change. Something supernatural miraculously takes place; Christ's presence in your heart changes things that were so rooted in your life that you saw no hope of change.

The dictionary defines change as, “convert, metamorphosis, reformed, reorganize, transformed, exchange, replace, trade.” Another word that the Bible uses is the word transformed, defined as, “change, alteration, conversion, metamorphosis, transfiguration, revelation, overhaul, remodeling, reshaping, remolding, redoing, reconstruction, rebuilding, reorganization, rearrangement, reworking, renewal, revamp, remaking.” Each of these words shows action and movement – a change from old to new, from past to present.

When one gives one's life totally over to Christ, we trade or exchange what we are, to what Christ wants us to be. We are not trying to change from the outside in, but Christ changes us from the inside out.

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The best example of this comes through the word “metamorphosis”, where the worm goes through huge changes and becomes a butterfly. Out of the old comes something brand new. God changes you into something unique and special for his Glory.

Change results in the fruit we can see when Christ truly lives in us and leads our lives. Anger changes into love. Selfishness changes into giving. My way changes into God’s way. A proud and arrogant heart changes into a “servant” heart.

Change does not happen overnight or all at once. It is like a plant. The seed must be planted, watered, and undergo change before it can sprout up through the ground. The Bible is like seed, prayer is like rain, and our heart is the soil in which God desires to grow us. The more we allow God to change us, the more God's will and action will flow through us out to others.

No one really enjoys change because, when we think about it, we may fear the unknown. However, this is where faith and trust in Christ is so important. We must believe that Christ knows exactly what we are going through, and what we need in order to change. He is the potter and we are the clay; we just need to let His gentle hands mold us into the vessel that will bring honour and glory to His name.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully these Scriptures will take you into a deeper understanding of the call of Christ, and the importance of understanding God’s transforming power in and for one's life. Again, we are called to change, and this can only happen by having a personal relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit ourselves to act as the Spirit leads.

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Psalm 23:3

He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

We are born with a sin nature; in other words, right from the start, we are in need of a change or transformation. Being born with the sin nature is not the result of something that we ourselves did, even though it does put us into the position of condemnation. Our sin nature is the result of what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. Their action removed them – and us – from intimate fellowship with God and birthed within each of us a sin nature. This nature desires to control us and would eventually destroy us. Without change, the result will be everlasting destruction and death.

David knew and sensed in his heart that a change was required. He could not remain on the same pathway. Without a complete transformation, he could overcome neither physical temptation or spiritual attack.

In this Psalm, David cries out to God to restore him into fellowship with his Lord. He cried out to God in this Psalm to restore his soul back into fellowship with God. He needed that personal relationship more than anything the world could offer. He knew that when fellowship would be restored, God would then guide him to the path of righteousness.

David asked for restoration for the sake of God's name, not just for own personal benefit. David wanted to glorify God with all his heart. God was calling David to be transformed.

Psalm 51:10 (renew)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

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David was a man whose heart desired the things of God; each day he longed for renewal and change. He did not want to stay where he was, but wanted to keep pressing for a deeper relationship with God. He asked God to create in him a new heart. He wanted to know and learn all he could about God. He knew his heart needed to be cleaned. Like us, he must have battled daily concerning the choices of his heart and mind.

He wanted his heart to be renewed and changed in such a way that it would become steadfast, anchored firmly in God. He probably felt he was on shifting sand and longed to have his heart planted on a firm foundation.

We also struggle with the call of God; we want our hearts to be firm but we struggle so much with the process of change. Christ, though, desires to take us by the hand and walk with us as our minds and hearts are transformed from the old life to the new creation which He wishes us to experience.

Psalm 51:12 (restore)

Restore to me the joy of your salvation. And sustain me with a willing spirit.

David again, in this Psalm, cries out to God to bring about inward change. As David worshipped and prayed, he knew things needed to change. Because of his sin, as he went about his responsibilities each day, he knew his heart was not in the right place. The joy of the Lord was not his strength. He felt distanced from God and did not want his relationship to continue like that.

Sometimes, in life, we find the greatest joy in something when we experience it for the very first time; later, after we experience the same thing repeatedly, we can tire of it. David was reflecting back and thinking of those “childlike” days when God

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and he seemed to walk together hand-in-hand. He reflected back on the killing of the bear, overcoming the lion and finally slaying the giant Goliath, that great enemy of Israel. Now that he was a king with so much pressure and responsibility, as well as temptation, he sometimes just desired to be back in those old days when his relationship with God was so much closer.

He wanted God to restore his heart back to those early days when salvation and his relationship to God was so real. He prayed that God would take him back to where they could have wonderful communion together. He prayed that God would keep him in that desirable place of fellowship. He asked God to give him a willing spirit, anchoring him firm and fast the heart of his Lord.

The first time God calls us is always new and exciting. However, as we face the challenges of the days, months and years, we can grow weary and tired. Just like David, we need to call out to God, asking Him to continually change and transform our hearts so that we may experience the joy of the Lord – the joy which provides us with so much strength.

Lamentations 5:21 (restore)

Restore us to you, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old,

Oftentimes people look back to what they call the "good old days". It can be easy to start off on the right path and then, as time slips by, end up somewhere that we never intended to be. The writer of Lamentations knew the history, knew where the people were now, and also knew there would be no hope for them in the future if God Himself would not help them to change.

History is always a teacher for those who are willing to listen. Age and time have a way of clarifying many things. Despite

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man's desire and hope to change, these desires and hopes are often overpowered because deep in the heart of man, he fights change.

In this verse, Jeremiah calls three times for restoration and renewal. He prayed, not only that his people would be given back what they had lost, but that God would go further by providing them with "newness" of His presence in their lives. God desires the very best for His people but, for that to happen, we must surrender to the changes He desires, saying to the Lord, "Not my will, but your will, Oh Lord."

Malachi 3:6

*For I, the Lord, do not **change**; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.*

For a true understanding of "change", we need to realize that God is always the same. He is never-changing; if we desire to follow him, and to walk in His ways, it is we who will have to humble ourselves and change. God's never-changing love is always consistent and strong; not only that, but he is long-suffering. That is why the descendants of Jacob were not consumed.

We, as disciples, make so many mistakes which cause us to fall out of fellowship with God. We need to see God for Who he is, and realize that He continues to show mercy to those who call upon His name.

Matthew 18:3 (NIV Bible)

*And he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you **change** and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Childlike faith seems to become more of a challenge, the older we grow. Children seem to have trust and faith, even when it

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comes to the unknown. Children seem to be willing to go through change. The first twelve years are full of all kinds of changes. Then, as children move into the teen years, even the pace of change increases.

Children seem to easily accept, understand, and believe in the kingdom of heaven. When we come to Christ, we come to Him as would a child. But it seems that, as we get older, we oftentimes set aside that childlike faith and lose the joy of the Lord.

We need to be mature in order to produce fruit and to be able to handle the stresses of life. But our faith does not need to be complicated. We simply need to trust God as a child would trust his loving father or mother.

Jesus makes another point – we have to choose to change. It takes action on our part. We make the decision and then act in faith to move forward in Christ.

Romans 12:2

*“And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

We can either walk the path of the world or the path of Christ. The longer we stay as a friend with the world, the more we will grow into its image. We are called to become like Christ. We are to reflect His image; for this to happen, we need to be transformed into His likeness.

Transformation involves a restructuring of our minds and attitudes. We need a new way of thinking which will change our

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attitudes. Once our attitudes change, we will see changes in our everyday actions.

Such transformation will result in the fruit that demonstrates to Whom we belong. It will substantiate that we are followers of His will for our lives. Such a transformed lifestyle is good and acceptable unto the Lord. We are to be transformed into the image of Christ; as this begins to happen, people will start seeing less of us and more of Christ in our lives.

I Corinthians 15:51

*Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be **changed**,*

When our journey here on earth is finished we will undergo more change. Our old bodies will pass away, and we will be clothed with a new heavenly "temple". Paul says that, at this time (during our earthly lives), it seems like a mystery to us, but we just need to trust God that it will happen. All the pain and suffering, all the handicaps, will be no more. All will be whole and functional again. We will even be given new names, but this is only for those who have committed their lives and wills to Christ.

The kingdom of heaven, Christ said, is being prepared and readied for our homecoming. The changes that first began in our lives with Christ will keep happening until we finally enter into that beautiful city of our God. The moment we see Christ as King of Kings is the moment when all the changes will have been completed.

II Corinthians 3:18

*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

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Change is something we face every moment of the day. Every decision we make is tied to some form of change. We can clearly see changes in our physical appearance as we look into a mirror. As we look into the mirror of the Word of God, we can see the real face of change in our lives. We can cover up and try to hide our physical appearance, and we can cover up our spiritual image. But when we look into the "spiritual mirror", we should see ourselves as someone who is changing into the image of God.

Our lives are to bring glory to God. People should see the character of Christ reflected in our lives. We may still look the same, but our nature and character is different. We now bear Christ's likeness. We are now called to reflect His attitude and His heart towards our fellow disciples and the people of the world.

The interesting thing about change and transformation is that we do not have to do it alone. We are told that the Holy Spirit is there to walk with us and help us. Being part of the family (the church) is also a significant help. It's like becoming part of a three-corded rope which, while giving strength, is not easily broken. As we look into the Scriptures each day, they will clearly inform us as to us how we are doing when it comes to transforming into the image of Christ.

II Corinthians 4:16

*Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being **renewed** day by day.*

In the process of being transformed into the image of Christ, the disciple can easily become discouraged and lose heart. This can be an immense challenge. Sometimes the mountain seems so tall and the finish line so far away. However, the "climb" must begin and then proceed one step at a time. If we do not break the

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journey down into smaller sections, we may well become "weary in well-doing".

Our "outer man" will break down and decay. Physical deterioration can often discourage us. Our focus, however, should not be on the outward body, but on the heart – where the Spirit of Christ dwells. The inner man is being renewed day by day. Jesus is the one who breathes life into our hearts and gives us hope for the future.

Philippians 3:20-21

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will **transform** the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

Another important detail related to our transformation is to remember that we are citizens of heaven. We are part of a new family and a new kingdom. Each day should be one of anticipation, looking forward to the moment when Christ comes to get us. Yes, living here on earth is a challenge, but it is only for a short period of time. Soon, and very soon, things are going to change drastically.

The humble state, in which we now find ourselves, is about to change. The day of transformation is approaching quickly. In preparation for His second coming we, as His church, are being transformed into His image. All this is taking place by and through His authority and power. Satan may be a ruler of this world, but his power and reign are about to come to an end. The Bible tells us, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world".

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Because of who Christ is, all things are subject to Him. Everything is under His authority and power, including Satan and all the demons. There is no greater name under heaven than the Name of Jesus Christ. The enemy does not flee us, but he will flee the One Who is in us. The enemy wants to keep us from being transformed; he desires to keep us bound. Christ, however, wants to draw us closer to Himself so that we can be totally set free.

James 1:17-18 (NIV Bible)

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not **change** like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.*

God is the original Author of giving; the gift He most wishes to give us is the indwelling life of Jesus Christ. Every day, as we accept the gifts He offers, we are helped in our journey with Him. Christ desires to fill us with His light so that we can see where it is that we are to go. When we were born, we were born into darkness; we were full of darkness and death. However, Christ, in his great love, has come to change that darkness into His light.

We may sometimes feel that we are in the shadow lands. The valleys of life are so full of darkness and uncertainty, but Christ has come to change all that. In the midst of the dark valleys, He can change our dark days into the sunshine of midday.

The real changes which we can appropriate to our lives will come through the truth of His Word, the Bible. If we accept that word and meditate on it, it becomes the powerful engine of strength in our lives. The Scriptures proclaim that God's Word is a two-edged sword that can divide even between the bone and the

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marrow. The more the "sword handler" knows, and the more he/she has been changed by the Word, the greater the strength and the more victories the disciple will have in life.

Christ desires to see us changed as His first-born children; after all, God has only children, not grandchildren or great-grandchildren. We need to stand strong in Christ, ready to make the necessary changes in our lives, so that the fruit Christ wants us to bear has matured and then harvested for His glory.

Resolution:

We are called to move from our ways to His way, from our nature to His nature, from being self-centered to being God-centered. Whether we like it or not, change is the starting point for growth. Changes are sometime difficult to face because they move us from a place of security to a place of insecurity – this kind of venture into the unknown requires faith.

Repentance means to go in a new direction—a 180-degree turn. Repentance leads to a change of heart. With changed hearts, our thinking will change, our speech will change, and even our countenances may change. Christ calls this change dying to the old and becoming a new creation for Christ. We will be "first fruits" for His glory.

Change is transformation from the inside out. Change begins the moment a child is born, whether in the physical body, the soul, or the spirit. Eventually, with these changes, a child becomes a mature adult capable of producing more of their kind.

Spiritual transformation can be compared with a butterfly going through metamorphosis. The transformed person becomes a

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new creation. Indeed, old things have passed away. Being born again initiates a brand-new life.

The butterfly exemplifies to us the journey of change that needs to take place if we are going to move from "crawling on the ground with the worms" to "flying in the sky with the eagles".

The butterfly has to go through major changes if it is to succeed in what it was created to do. Each step in those changes has challenges and consequences. But the worm/butterfly always seems to be moving forward with determination and focus – as should we.

In the life of the disciple, there will be change; if not, one should go back to Christ and seek Him in prayer and study His Word until there is evidence of change. We need to take off the old and put on the new in Christ Jesus.

We are all called by Christ to change and, if we will say "Yes" in our hearts and determine to follow wherever He leads, He will send His Holy Spirit to help us and guide us along the way.

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What do I hear and see as God speaks to me from this chapter?

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Chapter Eight

Called to Empowerment

*Seeing that His divine **power** has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who **called** us by His glory and excellence.*

II Peter 1:3

In North America, people and corporations are often very power hungry. "Money is power," is a common conception. However, for the disciple, authority and power result as fruit from a good character. When character is properly based on a good foundation, godly authority and power can be the result.

God provides us with a series of steps which we need to follow if we hope to serve God in such a way that will bring honor and glory to His name. Yes, we are called, and He will empower us to fulfill His call, but we need to call on God to give us the wisdom and understanding as to how to function in our ministry to others.

Let us first define three words, with the hope that they will help us better understand what this chapter is all about.

First, **authority means**: change, command, control, dominate, dominion, force, government, influence, jurisdiction, might, power, right, strength.

Christ gives this authority to help the disciple to stand up.

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Second, **empowerment means:** allow, authorize, commission, delegate, enable, entitle, license, permit, qualify, sanction, warrant.

Christ gives this empowerment to help the disciple to move forward.

Thirdly, **power means:** ability, capability, competence, potential, energy, force, intensity, might, muscle, strength, vigor, authority, command, control, dominion, influence, rule, sovereignty.

Christ gives this power to help the disciple to overcome.

Now that we see the big pictures concerning the meaning of these words, let us focus on some of the steps that the disciple should take in order to experience God's empowerment.

Relationship: Initially, we need to build a strong relationship with the One Who is going to give us the authority and power. We have no power within ourselves but, as we grow in our relationship with God, the "power giver" increasingly empowers us for the purpose to which we have been called.

Trust: Out of relationship comes trust and, when trust is built, power begins to be more and more delegated to the one with whom trust has been established. A steward is entrusted with the possessions of another; the steward has the power to do use those possessions as he sees fit – because he knows the master's will and heart.

Responsibility: Next, with authority and empowerment, comes responsibility. God holds us accountable for that which with

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He has entrusted us. We have the illustration of the talents. These people were given money as well as the authority and power to use it wisely; at the end of the term, they were brought to the master to give an account of their stewardship.

Authority: Once we are demonstrating that we are faithful, we are given the authority to move forward with what we have been entrusted. Authority cannot be demanded; it has to be given by the one who possesses the authority in the first place. We are given authority, not to reign over someone, but so that we may be able to guide, strengthen, and encourage those with whom we have been entrusted. Our goal is to bring others to the place of maturity so that they, in turn, can produce lasting fruit.

Empowerment: To move anything, we need to have the power and strength to do it. Power is given, not demanded. We are called to a ministry and to a discipleship lifestyle. In order for us to fulfill this call, we need to be empowered with the ability and gifts to carry out the God-given tasks. Christ sent the Holy Spirit to teach, guide and empower us for service to others. We even are given the power to love our enemies!

Stewardship and Submission: These two-character traits work hand-in-hand with all these steps. When you are faithful in the little things you will be entrusted with more. Stewardship and submission are the seasoning and balance to what it means to be called and empowered by God.

The world often uses empowerment for control, whereas Christ wants us to be empowered for service. Christ tells us that if we humble ourselves before the Lord, He will lift us up. Initially humbling oneself under someone else's authority and power is where the process begins. When you humble yourself under the

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mighty hand of God, you will be given the authority and power to fulfill the ministry to which you have been called.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully, the following Scriptures will take you even deeper into the meaning of the call of Christ and the importance of understanding God's call to empowerment in and for one's life. Again, we are called to change, and this can only come by having a personal relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Zechariah 4:6

*Then he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, Not by might nor by **power**, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.*

The Old Testament prophet knew of the importance of walking in the power of God's Spirit. He knew that it was not going to be through his own personal might or power that changes would happen to the people of Israel. Change would only come by first humbling themselves and seeking God; then the power would come to make changes and defeat the enemy.

Today things are no different. If we hope to see changes within our homes, communities, churches and countries, it must start by doing it by following God's will and His way. When we do that, He will then empower us to overcome those things which hinder our testimony and influence. We need to remember that we fight not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and spiritual wickedness in high place. The work that needs to be done has to be exercised through us by God's Spirit. There is no other way, truth or life.

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If we hope to be empowered to bring about the needed changes in ourselves and those around us, we constantly need to focus on the One Who called us in the first place.

Luke 24:49

*“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with **power** from on high.”*

Jesus knew that His physical time on earth was limited. In order to empower his disciples who, in turn, would establish the Body of Christ (the Church), He needed to breathe life and power into that body. He told His disciples to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the One Who would empower them and strengthen them for service.

The Father and the Son had a plan. It started with the death and resurrection of Jesus and with His ascension into heaven. At that point God would then send the Holy Spirit to begin to empower the church, equipping and strengthening them to go out into a lost world to win, disciple and baptize people into the family of God.

The Father would pour out His Spirit upon them, and on us today. The idea of "pouring out" suggests no limit to a generous flow. The disciples waited in the upper room, engaging in prayer, building up and encouraging each other. They didn't know when the Holy Spirit would be given, but they had the faith that it was going to happen.

Acts 1:8

*But you will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in*

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Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Jesus told His disciples to wait and pray, looking to Christ and believing Him for the promise of the Holy Spirit's coming (which He had indicated would soon take place). The Bible tells us that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit, like a mighty wind, came upon them and filled them "to overflowing" with power. Their bold faith, as demonstrated by their sharing the Good News, was the immediate sign of God's empowerment.

Acts 1:8 is yet another instance of Christ's great commission to His disciples. They were called by God but, in order to fulfill the commission, they needed to be empowered. Too many pastors, missionaries and Christians are ministering in their own strength. Because they are using God's principles for ministry, they may well see some fruit from their labors. However, for anything major to take place, their work and ministry must be totally seasoned by God's power – and that only comes through prayer.

As Christ promised, the day came when the power of God fell on the 120 in the upper room. And, because of God's presence and power, the church of Christ grows by 3000. The power of the Holy Spirit broke down the barriers of disbelief and doubt. The power of the Holy Spirit comes like rain, softening the hard hearts of men and women. The power of the Holy Spirit gives us the faith to go out to those "uttermost" places that we ourselves would never go to on our own initiative. Christ's call leads to faith, faith leads to prayer, prayer leads to empowerment, and empowerment leads to going.

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Romans 1:16

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

They key to Godly power is the gospel of Christ. The power of God comes through salvation and believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Christ's death and resurrection has paved the way of salvation for both the Jew and the Gentile. The dividing wall between Jew and Gentile has been torn down by the gospel of Christ. Once accepted, Christ becomes the empowerment for ministry and servanthood for any, and every, believer.

Paul wanted the Romans to know that, because of the gospel, they (and we) should not fear man and what he can do to our mortal bodies. No longer did Paul fear death; he had personally experienced the power of the gospel in his own life. He was not ashamed of the gospel or what could happen to him when he proclaimed it.

Romans 15:18-19

*For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the **power** of signs and wonders, in the **power** of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.*

When one begins a personal walk with Christ, unexpected things can begin to happen. New level so of faith and trust in Christ develop. Christ wants to work through his disciples to accomplish that for which he has designed them, both for their own lives and for the life of the church. These events will occur when we are obedient to Christ and His Word.

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As Gentiles accepted Christ, they began to see the power of God flowing through their lives; that power was evidenced in their testimonies, through their words and their deeds. Signs and wonders occurred, demonstrating God's power. The Holy Spirit showed no partiality between Jew and Gentile – all were meant for His glory.

This anointing that Paul experienced flowed through his preaching and touched many people's lives, including those of the Gentiles. As a result, they also were allowing the gospel to flow through them into the lives of others.

When the gospel, in its fullness, is preached, signs and wonders can occur through the church of Jesus Christ today, as they did when the church was being established. Paul's call and testimony were verified with the empowerment and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He was focused and directed totally by Christ Jesus.

II Corinthians 12:9

*And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power** is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the **power** of Christ may dwell in me.*

When one truly understands the grace of Christ, it is not a huge leap to acknowledge the power of Christ. The grace of God is what allows us to come into the very throne room of the Father Himself. Being, by grace, covered in Christ's righteousness, we can be empowered to push back against the enemy and to destroy his strongholds.

When we acknowledge our weakness, that is the time Christ's power makes us strong. Weakness need never defeat us

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but, rather, times of weakness are times of opportunity to believe Christ's promise that He will make us strong. Times of weakness are times when we can be perfected as servants of Christ. Our weakness will demonstrate His glory.

Paul claimed that when he boasted of his weaknesses, that was the time that the power of Christ in his life would be even more evident. Paul knew that, whatever the time or place, Christ was dwelling in Him. His desire was that the power of Christ would continue to flow through his life.

Ephesians 3:16

*That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with **power** through His spirit in the inner man.*

Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus was that, according to God's riches and glory, He would empower their "inner man", filling them with the very presence of Christ.

Paul knew that the church could not go forward or stand strong without the indwelling power of Christ flowing from their lives out to the hurting people of the world. As individuals and, as the local church, we need the strength and power of Christ if we, or the church we attend, is going to grow and mature in Christ. An empowered church is one that bears fruit for God's glory. The church of Christ is to be alive, with the power of Christ flowing through it. Individual disciples, as well as the church, are to be conduits of Christ's power to a lost world. He wants His riches and glory to flow through our lives to others.

Christ wants to grant to our "inner man" His riches, His strength, and His power. The key question is, "Will we trust Him and receive these gifts of grace from Him?"

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Ephesians 3:20

*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the **power** that works within us.*

How do we see Christ? How does our mind's eye view Him? We need to look above and beyond anything that the world or Satan could offer. Christ goes beyond our imagination. He wants to give us an abundant life – desiring to give us much more than we could even imagine asking from him.

Christ's power dwells within His disciples – the closer we draw to him, the more His power will flow through us. As His power flows through us, we will be blessed, and others will be blessed, far beyond anything we could imagine. The key is to "just ask". Scriptures tell us we "have not because we ask not". We need to ask Christ to empower us so that we can overcome the efforts of the enemy and be of benefit to the kingdom of God.

Paul told the Ephesian church to put on the full armor of God. He told them to prepare themselves for spiritual warfare, assuring them that their commander, Jesus Christ, would empower them for battle. Paul's purpose was to show them that, if they would work together with Christ, they would be able to stand strong in Him – no matter what they faced in life.

Philippians 3:10

*That I may know Him and the **power** of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;*

Paul longed to know and experience all he could about His Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. After his initial encounter with Christ, he desired nothing more than Christ. Paul realized that the

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same power that raised Christ from the dead, dwelt in him. Paul wanted the church to know that the same resurrection power also dwelt in them. The Holy Spirit had raised Christ from the dead; the identical power of the Holy Spirit that was in Paul, was also in them.

Disciples of Christ don't always realize Who is living in them. We need to remember that we have that special fellowship with Emmanuel – "God with us". He is not weak, but because of our lack of wisdom and understanding about Him, we often live weak and frail lives. Christ wants us to be victorious champions! He wants us to overcome, not be overcome. Wherever we are, Christ lives and dwells with us. We just have to have the faith and trust to believe Him.

Yes, there will be times of suffering. Even when we walk through the valleys and shadow lands of death, we need to line up to his will. That's why Paul could say to the Corinthian church, "Oh death, where is thy sting?" Death is just a doorway to a far better, eternal life.

II Timothy 1:7

*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of **power** and love and discipline.*

Paul was telling his friend and co-worker about the power of Christ that was present in his life. He wanted Timothy to be filled with faith, not fear. Fear is one of the disciple's worst enemies; it binds us and keeps us from moving forward. Fear causes loss of courage and strength.

Christ, however, fills us with His power and love; through His discipline we can be true overcomers. Regardless of age, all disciples struggle with discipline. The words "discipline" and

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"discipleship" are closely connected. As disciples, we are to be disciplined/patterned by the life and teaching of Christ. We need to be disciplined in the Word of God because it is our sword, giving the disciple overcoming strength and power to battle the enemy.

One aspect of God's power is the power of love. Love can cover a multitude of sins. Agape love can break down any stronghold. There is nothing that can overpower the power of God's love. The key to our walk, I Corinthians 13 tells us, is love. There is nothing greater than the power of God's love. After His resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Peter, do you love me?" Genuine love empowers us to freely walk with Christ in this life, and for all eternity.

II Thessalonians 1:11-12

*To this end also pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your **calling**, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with **power**, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul prays that the believers will be found worthy of their calling. A strong foundational relationship with God is established in prayer. As believers, we are so blessed that God specially calls us, desiring us to be part of the body of Christ for Kingdom service. Christ definitely wishes us to exhibit goodness and faith, but He also wants to see us demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit as the gifts of the Spirit flow through us with power. He wants our lives to have a powerful influence on others. He wants us to be "mountain movers" for Christ.

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The power that Christ pours out on us is not because of our own merit; rather, it is because of His grace and His love. That's why grace is so amazing – because there is nothing we could do to deserve it. It is simply poured into our lives because of Christ's great love for us.

We as disciples need to see people with the eyes of Christ. Christ sees us much differently than we see ourselves. When Christ pours His love and grace on us, He sees us worthy to receive what He wants to give.

Our end goal is that we glorify Christ in our lives. People should see the life of Christ flowing through us. He calls us, then empowers us, so that our lives will glorify the King of King and the Lord of Lords.

II Peter 1:3

*Seeing that His divine **power** has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who **called** us by His glory and excellence.*

"Seeing is believing." As disciples, we should be in tune with Christ so that his divine power moves unrestricted through our lives. It is important that we never become stumbling blocks or hindrances to His desire to share His grace and power with others. Christ wants to use us to serve, minister, and touch people's lives. He wants us to have the blessing of touching others for Him.

Through His power, He has granted us everything that we need for life. We need to ask him for wisdom and the understanding of how to use it. Everything is there for us; we have to just appropriate it into our lives.

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He has given us the tools needed to live a godly life. We cannot do it through our righteousness, but through His righteousness and grace. It is possible to live a godly life, but we must look to Him daily for wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

Yes, Christ has set a high standard for us, but He doesn't ask us to achieve it alone. He desires to walk with us. He placed us in a body of other disciples for mutual help and encouragement. He has sent His Holy Spirit to counsel and empower us. Our goal each day should be to sense Christ's will for ourselves and for those with whom we come in contact. Our lives are divinely orchestrated by Christ Jesus, not by chance

Jesus is the Way, is the Truth and the Life. It is He Who empowers us. People will know we are disciples of Christ by our love. Active daily love for others is what glorifies Christ.

Resolution:

We call on Christ to help and guide us so that we will be empowered for service. We need to seek God's power for the right reasons. Our role is simply to be vessels and channels for His power to flow through to others. It is not designed to build us up, or to draw attention to ourselves, but Christ has blessed us with empowerment to serve and to minister to others.

We have a treasure in earthen vessels. The day we ask Christ into our hearts, as Lord and Savior, is the day His power begins to help us to stand up, move forward and overcome the enemy and his strongholds.

Each day we should be asking the Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us for the day. The whole idea (of God's empowerment for the day) can be compared to the people in the times of Moses.

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They were given manna, but they needed to gather it each day. If we are to be strong in Christ, daily we need to eat of His word and ask Him to fill us with His power. There is no storing it up for another day. God calls us to a day by day commitment.

The word "empowerment" brings to mind two illustrations.

The first illustration is that of a policeman. A policeman is a person just like you or me but, because of his employer and his training, he is empowered to serve, doing things which a civilian cannot do. The police officer has been empowered to uphold the law and to bring order to chaos. He can stop vehicles and subdue robbers. The disciple, too, when he has been properly trained and empowered by God for service, can serve in many ways – never in his own ability and strength, but in the strength of Christ Jesus Who has empowered him through His Spirit.

The second illustration is that of dynamite. By its very nature, dynamite is powerful. It has many useful purposes, but it can also be used to maim and kill. One of the Greek names for the Holy Spirit can be translated as dynamite. The Holy Spirit has the ability to move mountains for the disciple. Not only does He have the ability to set free the captives of sin, but He also has the ability to destroy our enemies.

Christ has called every disciple for service; He knows we need empowerment to overcome the enemy and the things of this world. Remember, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What did I hear God saying to me while I was reading this chapter?

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RELEVANCE:

Our ability to serve is the direct result of God's empowerment. That same empowerment also gives us the ability to grow and mature; maturity results in fruit for Christ's kingdom. What actions and habits need to be changed in my everyday walk with Christ so that I might be a better tool in His hands?

Prayer Directive:

Pray for faith, help, wisdom and strength so that you will be empowered by God. Pray that God will help you, not to do it in your own ability or through your own desires, but through His ability and strength. Spend time in prayer. Give God your heart. Trust Him to empower you in the way He desires. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you for service each day.

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Chapter Nine

Called to Submission & Obedience

*Since you have in **obedience** to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*

I Peter 1:22-23

The discipleship call can lead to a direct confrontation between my will and God's will. As humans, we enjoy the perception of control. We want to control our destiny. For many, submission and obedience are signs of weakness; for the disciple, however, submission and obedience are strengths. Why? Because we are no longer walking in our own ability and strength, but in His ability, wisdom and strength.

In order to obey His plans and purposes for my life and ministry, I need to humble myself before God. His Word tells us that, when we humble ourselves before Him, He will lift us up. When we feel weak, He will make us strong. And when we find ourselves in the midst of a storm, He will bring peace. Submission and obedience are not qualities that come naturally to us. They have to be worked on daily. Submission is more than just appearing obedient on the outside, but instead, having a genuine heart obedience. There's an old story of a child being told by the teacher to go sit in a corner of the room, and the child responding to the teacher by saying, "I may be sitting on the outside but on the inside, I am standing up."

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The dictionary defines *submission* as “surrender, yielding, compliance, meekness, obedience, resignation”. And *obedience* is defined as, “abide by, act upon, adhere to, be ruled by, carry out, embrace, follow, perform, serve.”

What we face each day is a battle between the head and the heart – this is what many have called the “eighteen-inch battle ground.” The greatest battle will be fought within our own minds and hearts. We have the free will to make a decision between two competing wills. We must always remember that every decision we make will bear some type of consequence or fruit. One's attitude often leads to some form of action.

Christ called us to be obedient, the meaning of which is clear – submission to Him as Savior and Lord. It means humbling ourselves before Christ, our Mentor. It is important to remember that we are not an island unto ourselves, but that we are part of the body of which Christ is the head. We are not only under the leadership of Christ, but we are a part of a body which is there to help us in our everyday walk. We are fellow disciples, working together as a team, to bear witness to the world of the living Christ.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray “not my will but thy will be done here on earth as it is in heaven”. God has a beautiful plan for your life. But we need to have faith to trust that He knows how to carry it out in our lives.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully the following Scriptures will take you into an even deeper understanding of the call of Christ, as well as providing you with a sense of the reality of submission and obedience to a loving and caring God. Remember, we are called to change; change can only happen when we have a personal

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relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to act as the Spirit leads.

Genesis 22:18

*In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have **obeyed** my voice.*

This verse clearly tells us people and their cultures the world over would be affected by Abraham's obedience. When God made this promise, Abraham had only one son, Isaac, but God clearly guaranteed to bless his seed. It is very likely Abraham did not understand the "big picture" implications of this promise. With hindsight, we know this prediction included the coming Messiah and how His sacrifice would affect succeeding generations, even to this day. Our actions, and inactions affect not only our family and friends but, over time, can also affect the world.

God clearly promised that the world would be blessed as a result of Abraham's obedience. We need to be aware that what we say, and what we do, can have momentous consequences.

Blessing comes by obeying God's voice. God does speak to His people, but we have to learn how to listen. Are we sufficiently disciplined to hear his voice in the midst of the loud and confusing voices of the world?

Abraham had to learn to trust God as he was led from his country to a country far from home. He had to learn to walk with God for many years of His life. At the point referred to in this verse, Abraham had been obedient concerning the potential sacrifice of his son, and now had to trust God concerning His promise about his descendents, and how the world will be blessed through them. Our call is a call to obedience and submission, but we have to say "Yes" and then follow God with all our hearts.

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Exodus 19:3-5

*Moses went up to God, and the Lord **called** to him from the mountain, saying, "thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed **obey** My voice and keep My covenants, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine."*

Moses was a man of submission and obedience. When He heard God's call, He did not try to question it but he had faith to move forward. He knew God's call but there were times when he could not seem to understand what God was trying to do. He would challenge God's ideas and ways but, in the end, he knew it was better to obey and submit than to go against the mighty hand of God.

Moses learned how to listen for God's voice, and then to submit and obey God's calling on his life. Leading such a large assembly of people from bondage to deliverance, and then taking them on a pilgrimage to a new land was a huge step of faith. When we struggle with obedience, it is often because we have more fear than faith. We fear the unknown. We want to have all the details in place before we move. However, God asks us just to submit and obey. The hymn writer correctly says, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Trusting Christ and being obedient to him is the secret of peace in our hearts.

Men like Moses are examples of faith. The cornerstone of a strong faith is to submit to God and obey His word. Out of obedience always comes the promise of blessing.

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Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. God wanted a covenant relationship with Moses and the people of Israel; the responsibility of the people was to trust and obey God's covenant. God had showed the nation of Israel His works and mighty hand of deliverance. Now would these people continue to obey and follow God's law?

Again, and over again, God speaks. Do we hear him? After we've heard him, do we obey and follow? Will we say Lord, "Wherever you lead me I will follow!"

I Samuel 15:22

*Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to **obey** is better than sacrifice."*

This verse follows King Saul's confession (verse 20) that he has not been obedient to what God called him to do. God's commands are not "suggestions", but are directives calling us to obedience.

Samuel's purpose was to teach the king a very important principle when it comes to following the Lord; a principle that has not changed over the thousands of years. It is not so much what we sacrifice or do that counts, but it is the attitude and focus of one's heart. Samuel clearly pointed out to Saul that his sin was not one of not "enough offering or sacrifice"; rather, it was that he was disobedient to the voice and clear command of God.

In serving God, it is not so much the ministry that we do that is important; rather, it is the attitude and heart of obedience behind the ministry. Ministry and service needs to be built squarely on submission and obedience. It is not a "Yes" followed by a "No". "Yes, Yes" should be our answer to God. Jesus taught a

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parable concerning two sons. Both sons are called to go out and labor for the Father. One says “Yes,” then does not go; the second says “No,” but then goes. Christ wanted His disciples to understand that He was even more concerned about the attitude of their hearts than the actual actions.

God does speak. He does call. The question is - how are we going to respond? It is important to remember that how we respond will affect us, our families and even world history. Remember Samuel’s words to Saul, “To obey is better than sacrifice.”

Joshua 5:13-15

Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us or for our adversaries? He said, “No: rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, “What has my lord to say to his servant?” The captain of the Lord’s host said to Joshua, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” And Joshua did so.

Joshua was a man who knew how to follow orders; for over forty years he submitted to, and obeyed, the orders and directions of Moses. Now God was calling him to take over the leadership reins from Moses and lead the people into the promise land. God knew Joshua’s heart, calling and raising him up ‘for such a time as this’.

The mantle of leadership passes to Joshua; he accepts the challenge and, within three days, leaves his spiritual leader and friend behind in order to lead this large host of people over into the

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promise land. Upon arrival, he prepares for battle, but then receives strange instructions. Instead of instructing Joshua to attack, God calls on him to silently march around Jericho. Although a “warrior of warriors”, Joshua hears God, then submits and obeys.

Then the night before the strange “battle” begins, God, in the form of a man, appears to Joshua and says to him, “No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord.” Joshua falls to the ground and submits totally to the true Leader of the army. At the conclusion of this encounter, Joshua goes forward in obedience, but now as second-in-command.

Joshua’s encounter with the Lord of Hosts is a clear demonstration that he recognized that he was a servant of the Most High God. If we, as disciples, are to be true servants of God, we must humble ourselves in obedience and submission to His authority and leadership.

While the actual words “obedience” and “submission” are not used in this passage, the event clearly testifies to their meaning.

Acts 5:29-32

*But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must **obey** God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one who God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who **obey** Him.”*

The rulers and the authorities attempted to discourage the disciples from proclaiming their “radical” ideas which took people’s attention away from traditional temple worship ... as well

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as lessening the importance of their own positions of authority. In actuality, the authorities were trying to get them to turn their backs on Christ. They wanted the disciples to be less “fanatical” about Christ’s teaching and ways. They even had them beaten, jailed, and threatened with death.

The ruler of this world desires that you and I be in submission and obedience to him. Sometimes he will even reward us for rebelliousness and disobedience, but his way always leads to death and destruction.

The disciples knew what Christ had taught them. He had walked with them and served them for three years. They had seen, heard, and tasted the “good”. They had partaken of the “new wine”, and no matter what the religious leaders would say or do, they were not going to turn back on Christ’s call.

Because of Christ’s obedience to the will of the Father, we can be set free from our sins. Our obedience to the Son’s salvation invitation grants to us the opportunity of full repentance - something that the keeping of the law could never do.

We, as disciples, have to make a decision to go forward with Christ or turn back to the way of despair and destruction. In our decision as to Whom we will be submissive and obedient, we need to understand clearly all that is at stake.

Finally, the disciples shared with the religious rulers of the day that they knew it was better to serve Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit of God, they knew, was their witness that they were obedient in telling the truth.

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Romans 5:19

*For as through one man's **disobedience** the many where made sinners, even so through the **obedience** of the One the many will be made righteous.*

The Romans knew how, in most ways, to be obedient to Caesar and his rulers. Paul explained that, no matter the position in life (whether Caesar or a common labourer), we are all sinners because of Adam's fall. Everyone falls under the curse of sin ... all are equally "in the same boat", having the death mark of sin on our lives.

Paul wanted the Romans to see that there was a way out of the bondage in which they found themselves. He wanted the Roman church (and people everywhere in every age) to understand that, because of Christ's obedience, they could be set free and could receive His righteousness and grace. The great news is that we can be forgiven and loved for all eternity.

The power of one decision can have a huge impact on so many people. As individuals, we are not islands. Our acts of disobedience or obedience can, and do, affect many, many people now as well as throughout succeeding history.

The act of obedience is the door Christ opens to all who would receive Him as personal Lord and Savior. Obedience is what empowers us to overcome sin. Obedience is vital.

Romans 6:16-18

*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for **obedience**, you are slaves of the one who you **obey**, either of sin resulting to death, or of **obedience** resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became **obedient***

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from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

The Romans knew all about slavery; many of the conquered people groups were enslaved to the Romans. Wisely, Paul uses this analogy, telling them that they are enslaved to sin. We are enslaved to whatever (or whoever) is our master. If we are mastered by the world (its systems and teachings), we are enslaved to it.

A slave has no ownership of himself. The slave is bound to someone until either his debt is paid, or his master frees him. Bondage to anything can be very depressing because it hinders you from what you really want and should be doing.

We need to recognize what/who it is that enslaves us. Christ wants us to be slaves to His righteousness. If we are enslaved to His righteousness, then the product of our lives will be righteousness.

We were slaves to sin but, because of obedience to Christ, we have been set free. No longer are we slaves to the world but are now free in Christ.

Ephesians 5:21 (NIV Bible)

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The relationship of body parts to one another is critical. All parts have to work in harmony with each other. Each part of the body has its own unique function, but all must work together for the proper functioning of the whole body.

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The book of Ephesians has much to say about relationships between fellow Christians, as well as about relationships between churches (Christ's Body). For the body of Christ to function properly, Christ's followers need to demonstrate true humility one to another. As disciples, we need to listen, learn, and change where change is necessary. It is our human nature to be independent, "calling our own shots", but in the Body of Christ, this cannot happen. Many churches and Christian organizations have been destroyed because people will not submit to one another.

In the world, submission is a foreign idea, but in the body of Christ, submission should be the norm. This is what differentiates us from the world. Submission requires daily conscious effort. In the next verses, Paul illustrates this important principle for the church by using the example of marriage. Men have to sacrifice and die to themselves; women have to submit, giving themselves to their husbands. Christ, the Husband, was willing to die for us, His bride. As His bride we need to submit to Him.

It is important to remember that we submit to one another because of our reverence for Christ. He calls us to submit – we obey.

Colossians 2:20-21

*If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, do you **submit** yourself to decrees, such as, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!*

Dying to oneself is the cornerstone for submission and obedience. Our will has to be put to death. There is no room for two rulers in one body. We are to submit ourselves to Christ and to His teachings. We need to "come out" of the world. The word "church" itself means, "called-out ones."

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Paul felt the Colossian church should have known about dying to self, but they were doing what most disciples do – trying to keep a foot in both Kingdoms. Paul was really stating that they were not very mature in their understanding concerning the meaning of submission to Christ. He points out to them that they hadn't yet got past the basic principles of the world. They were like children, trying to see the world through handling, taste and touch – basic senses rather than spiritual senses.

We are slaves to whatever we have submitted. We are no longer bound to the world and should not, therefore, enslave ourselves to it. We are ambassadors of Christ's kingdom and are His representatives on earth. We do not belong to this world. Its ways and its culture are not ours.

II Thessalonians 3:14

*If anyone does not **obey** our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with Him, so that he will be put to shame.*

The evidence of submission to one another in the body of Christ is demonstrated by our obedience in carrying out the instruction of our leaders. As fire produces fire, disobedience can spread, producing more disobedience and rebelliousness.

Those who disobey instruction will soon be known as rebellious and unruly. How we deal with instruction demonstrates our character. Christ told us that if we humble ourselves He will lift us up. Much disobedience results from the desire to assert our wills and ways.

A prevalent attitude in our North American culture is to rebel against those who are in authority over us. We don't

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appreciate someone telling us what to do or giving us instructions on how to live

Having stressed the vital importance of submission, Paul allowed no options to obedient submission. Those who would not accept this truth were to be watched and even “shamed” into obedience.

Hebrews 13:17

*Obey your leaders and **submit** to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*

Here we have both the words “submit” and “obey” in one verse. There are lines of authority to which disciples are responsible. Leaders must lead with godly servanthood, and disciples of Christ must submit to the authority of their leaders. There needs to be an understanding and a working together of the members of the body. Leaders need to be accountable to God and “followers” need to be accountable to their leaders. As we all work together in unity and harmony, we will see the blessing of God flow forth on us as a body and as individuals.

At some point, every disciple is a leader, influencing and guiding others. Every disciple has the potential to affect others, either for the negative or for the positive. Some have said that the basic definition of a leader is one who is an influencer, but I believe it goes further than that. First, a leader is one who has had a call from God. Second, he or she needs a clear goal and direction from God. And, also, leaders will be held responsible for their words and actions. Leaders of disciples need to lead as a shepherd would lead his sheep. We are to keep watch of those under us. This requires building relationships and good lines of communication.

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Before we can speak into someone's life, we have to know them; we need to ask God for wisdom in how best to help another follower of Christ. As leaders, people are entrusted to us – we have, in effect, become stewards of their lives. This is why leaders will have to give an account for the people who have been entrusted to them.

It is not only leaders who have responsibility – followers do as well. If we do submit and obey, we are then more open to receive a blessing from the Lord. Obedience and submission can make us profitable for the kingdom of God. If we submit to our leaders, it will bring joy to them, but if we constantly oppose them, grief will be the result for them as well as for ourselves.

James 4:6-8

*But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." **Submit** therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Pride can be a huge stumbling block for disciples. Proud people find themselves in direct opposition to God Himself. We need to humble ourselves, submitting our will to God's will, and our ways to His ways. When we submit to God, then an enemy will no longer hold on to us. By submitting to God, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to resist the devil; when He sees Christ Jesus in us, he will flee from us.

James tells us to clean our hands and hearts, both of which are steps that show that we are submitting to God. Hands represent our actions; our hearts reflect our attitude – the things we think and feel, our attitudes. While we often know what God wants us to do,

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we are challenged with the inner conflict of wanting to keep our feet in both worlds, one in the worldly kingdom and the other in God's kingdom. James tells us that this cannot work. God wants loyalty and commitment. He wants obedience and submission. It is better to be "cold" than "lukewarm". A double-minded person is just a lukewarm person.

The key to victory in our lives and victory over the enemy of our souls is submitting 100% to God in all areas of life. Victory in this 24-hour-per-day battle can be accomplished, but only with Christ personally dwelling in our hearts. All things are possible through prayer. Drawing near to God in prayer is uplifting, even though it may seem to be humiliating, causing us to neglect prayer. Before we can serve and minister for Him, we must spend time with God.

I Peter 1:22-23

*Since you have in **obedience** to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*

Peter wanted disciples to take the next step in their walk with Christ. Obedience to the truth should be followed by the purification of our souls. Change needs to come from the inside; it will be evidenced on the outside. Heart change results in thinking and action changes.

The first step of the disciple's journey starts because of love; the rest of our journey needs to be seasoned by love. Our actions are for the love of the brethren. We do what is best for the body, and not so much for the individual.

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Peter reminds them of their spiritual birth. The seed that is in them is not perishable seed but imperishable, eternal. All this is made possible through the living and enduring word of God. Because of obedience to Christ we now have built within us the capability to endure all things. “Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.”

We need to remember that it is the truth that has set us free and it is the truth of the Word of God that will keep us free.

Resolution:

To change from seeking my will and desires to seeking His will and desires; to obey His plans and purposes for my life and ministry. This requires willing submission and obedience to the leading of the Lord. These actions originate from recognition of the truth of the word of God and from an ongoing prayer relationship with God. We need to come to the place where we can see that we cannot exist, or even move, without God.

Each day we face a battle with our wills. Are we going to seek to do our will or God’s will? We are in a battleground where the adversaries are pride and humility. It becomes a battle between the head and the heart – this is what many have called the “eighteen-inch battle ground.” The greatest battles will be fought within our own hearts and minds.

Christ called us to be obedient. This means submitting to Him as Lord and Savior. Many have Christ as Savior, but few have Him as Lord. Christ is our mentor. We need to humble ourselves and let Christ be total Lord of our lives.

We need to work together as a team, not in our own strength or righteousness. Rather, we need to work together with Christ, depending on His strength and in His righteousness. He

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that the battle between your mind and heart will be won, and that your heart will be ruled by Christ. Pray that God will help you to submit to Him and obey Him in all areas of your life. Pray that you will submit to the leaders that God has put in place over you – those who guide and teach you. Pray that you will be a strong team player.

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Chapter Ten

Called to Make Choices

*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his **calling** and **choosing** of you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

II Peter 1:10-11

Man has been given a free will to choose. God does not force us to follow Christ; we are able to choose. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were told what they could do and what they were not to do. Like us, they still had the freedom to choose.

Each day we face hundreds and hundreds of choices. We choose to stay or to go, to walk away or to come near. Each day we are faced with decisions requiring a choice; we must recognize that each decision has a positive or negative consequence in some form or other. Every daily choice affects one's total person ... body, soul and spirit. Because we make so many decisions each day, we are not aware of the power and effects that result from each of these choices ... not only on our own lives but also on those around us.

To help us to understand this section, two words need to be defined. The first is "believe", meaning to accept, be certain of, be convinced of, count on, depend on, have faith in, place confidence in, rely on. The second word is "choice", meaning alternative, option, pick, say, selection, variety.

The Bible challenges us to choose life and not to choose death. Our choices always produce some type of fruit. We are

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challenged each day to make choices. If we do not make a choice, the choice will be made for us by someone else.

The Bible is a factual testimony of everyday people who made choices which had a profound effect on people, nations, and the world. Each choice is based on some motivation. Many choices are made because of life experiences ... either those of ourselves or of people we know.

The attitude that we should have is the same attitude that Christ had ... making choices based on love and according to the Father's will. Christ chooses to love us just the way we are. Out of His heart of love for us, He chose to die for us so that we could live. He desires us to choose life and, in so doing, He wants to give it to us abundantly.

There is a dying to oneself that we need to undergo. It may seem painful for the moment but, when we choose to walk the journey by faith in Christ, doors can open that we never thought or dreamt were possible.

The choice must come from the heart, and must not be based on mere acquiescence. It must derive from love, not because it is demanded. We choose to love and follow Him because of how much He loves us. That's what grace is all about. We cannot pay for or work for grace ... it is just given. Our part is simply to choose to receive Him as Savior, Lord, and King. Grace is a totally free gift.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully, these Scriptures will take you into an even deeper understanding of the call of Christ, as well as emphasizing the importance of understanding how to make right choices. Again,

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we are called to change; this can only come about by having a personal relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to act as the Spirit leads.

Genesis 13:11

*So Lot **chose** for himself all the valley of Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other.*

We do not know a great deal about Lot, but what we do know is that His choices cost Him very dearly. His choice of going to the rich valley land and getting involved with the people of the cities led to the destruction of most of his family. Both Abraham and Lot were very rich and had great possessions; their workers began to grumble and then to fight with each other. A decision had to be made. The choice was to separate and go in two different directions.

Abraham's choice brought blessing, but Lot's choice led to destruction. Out of Abraham's decision came the promise of a son; out of Lot's decision came the loss of his wife. Lot debases his daughters and ends up living in a cave because of fear. Lot's choice did not stop with his death, but the results went on for many generations to come.

The heart is the key to decision making. Abraham loved Lot and had a spirit of giving. Lot had a spirit of greed and a desire for wealth and prestige. These two heart attitudes led in two different directions and produced two totally different kinds of fruit.

Deuteronomy 1:12-13

*How can I alone bear the load and burden of you and your strife? **Choose** wise and discerning men from your tribes, and I will appoint them as your heads.*

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God wanted to bless and keep His promises to Moses. Because of what God was going to do, Moses had to make changes to how he led the nation. Moses needed to choose men with leadership skills, placing them in management positions over the people. They had to be men who were wise and discerning. Their record of accomplishment qualified them for these positions. Because they had previously shown leadership, they had proven themselves; the people would most likely follow them. While certain men were chosen, it was really God Who appointed and certified them as leaders.

Leadership choices are sometimes difficult because the leader himself does not see what needs to be done. He may not be able to "see the trees because of the forest". Leadership is both a called and a learned process. God calls people to a specific leadership task and sometimes it is for just a season. We learn leadership from God and fellow disciples.

Moses had a leadership problem. The nation of Israel was growing very fast and so were the problems and challenges; a decision had to be made and that decision was going to bring about changes. The larger the ministry, the more creative our choices have to be because they affect so many people, both now and also in the future.

The choice Moses made was to bring in more leadership, thus spreading out the responsibilities of this ministry to more people. Choices have to be made because of the challenges we face. As people, we often fear change; often, however, change is what brings in new life and produces more fruit.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

*For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has **chosen** you to be His own possession out of*

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*all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor **choose** you because you were more in number than any other peoples, for you were fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

We need to see that God makes choices on the basis of His promises and covenants. He had given an oath of love to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; He was not going to go back on His promises. God had called and chosen Abraham and his descendants to be His own, not because they were strong or were many in number, but because they were weak and needed a Redeemer.

From all the people of the earth He chose them to be His own. He had a long-term plan for Israel and it is still in affect even today. We need to understand that the Lord moves and acts out of love. He was going to love them unconditionally even though His chosen people were sometimes stiff-necked, turning their backs on God.

God's great love was so evident as He reached down into the powerful land of Egypt and set His people free. From the house of slavery and bondage, He rescued them, releasing them to claim the land He had promised to them. He was, and is, a God Who keeps His word. God called and chose them out of love, and He is still calling and choosing people today. The key is coming to Him and receiving His great love in our hearts.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love

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*the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. "But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So **choose** life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."*

God reminds the Israelites that they have a free will. They can choose to follow or leave. The same was true in the time of Christ. He challenged the disciples to make a choice to stay or to leave. At that time many left, but the twelve remained (Luke 6:66). It is not easy being a disciple of Christ. We need to see our decision is a free choice. We can walk with Christ or walk away from Christ.

Moses was reminding the twelve tribes of Israel of a very important truth. We should choose to follow our Lord, not because of duty, but because we have chosen to do so out of love. We are all challenged to walk in the Lord's way and to follow His commandments. We are called to obey the voice of God, to choose life over death. But it is still our choice.

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Moses relates God's promise that if we obey God's voice and hold fast to Him, that we will live in the land and our days will be blessed. We are to choose life and blessing - or death and adversity. God compares it to a court case because He has called heaven and earth to witness our decision.

Joshua 24:14-15

*Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, **choose** for yourself today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

After they had conquered much of the land, Joshua reminded the Israelites and their children that they would always have a free choice as to Whom they would serve. They needed to be reminded where they came from and what their old nature was like. Choices require discipline. Good choices require work and effort to stay on track. Too often we take the road of least resistance. The enemy is subtle, desiring initially to make the road easy; then, when he has led us far from God, family, and friends, he devours us.

One thing that Joshua desires for the people is to have a righteous fear of the Lord. We need to understand that we are called to serve God with sincerity and truth. We also need to put away the old things. I believe that Joshua was hoping that, after all the people had gone through, they would make the right choice. This is, in fact, the way they responded to Joshua in chapter 24:16-28. After vowing allegiance to God in each other's presence, they set up a pile of stones to be a testimony to future generations, so

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their children's children would know the kind of decision that was made at this spot. (24:27)

Joshua's challenge to the Israelites was not made on his behalf alone; it involved his entire household. As a family, they had come to an agreement that, no matter what everyone else did, they were going to serve the Lord.

I Kings 8:16

*'Since the day that I brought My people Israel from Egypt, I did not **choose** a city out of all the tribes of Israel in which to build a house that My name might be there, but I **chose** David to be over My people Israel.'*

David was called and chosen by God to be king. But a large amount of time transpired between David's anointing and his coronation as King. During those many years David was confronted with many choices. For example, David's decision not to kill King Saul when he had the opportunity always bothered his men. Presumably, David could have taken the throne from Saul earlier and, although God had called and anointed him, David also realized that God wanted him to be patient and wait for His timing.

David had experienced God's hand in his life. God had enabled him to kill a lion and a bear; in front of the armies of Israel and the Philistines, he had killed Goliath. Now he was called to humble himself and wait.

David was determined to build a temple for his God, but God said no. David could build a city which we know today as Jerusalem, but the temple would become Solomon's call and ministry. David remained obedient and submissive to His God, and God richly blessed him. Now, because of the choices that David

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made, God was able to keep his promise to him and let his son build a house for the Lord.

Luke 6:13

*And when day came, He **called** His disciples to Him and **chose** twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:*

Jesus had spent the night in prayer communing with His heavenly Father; by morning He was sure of the twelve disciples into whom he would begin to pour His life. These would be the ones who would plant the church, Christ's body, throughout the world.

Choosing people for ministry is not easy. We all come from unique backgrounds and with "baggage" which can color our thinking and judgment. However, Christ chose to move forward with these twelve, knowing their weaknesses and strengths. He even knew that one would betray Him in the future.

Almost certainly, Christ's chosen disciples did not understand what this choice was going to mean for them – for most of them this choice to follow Jesus Christ was going to cost them their very lives. They would undergo persecution and finally, martyrdom, because of their choice to love and follow this man with all their hearts. Nevertheless, we know their decisions to follow Christ changed the face of the world and is still touching people's lives to this day.

John 15:16

*“You did not choose Me but I **chose** you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*

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It is easy for us to imagine that, when it comes to the things of Christ, we are the ones who made the first move. But what really happens is that He puts the desire in our hearts which prepares us to hear His call; that desire, in turn, helps us to have faith to step out and make the choice to follow Christ. The Scripture say that He chose us. He loved us so much that He wants us to be part of His family.

Jesus wants us to be personally grafted into Him, the "Vine". He wants us to have a heritage/lineage that spans generations of time. In the world of horticulture, in order to be grafted into the main vine, there first has to be a cut on the side so that the new branch can be grafted into place. This picture presents a fascinating reminder how His side was cut open by a spear, indicating that He was wounded for our transgressions.

But the Word takes it a step further, sharing that Jesus chose and appointed us. He has given us a place and a purpose. He wants us to bear fruit that will last. He wants our influence and action to touch, not only our lives and the lives of people around us, but also to bear fruit for generation after generation.

Because He chose us, and we accepted Him, we can come to Him with faith and in confidence, knowing that He will provide whatever was asked for in His Name. Why? Because we have heeded His call and have chosen to let Christ "graft us into His side". As a result, His eternal life now flows through the "branch" of our lives to produce fruit for His glory.

We are his children. All we have to do is call upon His name and He will answer.

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Acts 15:7

*After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a **choice** among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.*

This Scripture reminds us that God does the choosing and the assigning of ministry; He determines whom we will serve. At the council of Jerusalem, the disciples were trying to deal with all kinds of problems. They needed to make some difficult choices and decisions; the choices that they were about to make were going to affect the entire church, both at that time as well as in the future.

Peter was called by God to begin to speak and minister to the Gentiles - a choice that would cause his Jewish brothers to call him unclean. They claimed he was fellowshiping with the enemy, the uncircumcised. He knew and struggled with the consequences of his choice but, in the end, he stood up and gave testimony as to what had happened. He shared that God was the One Who had first chosen to open the door to the Gentiles; Peter was simply obeying God's choice for him. God had chosen to fill the Jews, as well as the Gentiles, with the Holy Spirit. So, who were they to stand up and argue against what God had chosen to do?

The gospel went forth by the mouth of Peter and the Gentiles began to believe and became followers and disciples of Christ.

I Corinthians 1:27

*But God has **chosen** the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has **chosen** the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,*

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One thing we must learn is that God's ways are not our ways. He works outside of time and space. God is not limited to what man creates or believes to be true. Our knowledge is minimal, like child's play. God bears testimony to a lost world, wanting people to understand that the impossible is possible through Him. He takes the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. The wise will stand back and just shake their heads.

God also takes the weak, the ones that the world would not choose, and makes them strong. He takes the ones that people would cast off (like street people), and lifts them up to speak with wisdom and authority to those who are learned. He did precisely this with His disciples. He chose fishermen, a tax collector, and other very common men to bring about a change that would touch the world. God often chooses what man rejects; He knows such people have nothing to lose and that they are just "foolish" enough to believe that God can, and is able, to do great things through them.

God likes to do that which will cause man to take note and wonder. He does not want us to see a mere man, but he wants us to see the power of a living God flowing through that man, woman, or child. We sometimes think we are so smart! God wants us to challenge and question our own ideas and thinking. He wants us to see people as He sees them.

We are called to challenge the wise and the strong but it all starts with the kind of choices we make. Do not ever think that God cannot use you and minister through you. He can and He will if you just choose to let Him.

I Thessalonians 1:4

*Knowing, brethren beloved by God, His **choice** of you;*

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People, we need to see that God has chosen to love and to work through whomever He wills. We, and the church, need to know and understand that we are called. We need to recognize that He has chosen us with our talents, gifts, and even weaknesses – to touch a lost world. Our limitations do not hinder or hold back the power of God. What hinders us is our fear and lack of faith.

It is like adoption; the child really has no choice – it is up to the adopting parents to make the choice. It is the same with God. He chose us, adopted us into His family, and made us joint heirs with Christ.

Paul goes on to state that He chose us so that He could demonstrate His gospel and His power through our lives. We are to become models and example of who Christ is. We are called Christians, which means “Christ Like”.

James 2:5

*Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God **choose** the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

Love is the most powerful weapon in the disciple’s hands. It can move mountains and can tame the wildest enemy. Faith, hope, and love will always remain; love will never fail. God will use the poor to reach out to those who are in need. The poor see things differently than the rich. The people the world rejected He will raise as heirs of the kingdom.

Our God is a God who keeps his promises. When He speaks, it will happen. The foundation, though, is that we must love Him. He pours forth His love through His Son and we are to receive it, but once we receive it, we must let it flow through to others.

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God's ways are not our ways; He is going to do things that will show that He is the Creator of all the heavens and the earth. James is asking a question of his readers, "Has He not made the poor rich"? Again, we have to choose to love: yes or no.

I Peter 2:9

*But you are a **chosen** race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has **called** you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

There is something special about being chosen; it is something you cannot control. You have to rely on the one who is doing the choosing. You may be out there alone, and someone calls you and asks you to partner and collaborate with them. It is not you asking them; it is them asking you. It is their free choice.

Because of God's choice of us, we have become a royal priesthood, a people of and for God. We have become part of a holy nation. We are no longer living in isolation. We have become God's own possession. He desires us to be His. The underlying idea is that we have been asked to come into His family, taking on His Name.

Because of this new relationship, our desire will be to proclaim his excellence to others. We need to see the big picture of what Christ has done. He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We do not need to blindly stumble and fall, but realizing that when Christ, the true light, comes into our hearts, He will light the way so that we can see and move forward. His light exposes all the schemes of the devil.

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II Peter 1:10-11

*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his **calling** and **choosing** of you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

Peter tells his fellow disciples that, because of their calling and having been chosen by God, they need to be diligent in how they live and how they act on Christ's behalf. As disciples, we need to conscientiously follow Christ's teachings and practice His ways; if we do this, we will not stumble. Christ has started us on a journey during which we are to glorify Him; we must be careful how we walk and live. The enemy is always trying to trip us up.

These things that we have learned and understood will lead us into the eternal kingdom if we will be diligent and will practice these truths in our lives. Christ has, and is, being poured out for us; all that we need is provided by Him. After all, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He wants to abundantly supply our every need. He is like a father who wants to care for His children. He wants to walk hand-in-hand with us every step of the way. The only cost to us is giving ourselves totally to Him.

The most critical step for the disciple is coming to Christ and making Him Lord and Savior. Too often Christians want Christ to be their Savior, but don't want Him to be the Lord of their lives. Letting Him be Lord is the door that lets us into His eternal Kingdom. This is the true choice that needs to be made – above and beyond anything else we may seek or do.

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Resolution:

Since you got up this morning, you have already made hundreds of choices – from what you would wear, eat, and do this day. You, in many ways, control your attitude, your actions and your destiny. Each moment needs to be seen through Christ's eyes and His will for us.

The relationship between the Creator and the created was broken. We need what was lost restored to us. One way to illustrate this is through the description of a pawnshop. The item sold to the pawnshop dealer can be reclaimed when one returns to pay the price of redemption.

When you make something personal, it usually means that you are committed. It is Christ's heart touching my heart. It is His hand taking hold of my hand and walking with me. He names us and our relationship with Him and other disciples becomes intimate. But the first step is making that commitment to Him and choosing to follow Him as Lord. We need to let Him be the potter and recognize ourselves as the clay. We need to let His loving hands mold us into His likeness and image. But it all starts by the choices we make each day.

Each day we travel on a spiritual journey, a road that is made up of many forks and turns. Each fork and turn leads somewhere; it can lead to hopelessness, despair, destruction, and death. It can lead us in circles. But, praise God, we can follow Christ on the narrow road leading to eternal blessing. We are called to be ambassadors for Him, representing Christ in this lost world. It all starts by talking with the Lord, looking into His Word and seeing the direction that He has for us. Each choice, each moment, is like a fork in the road. We have the free will to choose the

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that God will show you, that when He called and chose you, He did not make a mistake in doing so. Pray that your spiritual eyes may be open so that you can accomplish God's purpose for your life. Ask for help to make the right choices. Also pray that you may see how your choices will affect others.

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Chapter Eleven

Called to Stewardship / Service

*Let a man regard us in this manner, as **servants** of Christ and **stewards** of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of **stewards** that one be found **trustworthy**.*

I Corinthians 4:1-2

The title of this chapter deals with the call of God for stewardship and service. I believe that these two words should not be separated. The call to service takes that with which God has entrusted us, "plants" it, and then uses it to produce more fruit.

Once we have given ownership of ourselves to Christ, He then gives back to us that which He entrusts to our stewardship. He gives the fruit of His Spirit as well as the gifts of His Spirit. When we are faithful in the little things, He then entrusts us with greater things. Everything that He gives to us is for the purpose of glorifying the Father Who is in heaven. Stewardship is being entrusted with God's possessions here on earth.

It is important that we define two key words. One is **stewardship**, **synonyms of** which are: husbandry, housekeeping, management, conduct, conduct of affairs, manipulation, operation, running, handling, agency, commission, care, charge, control, authority, superintendence, oversight, surveillance, patronage, protection. The second is **service**, synonyms of which are: avail, benefit, help, supply, use, usefulness, maintenance, overhaul, business, duty, labour, work, ceremony, function, observances, tune, recondition. Both these words are very foundational to the disciple's call.

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The Scripture also use words such as manager, management, or to entrust with.

We often think of stewardship and tithing as synonymous. Tithing may be a good method of giving but it may also be merely an act. Stewardship, on the other hand, is an attitude that expresses itself in daily living. Stewardship recognizes God's ownership; all that we are or have is a trust, and must be used for God and for the good of our fellow man. Stewardship is something far beyond the tithe. The tithe may become mechanical, but stewardship is not.

Stewardship touches many aspects of the disciple's life; he is to be aware that he has been entrusted with the good news of Christ, and then must manage his life accordingly. Following are just some of the areas in which we are to be good stewards. We need to remember that Christ is entrusting these areas to us.

Relationships: A relationship between the steward and his master must be established; until then, the steward will not know how to look after that which has been entrusted to him.

The deeper the relationship, the greater the understanding the steward will have regarding his responsibilities. Stewardship brings freedom, not more bondage. The closer we draw to Christ, the closer He draws to us. He has only our best in mind. The problem is that we live in fear of giving up control and simply trusting God. Trust comes by building bridges of relationship. We, as disciples, must be open to Christ's Lordship. The Lordship of Christ means ownership. We do not own what he has given us; He entrusts us with His possessions and ministry. With this in mind, He will give us the needed tools and provisions to look after His possessions.

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Commitment: Commitment is a choice. While commitment to Him as Lord is a free choice, the disciple must recognize that he is the Lord's servant. As servants, we become the stewards of that with which He has entrusted us.

Disciples should commit to stewardship, not because it is a law or a legalistic demand, but because we understand Christ's great love for us. It is because of His unmerited grace and love that we commit to being His stewards. Choosing between our wills and God's will can be a battle because this commitment will mean a change in thinking and lifestyle. This commitment can be compared to wedding vows. It is making a new covenant between two parties. Communion is to remind us of the commitment Christ made with us, as well as our commitment with Him. Stewardship, on the other hand, is an attitude that expresses itself in daily living. Stewardship recognizes God's ownership; all we are or have is a trust and must be used for God and the good of our fellow men.

Scripture: To be a good steward one must be a skilled handler of God's Word, as those skilled with a sword are ready for battle. To be good stewards we must know what it is that we have been put in charge of and that for which we will be held accountable.

Paul tells us that we are entrusted as stewards for the teaching and sharing of the good news of the Gospel. We are to give it out to those around us. Like the Bereans, we are also entrusted with the learning and studying of the Word of God. God's Word is like a sword and we are to be good "sword handlers".

Time: As disciples, we can easily find ourselves controlled by time. It does not serve us but we tend to serve it. The greatest gift you can give to God or anybody is the gift of time.

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Time is a gift from God and, as disciples, we need God's help daily so that we may use time wisely. Just as you make a financial budget, you must also make a time budget. If you fail to prioritize your time, the cares of this world will move in and take over. Men and women become stressed out because they often feel they do not have enough time in the day. We can become burnt out when heavy schedules fill every waking moment of the day. It is very possible that we have been overcome by things that have bound us to the point where we have no money or time to give. What God wants in His "offering plate" is not so much your money, but your time. Discipleship and relationship cannot be built without the investment of time.

Money: The disciple will need money to do some of the work of ministry, but it should not be the controlling factor or the gauge we use to determine God's will. Many a disciple has found himself deeply ensnared because of the misuse of finances.

When it comes to money, God is looking for people and churches through which He can channel His resources. Many resources are kept or even hoarded in the "channel". Money is to be a tool, not a god. We do not store up money in heaven, but are blessed by what the wise use of that money produces. God wants to provide for all our needs, but not for all our wants. Paul could tell the Philippian church that God would provide for all their needs, but it was on the basis of their sacrificial giving. God wants us to give in love ... with no strings attached. This is when we will experience the joy of being a willing giver.

Ministry: Another great gift of giving is a ministry of service. God gives people the ability to make money and to use time wisely so they can use their time to minister and help others. You are the biggest gift of wealth to God. We are all called to be ministers.

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Joshua challenged the people of Israel to make up their minds. Who would they serve? Jesus challenged and warned the disciples about serving two masters. Money and its use or misuse can bring division, building up all kinds of walls between fellow ministers. Because stewardship is a ministry, we need to ask God to fill us daily with His Holy Spirit so that we can be good ministers to the body of Christ and effective witnesses to a lost world. Stewardship should not be taken lightly; we should be seeking God daily on how He wants us to serve Him.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully the following Scriptures will take you even deeper into what the call of Christ is and the importance of understanding how we are stewards and servants of what Christ has entrusted to us. Again, we need to remember that having a personal relationship with Christ is essential before a call to stewardship and service. Let us hear from the Word and commit to act as the Spirit leads.

Luke 12:42 (NKJB)

*And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise **steward**, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"*

When a servant is faithful in the little things, the Lord then entrusts him with more. How do I get more? We get more by being good stewards of what we have. In society, we have a lot, but we also waste a lot. We often do not have the time or space to take care of all that we have. We need wisdom and understanding from God to know what to do.

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Through a story (parable), Jesus teaches the disciples a very important lesson on stewardship. Stewardship has a physical level, but Christ also wanted to teach about the spiritual level of stewardship.

This parable is about a steward that has been put in charge of feeding and caring for others, and for looking after the master's possession while he was away. This was Jesus' way of preparing the disciples for when He would be away from them. The Master is coming back, but not at a time the servants will know or for which they will be prepared. They just need to be ready for His coming and for the judgments He will make concerning their stewardship.

At the conclusion of His parable He tells the disciples that, from everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be asked. We will be held accountable for that which we have been entrusted by God.

Luke 16:2 (NKJB)

*So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your **stewardship**, for you can no longer be steward.' So the master commended the unjust **steward** because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.*

Jesus taught another lesson to His disciples. He wanted them to learn how to invest and in what to invest. This steward had not been a very good manager and he was about to lose his job. So, he knew he'd better do something because he was not able to work or beg; he decided to invest in people. He helped them lower their bills (cheating!) in terms of what they owed to his boss and, in so

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doing, he stored up treasure; when times got rough, people would look after him and his needs.

Are we investing too much in earthly possessions, not realizing the "bottom could fall out" out of our so-called secure holdings? In today's society no job or investment is secure. Only that which we invest in Christ is safe. He tells us that even rust and moth cannot get at what we invest on behalf of Christ.

We need to be investing in the kingdom of God, giving unto Christ the materials to build our eternal dwellings. Disciples need to see that the things here on earth will fail, but that treasure we lay up in heaven will gain a lasting reward. We need to understand that our investments should be built for heaven, not for earth.

I Corinthians 4:1-2

*Let a man regard us in this manner, as **servants** of Christ and **stewards** of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.*

Paul's intention is to teach the Corinthian church the meaning of true service. Upfront, we need to understand that we are all servants working together for a common goal. We are servants of Christ and our ministry is to be good stewards of that with which we have been entrusted. Self-gain is not our goal; rather, our planting and reaping is focused on helping others.

We do not see how all this works together towards a future purpose. For us, our stewardship is simply a ministry. Often, we just see a few pieces of the puzzle; the key for us is to be trustworthy. People have invested in us so that we can invest in

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others. A steward is required to use here on earth what God gives us through others.

Paul wanted the church to look beyond themselves and to help, invest, and minister to all. Jesus portrayed this to the disciples when He gave them the command known as the Great Commission. Christ wanted them to work as a team for because we all belong to Him, our Lord Jesus Christ. The wisdom of the world is not as important as being a mature steward and looking after that which God has entrusted to you.

I Corinthians 6:19-20

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Again Paul wanted to remind the disciples and the entire church that their bodies were temples and they had a responsibility to look after their "temples". We need to realize that we are all called to be a good steward of the Holy Spirit Who dwells with us. We have been sealed by the Spirit for the work of service. He empowers us, gives us the fruit of the Spirit, and also gives us gifts so we can serve others.

We have been bought with a price. We could not afford the cost that was required for our lives. We have been redeemed and bought back by Christ. We have died to sin and now He has given us newness of life from Himself; now we need to look after that which he has given us. We are to be wise stewards, but also need to remember that we need to freely share what was freely given.

Because of what Christ has done for us, we now need to glorify Christ in our bodies. We were in debt – there was no hope

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or way out for us – we were dead in trespasses and sin. But now that the old has passed away and we have become new, we are challenged by Christ to be good stewards of what He has given and invested in us.

I Corinthians 9:17

*For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a **stewardship** entrusted to me.*

My action can reap rewards. We need to be willing to fulfill our stewardship voluntarily because of love. Christ is not forcing us to walk in His shoes, but He is calling us. Do we desire to begin a new journey with Him?

Christ desires to entrust us with his love and power; He wants us to be good stewards of what He has given. What He offers can change and reshape the direction of the world. We are entrusted with the stewardship of God's grace to give to whosoever will receive.

Hopefully the reward is not our main focus! We should love to serve Him because of what He did for us. We were destined for eternal destruction, but He chose to pay our debt for us, so we could be set free. Paul's ultimate joy and reward was that he was found worthy to preach the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 2:7

*But on the contrary, seeing that I had been **entrusted** with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised.*

Like Paul we, too, have been entrusted with the greatest gift of all - the gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ. There is no

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greater gift that we could receive; we have been called and given the gospel for a purpose of being Christ's witnesses to a lost world.

The gospel is made up of at least nine key truths: Christ's virgin birth, His earthly life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension to the Father, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the birthing of the church. The last part of the good news is He is soon coming back for His church. Then we will spend all eternity together with Him - that's forever!

Ephesians 3:2

*If indeed you have heard of the **stewardship** of God's grace which was given to me for you;*

As disciples, we have all been given the special ministry of being stewards of God's grace. The story of God's amazing grace needs to be told to as many who are willing to hear. God's grace is free to all who will receive it. Christ paid for it on the cross of Calvary.

Grace is unmerited; there was nothing that we could do to qualify us to receive it. In his determination to share the message of the Good News, Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ. He had been the recipient of great grace; now he wanted others to hear and believe.

We need to be out sharing the gospel with others. We have been made stewards of a great message. How will people hear if we do not get out there and tell them? Someone told us; now we need to tell others. We have been given a message that will affect generations of people (including those as yet unborn) until Christ returns. Having been called to stewardship, we need to fulfill that call, going out and touching others with God's mercy and grace.

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Colossians 1:25

*Of this church I was made a minister according to the **stewardship** from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,*

The ultimate purpose of stewardship is that people will come to the place of being complete in Christ. Christ desires maturity as individuals and as a church. We are to produce fruit that will last.

We have been made ministers and servants in God's kingdom. We have been appointed as witnesses and proclaimers of the living truth. Christ gave to us the tools and giftings so that we could fulfill this stewardship ministry for Him. He has given us every benefit to enable us to fulfill this calling. The end goal of this empowerment is to be able to carry out the preaching of the word.

Titus 1:7

*For the overseer must be above reproach as God's **steward**, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,*

Paul sought to teach Titus about the role of the overseer (the elder or pastor or shepherd of the flock). He must be above reproach, someone in whom people cannot find everyday types of faults. He is not saying that such a leader must be perfect, but that he must live at a higher standard than most people. Paul provides a list of leadership standards to Titus and Timothy. Leaders are instructed to adhere to high standards, not just for their own sakes, but also for those around them.

Why these high standards? Because God has entrusted His church into the hands of leaders. As leaders, we are responsible,

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and will be held responsible, for the people who make up the body of Christ, the church. We need to be careful how we handle our leadership, making certain that it is firmly based on the Rock of Jesus Christ.

We, as leaders, have to prepare the next generation of leaders. While we are entrusted to lead the church today, we also must prepare it for tomorrow. We are stewards of the great commission; There is work to be done in the church and outside the church as we endeavor to fulfill our stewardship mandate.

I Peter 4:10

*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in **serv**ing one another as good **stewards** of the manifold grace of God.*

When you sum it all up, everything we do, we do on behalf of Christ. He dwells in our hearts and His desire is to touch all that we do with His love and grace. We are to be stewards of His character in a lost world.

We are given special gifts to carry out our stewardship task of s. He does not call us and then leave us to our own resources. No! He gives us the tools and the empowerment to fulfill that which He has called us to do.

The challenge for us is our nature and will. Too often we desire things for ourselves, but our desire should be to see how we can bless and encourage others. Our job at this time is not to reign, but to serve. Even Christ did not come the first time to reign as a king, but came as a servant. However, the next time He comes, He will come as the King of Kings.

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Again, our goal should be to be servants and stewards of the manifold grace of God. Our call and purpose is to see God's grace spread out and broadcasted throughout the whole world.

Resolution:

“The deeper one’s religious experience the greater will be the sense of stewardship.” Stewardship of possessions is the effect of God’s saving grace upon a disciple and his property. Because of God's work in us, we recognize (and use!) our talents and possessions as a trust from God. When God gets us, He gets our property and all that we are. When Jesus got Peter, He also got Peter’s boat. When the throng pressed Him at Galilee’s seaside, He had a boat from which to preach because He had the owner of the boat. He got the lad’s lunch with which to feed the multitudes because He got the lad. When God gets a man with a car, He gets a car to be used in His service. When He gets a man of talent, He gets talent for the interests of His Kingdom. When He gets a man with wealth, He gets wealth for furthering the mandate of the Christian church.

We become Christ’s stewards when He becomes our Lord. To acknowledge the Lordship of Christ means that we accept stewardship. Professing Christ as Lord and failing in stewardship is to say “Lord, Lord, and not do the things He says.” (The Challenge of Christian Stewardship, Milo Kauffman, P3).

Do not wait until you can do “great things” to start working for the Master. God can do “wonders” with little things that are dedicated to Him.

Often what you possess will end up possessing you. We need to turn complete ownership over to Christ, both of our lives and our possessions. We also need to see that, as a body, we have

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Chapter Twelve

Called to Humility

And my people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

People struggle with the challenge of humbling themselves before God and others. But humility is the door to answered prayer. It is also the door to building strong relationships between God and ourselves. Humility does challenge us, because it is a battle of the wills. It is struggle between my will and desires and God's will for my life.

Jesus challenges us, over and over again, to follow and submit our lives to Him. The rich young ruler was such an example. He focused on what he had to give up, and not on what he was going to gain. Too much of the time our attention is focused on the things here on earth; in reality we should be focusing on the heavenly King and His Kingdom.

We like to hold on to that which we know. We struggle with fear because of the unknown, but God wants us to step out in faith; that will mean humbling ourselves, submitting to His ways and direction for our lives.

There are two key words that we need to define for this section. The first is the word "humility" which is defined as "humbleness, lack of pride, lowliness, meekness, modesty, self-abasement, servility, submissiveness, unpretentiousness". The second word which I believe is very connected to the word

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“humility” is the word “prayer”. Prayer is defined as “communication, devotion, invocation, litany, supplication, appeal, petition, plea, request”.

The reason why I associate these two words is because the only way you can humble yourself before God is through prayer. Prayer is the line of communication that God often uses to speak to us, correct us, and build us up in faith. The Word of God suggests that we should pray before studying and meditating, both during and after our devotion time. The purpose is to make sure that we understand and, in a new-found faith, begin to walk forward in Christ.

The most challenging part of prayer is actually praying, because it means that, in humility, we have to submit to God our time, our will, and our desires. Many people do not want to pray because of the fear that God might talk to them and ask them to change, or do something that is outside of their own will.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully these Scriptures will take you even deeper into the meaning of the call of Christ and the importance of understanding how we are to humble ourselves and pray so, as disciples, we can draw near to Christ. Again, we are called to humility and to prayer; this can only come about by having a personal relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to act as the Spirit leads.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

*You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that he might **humble** you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.*

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He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

Many of our struggles are caused because we are not willing to humble ourselves and submit to the hand of God and His leading. The Israelites could have entered into the promised land immediately, but they feared man more than they feared God. Even after all the great miracles they saw with their own eyes, they were not willing to humble themselves. They focused more on complaining to Moses than saying, “Yes, Lord, you are truly our God – now lead us on into the promised land.”

They had to wander and then die in the wilderness because they would not humble themselves. They wandered about and lived near the promised land – yet would not humble themselves – at which point they would have been able to possess the land that God had promised to them. God had called them out of slavery in Egypt and He was ready to lead them into the land “flowing with milk and honey”.

Jesus also quoted part of this verse to His disciple so that they would get their priorities right in terms of recognizing Who is in charge. All they needed was going to come directly from the Father, but they needed to daily humble themselves before Him – just as we need to do today. The most important thing we need to focus on each day is what God is saying to us. Once we hear that, we must humble ourselves and do it.

So many churches and people have the second or third best, or possibly nothing at all, when it comes to God’s fruitful blessing. Why not? Because the leadership will not humble themselves and

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individual people will not humble themselves. God wants to pour out his blessing on His children, but too often we lack the faith to humble ourselves before Him. So, whether Israelites or modern-day people, churches and individuals can spend their whole life just “wandering around in the wilderness”.

II Chronicles 7:14

*And my people who are **called** by My name **humble** themselves and **pray** and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

The people of God always find it so difficult to humble and submit themselves to God. They want their way instead of God’s way. The people of Israel had turned their backs on God’s leadership. When we refuse to be guided and led by our God, it begins to affect us, our livelihood, and our land. God cannot bless disobedience. He wants us to be living in faithfulness to Him. He does not want our sacrifices – He wants our hearts.

There are three things that the disciple must remember when it comes to his relationship with God: 1) You have been called by God and, because of that, He will love you and take care of you. 2) As disciples, we must humble ourselves before the leadership and Lordship of God. 3) We must be in constant communication and prayer with our God.

Disciples must take the first step, humbling themselves before God; only then can they and their land be healed. When Moses saw the burning bush, he thought it very strange, but God spoke to him as he approached it. He heard from God when he took the next steps toward the bush. Then God asked him to remove his sandals as a sign of humbling himself before God’s authority.

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Throughout history, man has turned away from God; this Scripture indicates that man must make the first move of turning to God. God encourages us to turn but we must do the actual turning. Often the first step of turning is a small word of prayer and opening up of our hearts to God. The moment this happens, healing and deliverance and restoration begins to flow into our hearts from our heavenly Father.

Ezra 8:21

*Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might **humble** ourselves before our God to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.*

The people acknowledged that their journey must start off by humbling themselves and praying. By fasting, they were focused on clearly hearing from God as to His instructions for them. Fasting is surrendering all our needs and desires to God. They wanted to demonstrate to God that all they wanted to do was to hear from Him.

Fasting takes the disciple and his prayer life to a deeper level of seeing and hearing God's will. The focus of fasting is to gain God's gift of wisdom and understanding; this Scripture refers to everyone's need in that regard. Fasting is something that gets spoken about by everyone, but it is very rarely practiced. The reason fasting is rarely practiced is because, in humility, disciples give up food and comforts – things which are so enjoyable.

Fasting usually is seeking God's guidance about something very specific; a direction we need to take or a word about a decision that one needs to make. The people needed to know which way to go and how to get to their destination safely. They were on

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a journey and they realized that the only way they were going to complete this journey safely was by God leading and guiding them.

Another point that we see here was that this time of fasting was would directly affect their children as well as their possessions. In reality, everything they possessed was to be entrusted to God for safekeeping. We need to see ourselves as stewards of what God has entrusted to us; at all times, however, we need to recognize that God is the real owner of everything with which he has given us.

Psalm 25:9

*He leads the **humble** in justice, and He teaches the **humble** His way.*

There are two things the writer of Psalms wanted his readers to know about the God he served. When we walk humbly before the Lord, He will lead us in the paths of justice. He will show us the “rights and wrongs” of life. We are called to walk justly (honestly, righteously, and morally) and uprightly before the Lord; to do so, we must first humble ourselves before Him. David understood the important truth about the connection we need to have between ourselves and God.

Next thing to see is that we are all on a journey, one that can lead in many directions. However, through David, God tells us that if we humble ourselves before Him, He will instruct and show us which way to choose. God is interested in us personally. He is concerned about our every thought and action.

Do we know that God knows that we will make mistakes? Of course, he does! Nevertheless, that does not stop Him from loving us and caring for us like a father would his child. We are

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very, very important and special to Him. He wants to help us to walk in justice and truth. He wants us to see clearly the pathway we are to walk.

Psalms 37:11

*Nevertheless, the **humble** will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.*

Humility always seems to be the first step that we need to take if we are going to get where we think we should be. People throughout the world desire prosperity. There are two kinds of prosperity – material and spiritual. The rich young ruler was very prosperous in the things of the world, but was very poor in the things concerning the Kingdom of Christ.

We often forget that it is God who provides all things. It is God who sets up leaders and removes leaders. It is God who gives and takes away. He is the divine plan-keeper. He holds our time – present and future – in His hand. Our role is to obey His call and humble ourselves before Him. There is great blessing that follows if we will just bow our knee first.

The very land is His, not ours. Yes, we inherit the use of it. All that it contains is ours to work with while we are here. But when our time is finished, it will be passed on to others. “First Nation” people understood this principle very well. We are just entrusted, as good stewards, to look after the land. When we recognize His ownership of us and the land, we then see that we have great prosperity, not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

Proverbs 3:34

*Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the **humble** (afflicted).*

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We will undergo suffering and pain. People will make fun of us and say all kinds of things against us falsely, but we are not to worry because it is during such times that God will pour out more grace.

We are told that we will be persecuted because of our testimony for Christ, but we need not worry because God is with us. We also need to understand that when scoffers challenge us, they are also challenging Christ. We are not alone; He is walking with us and is in us as we go through these times of suffering. His grace is sufficient.

Proverbs 15:33

*The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes **humility**.*

Proverbs demonstrates for us principles for life. One such principle is that we must first fear the Lord. We are not to fear what can happen to our bodies or our souls, but we must have a holy fear about what can happen to our spirits.

Fearing the Lord and seeking His face is the first step on the pathway of instruction. We need wisdom for each day. There is so much happening all around us. Our tendency to fear man and the world more than we fear God is a trap set by the enemy. Satan wants to ensnare us by the ever-present fears of this world; he knows fear binds us and keeps us from moving ahead for the Kingdom. We have nothing to fear in Christ, not even death itself.

We face a never-ending struggle with pride; we want to be recognized for who we are and for the work we do. This pride is usually kept secret in our hearts, but it is there. We want to be honored and praised once in a while. However, wisdom tells us that we must humble ourselves first – then will come honor. We do

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not receive honor while in a state of pride but only when we are in a state of humility. Our attitudes must be kept in check before the Lord.

Matthew 11:29

*“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and **humble** in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Jesus teaches the disciple how to deal with the inner storms of one's heart. Sometimes the world overtakes and burdens us to the point where it is hard to barely survive. But Jesus had an answer for this challenge. He tells us not carry the world, but rather to yoke together with Him. And together, the pressures of this world will be overcome.

The picture that Christ gives to us here is that of oxen being yoked together and ready for working the land or just simply pulling something. They pull in unison; if one is a little weary or weak, the other pulls for him. Christ wants to pull together with us, the weak partner. He calls us to join up with Him, but we must first humble ourselves and accept His call, becoming part of His team. When we are teamed with Christ we can learn so much from Him; but it is vitally necessary for us to humble ourselves before we can work together with Him.

He wants us not to worry. He comforts us with words like ‘love’ and ‘gentleness’. He tells us that He is humble in heart. He knows what we need, and He just wants to minister strength, hope and encouragement to us.

Christ knows that the battles we face are not going to be easy; however, if we start each day ‘hooking up’ with Him, our days will seem less wearing. He wants to bring rest to our souls

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even in the midst of the storms if we will just yoke with Him and learn to humble ourselves before Him.

Matthew 18:4

*“Whoever then **humbles** himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

A child likes to be close to the father. A child usually does not worry about the cares of the world. That child just wants to enjoy the love of its father. There is a security and warmth for the child when they just trust their loving parent.

A child is just so trusting. A child has such simple faith, believing and knowing that the father will take care of all his needs. We are to be like children, in faith just trusting the Father. We are to have an attitude of a child for whom it is a joy just to be alive and to be with others.

Jesus wanted to teach the disciple that greatness comes through humility. He wanted disciples not to worry about anything. He wanted them to see that on earth, as well as in heaven, there is no need to be lording it over one another. He wanted the disciple to have a heavenly perspective like a child does here on earth. We are called to be kingdom dwellers, serving as ambassadors here on earth.

Matthew 23:12

*“Whoever exalts himself shall be **humbled**; and whoever **humbles** himself shall be exalted.”*

It is human nature, it seems, that we all want to get to the “top of the pile”, not knowing that when we get there, that there is nothing up there but more work, more stress and many more challenges. We somehow think if we can just get to the next level

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there will be peace and happiness, but the truth is we will never be content there until we learn to be content where we are at now. If we struggle now with our position, we will struggle even more there.

We need to relax and put our future into the hands of the Lord. We should not try to manipulate things according to what we think is the right timing. We need to trust in God's timing. He knows the "when, where, how, why, and what" of our lives. The key to life is just to humble ourselves in His loving hands and listen to His call so that we are ready to move forward in His timing.

God has ordained times and seasons for our lives. He knows when to keep us behind the scenes and when to move us out into the limelight. However, it all must be done in His timing and for His glory. Queen Ester was told by Mordecai that she was being exalted "for such a time as this". Leave our lives in the hands of God and let Him do the promoting in His times and seasons. You will be glad you did!

Ephesians 1:18

*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His **calling**, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

With this verse, I want you to see the importance of prayer as connected to calling, and how we should see things as Christ sees them. We need to have the eyes of our hearts open; the only way that this can take place is by humbling ourselves before the Lord in prayer. I believe we do not see many things that are going on around us because our spiritual eyes are closed. He does not want us to walk in darkness, but He wants us to walk in the knowledge of His light.

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We need to know the hope of His calling for our lives; again, this can take place only by humbling ourselves before Him. Each day we need to pray, using our spiritual eyes. Each day we need to see the light of Christ shining on the pathway that we are to walk that day.

Being a child of the King leads to a great inheritance; too often, however, we do not receive or even see what Christ is offering us. Often, we may be looking in all the wrong places.

Ephesians 4:1-2

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the **calling** with which you have been **called**, with all **humility** and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,*

Paul knew what his position in Christ was. He tells his readers that he was a prisoner of Christ. He had become totally captivated by Christ. He knew what Christ had done in his life and that He would do the same for anyone else. He was begging the Ephesians church to go back and re-evaluate their walk with Christ.

He wanted the Ephesian disciples to remember the day when Christ called them. He reminded them of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They had begun right but now they were getting side tracked, following another pathway. They were to remember how they were called. Christ had called them through humility and gentleness; they needed to remember not only how gently Christ called them, but also how they were to treat others. Christ was patient (tolerant) with them and is still patient.

We too easily forget an important principle that Christ wants us to understand and remember. This is it: the way He has

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treated us, He wants us to pass that on to others. “The same abundant humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance which Christ has extended to us, we need to imitate and extend to our brothers and sisters.” Why more? Because of being experienced disciples, our understanding should be better.

We are called by God to give, not in our strength and power, but in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. Paul begs us not to forget this reality. This is a key foundation stone for the church of Jesus Christ. If the body is to function for the glory of God, we must imitate Christ’s kindnesses towards one another.

Philippians 2:3-4

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with **humility** of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*

We are part of a body ministry. We are called to work as a team. We need to keep our eyes open for those who are all around us. We should not just focus on the inward, but we need to look on the needs round about us. Our motives should not be based on selfishness and conceit, but rather on building up and encouraging others around us.

Paul wants us to see those around us through the lens of humility. We need to see people differently. We need to see them through the same lens of grace and mercy with which Christ sees us. We have to stop focusing just on our personal interests. There is a great struggle in this area today for both the individual disciple as well as for the church. We are becoming islands unto ourselves. We hear, but don’t really hear. We see, but don’t really see. We acquire wisdom, but don’t really understand.

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To be able to look out for the interests of others can only begin when we take the time to get to know them personally. Often, we do not take the time because we say we are too busy, but it is hard to help and to minister to someone you do not know. Relationships can only begin when we open ourselves to others, becoming humbly vulnerable to them. When we look at another person, how do we see them? How, in reality, are they seeing us? To answer these questions, we need to “sow seeds of humility” through our vulnerability; only then can we reap the harvest of good relationships.

Philippians 4:12-13

*I know how to get along with **humble** means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

Why could Paul do what he did for Christ? Because, in humility, he gave himself totally into the hands of Christ. We are not promised an easy road. We will suffer all kinds of challenges as well as blessings. At times we may even struggle with the things that are basic to life, like food and drink. Our circumstances will stretch our faith.

Paul shared the secret of his ability to overcome all things, and still have a heart of praise and thanksgiving for Christ. He tells them that he can do all things – but only through Christ’s strength. Paul was not operating under his own strength and power but was moving forward by the strength of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s treasure was not here on earth, but it was in heaven. He was driven by Christ, and was laying up treasure in heaven for

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Christ. He was not worried about whether he had little or much. He was just glad to be found worthy to be called by Christ to serve. Again, it is all on how you focus – is it on the temporal or on the eternal?

What is the secret to our walking with Christ as a true disciple? Paul, indeed, had the right focus.

James 4:5-7

*Or do you not think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us? But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the **humble.**" Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

Heaven is a storehouse of grace. It is because of grace that we can even stand before the Lord of Lords. It is also because of grace that God has called us to serve. We are so blessed with an abundance of grace. Because of God's grace, we have the power to overcome.

If we hope to have victory in our lives, we must submit and humble ourselves before Christ. Satan wants us to be full of pride, seeking that which is pleasing for ourselves, getting us to desire in our hearts to become like gods. Christ calls us to a walk of humility, and when we do so, the gates to the enemy's fortresses begin to be pulled down.

We are to be overcomers in Christ, but first we must humble ourselves and then receive His abundant grace. God has a purpose for our lives; that purpose is revealed to us through His Word.

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God desires to help us in our life's journey. The proud he leaves to their own ways but for the humble, he will give more grace. If He has called you to do something, He will give you the needed power and grace to complete the work. Again, do not measure yourself by the world's standards or see yourself through the eyes of other people. Rather, see yourself the way God sees you, clothed in His righteousness and grace.

James 4:10

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Just as we would do with an earthly king, when we come before the Lord of Lords, we need to humble ourselves. We need to realize that our King is all-wise and all-knowing; if we humble ourselves and wait on Him, He does have the answers for our problems and challenges.

We should always let God lift and promote us. If we promote ourselves, we will fail – and fall. Christ is the sure foundation, the master builder, and we need to trust that He knows where to place us in His superstructure. We should not spend our energy and time battling for key positions within the body of Christ. We should just come before Christ and others and ask, “Where can I serve?”

“Exalt” implies, not only position, but can also mean a higher level of understanding. Christ wants us to be overcomers, with a clear vision. The word “exalt” means to promote, raise, advance, upgrade, uplift, inspire, excite, stimulate. God wants to inspire, excite and stimulate you to move forward in faith in Christ. When we find ourselves in deep valleys, we need to humble ourselves before God and He will helpfully guide us out of those difficult times. He wants to set our feet on a firm rock.

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I Peter 5:5-7

*You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with **humility** toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the **humble**. Therefore **humble** yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.*

Peter wants people to see the value of learning from others. We are all teachers but, as disciples of Christ, we should also submit ourselves to be “learners”. God wants to show us that, in the body of Christ, we all need to be in submission to others. This submission is not for the purpose of controlling, but for guiding and teaching us how to face the problems and challenges that come our way.

Humbling ourselves before God can seem to be a big challenge, so we know that humbling ourselves before others will most likely be even a bigger challenge. We are commanded to be humble in our demeanor toward one another. We should listen and hear what others have to say. We should not be so judgmental towards people. We need to take time to know them and learn from them; only then can we better understand why they say the things they say, and do the things they do.

The order is clear: first, we need to humble ourselves before God; then we will have the ability and power to humble ourselves before each other.

Another important concept in this verse is the idea of timing. There are times to speak and times to be quiet, times to weep and times to be full of joy. We often get out of step with

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God's will and timing. We might know His will but then act on it at the wrong time.

The world is so burdened down and anxious about many things. As disciples, we need to just humble ourselves and cast all our cares on Him. He will help and guide us through. Christ really, really cares for us, not only in the big things, but in all the little details of life as well.

Resolution:

Humble pie does not taste all that bad if it is eaten with the right attitude! Pride and fear seem to be the biggest obstacles to moving forward as a disciple. Humbling ourselves in prayer clears our vision and “removes the wax from our ears” so we are able to hear the voice of God. The discipleship walk consists of daily steps of humility. Humility means emptying “self”, allowing Christ to “pour Himself” into our lives. II Chronicles 7:14 shows that, as we first humble ourselves, then we will hear from heaven. We struggle so much because we get in the way of what God wants to do. This is why Scripture tells us that confession is good for the soul. Confession is simply admitting that we cannot do it on our own, and that we need help. For example, the first step for an alcoholic to get help is for him to humble himself and just admit that he has a problem. At that point, he can begin to overcome and move forward with the help of God and others.

So much of our walk is based on humility. If we will first just humble ourselves, He then moves to lift us up and put our feet on a solid rock. We think often that, if we humble ourselves too much, then everyone will just “walk all over us”. Humility does not describe a person who has no backbone, but beautifully describes a person who recognizes who they are; such people know

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what they are lacking, and are willing to surrender themselves in the hope of becoming an even better tool in the hands of Christ. Leadership is being willing to serve others, and to help others grow and mature. People humble themselves to our leadership because we have humbled ourselves to the leadership of others.

There are many pathways in life. There are pathways that others lay down for us; there are pathways we blaze ourselves. But then there is God's pathway – which is always the pathway of humility. Christ first blazed that pathway for us, and it led Him to the cross, a place that was cruel and humiliating for a King. We, too, must walk a pathway that starts at the foot of the cross. We have to humble ourselves before Christ, dying to our will and living for His.

The call of Christ can only begin to bear fruit in our lives, and in the lives of others, when we are willing to come to the Lord in prayer and humble ourselves before Him. When we do so, the binding chains and ropes of the world fall off. The more we humble ourselves, the more freedom we receive and experience here on earth.

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What do I hear and understand God speaking to me about from this chapter? When I look in the mirror, do I see a person of pride, wrapped up in himself, or do I see a person who is willing to ask for help so that, in turn, he can help and encourage others.

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RELEVANCE:

Which prayers seem to be blocked because we will not admit our real motives before God? What things are we not willing to do because our pride or fear is keeping us from moving forward?

Prayer Directive:

Dear Lord, help me to see who I really am. Pray that God will give you a burden for prayer. Pray for the grace to humbly exchange your will for God's will, accepting His plans for your life. Pray that you will be able to say, "Yes, Lord" to what he calls you to do.

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Chapter Thirteen

Called to a Discipleship Lifestyle

*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my **disciples**.*

John 15:8

As children of God, we are called to live a moment-by-moment lifestyle that will model and reflect Jesus Christ to a lost world. Yesterday cannot be changed, and tomorrow is yet to come, so we must focus on the time that God has given to us today. Each day, as disciples, we can affect and impact the lives of those around us. In a sense, we are “writing history”.

Our calling is to become disciples of, and for, Christ. Then we are called to go and make disciples. As we come to know who we are in Christ, we will want to share our reality with others.

A discipleship lifestyle is a daily commitment to the truth and teachings of Christ. It is a daily walk of following after Christ and obedience to His call on our lives; it requires us to continually ask the question: “What Would Jesus Do”?

There are four key words in this chapter that one needs to understand so that we can fulfill what it means to be called to a discipleship lifestyle. The first is the word **disciple** which means “adherent, believer, convert, devotee, follower, learner, pupil, student, supporter”.

The second is the word **discipleship**, which means “forsaking everything to follow, discipline, taught and trained by a

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master, one who is mentored by another who himself has also been mentored.

The third is the word *discipline*, which means “drill, exercise, method, practice, regimen, regulations, training, conduct, control, orderliness, restraint, self-control, strictness, chastisement and correction”.

Lastly, we have the word *lifestyle*, which means “a manner or custom that we hold to, a way of life that we personally live”.

All four words draw a unique picture for the believer. Discipleship is more than just a name or title given to a believer in Christ; it is a lifestyle and culture that must be lived out each day. It is giving up one way of life for another, but it is not a “dual citizenship”. We surrender our worldly passport for God’s heavenly passport. We are pilgrims in a foreign land. Christ has sent us forth into the world as His ambassadors.

Discipleship implies discipline in the ways and teaching of the Master; in this case, the Master is Jesus. In our professions or areas of work, we continually do what we can to gain experience; we study, write exams, practice and work. Sometimes this exhausts our minds and bodies, all for the satisfaction of experiencing a job well done. This is exactly what Christ expects of His disciples; because of this required discipline, many of His disciples chose to no longer follow Him. They recognized the demands of His teaching and commandments.

In many ways, discipleship is taking on a culture and lifestyle of another kingdom. We become citizens of Christ’s Kingdom and we are called and sent out to be His ambassadors here on earth. We are merely pilgrims, “just passing through”, never to take up full citizenship in the kingdom of this world.

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The Great Commissions of the Bible calls us to go out and make disciples, to train and discipline others in such a way that they will go out and produce fruit that will last. Christ has freely given to us, now we must freely give to others.

Through the ages, discipleship has cost many people their lives, their homes, and sometimes their families; many joyfully gave because their focus was not on earthly possessions or rewards, but rather on the heavenly kingdom and its King, “Jesus Christ”.

Discipleship inevitably makes the disciple an enemy of the world; the reason is that the light of Christ within us (as disciples) reveals the darkness in their own lives and brings conviction to their hearts.

There are three things that stand out when it comes to the call of a Discipleship Lifestyle:

1. Discipleship: forsaking the things of the world. It is also having daily fellowship with God and other believers. In addition, we are to walk in the steps of Christ that He has laid out for us to follow.
2. Discipline: focusing and keeping focused on the call of Christ; out of that comes fulfillment of the deepest desire for freedom that people all want.
3. Lifestyle: a call to live and walk in His ways, to obey and follow His truth and to have a life that is practiced and patterned after His life.

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Scripture Signpost:

Pray that these Scriptures will take you even deeper into an understanding of the meaning of the call of Christ and the importance of understanding how we are to live a discipleship lifestyle. The Scriptures tell us to pray so that we can draw near to Christ, as a true disciple. Again, we are called as disciples, to practice and teach and train others in those things in which we have been taught and trained by Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Matthew 10:42

*“And whoever in the name of a **disciple** gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”*

Everywhere Jesus went with the disciples, He used that time to teach and enlighten His followers as to the truth about God. During one of these times, the discussion turned to how people will be rewarded for their service. Christ turned their attention to the ones who need help the most – the ones who cannot look after themselves.

As disciples, what we say and do has great value in God’s eyes. The disciple of Christ is one who gives to everyone, regardless of their place in society. Giving should be part of the lifestyle of a disciple. He gives from his heart because Christ has loved and graciously given to him. We need to see with the eyes of Christ all the diverse kinds of people around us.

Jesus tells them that even if they give a cup of cold water in His name, it is a blessing to the receiver as well as to the one who has given it. The water is fresh and clean, because it has just been drawn from the well; it is the best and because of that it will

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quench the thirst of a child. We need to know that we are called to a lifestyle of giving and, when we fulfill that lifestyle, there is great blessing for both the receiver and the giver.

A major role of the discipleship lifestyle is to have a giving and loving heart.

Matthew 28:19-20

*“Go therefore and make **disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

The hearts of disciples are hearts that are willing to go, and to give of themselves. We have all been given a great message of grace and freedom. Christ’s message was a message of good news and we are called to go out and give that Gospel message to others. We are to go to all nations. The body of Christ needs to be spreading the Good News throughout all nations.

However, the disciple is not called to do it alone. As we have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are to go out and do likewise. Baptism means to be immersed or totally covered over. We need to be total immersed in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. We need the fullness of all three in our lives.

Our purpose and goal in going out is to teach these new disciples, helping them to understand and observe how Christ wants them to live. We are to carry out the commands of Christ. If we do this, Christ will be with us wherever we may go. Even if obedience to this call of Christ takes us to the very depths of hurt and pain, He will be there with us.

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This commandment to the disciples involves living Christ-like lifestyles. We take what we have been given, and then go out, sharing through our words and deeds. People need to see in us the demonstration of a discipleship lifestyle.

Luke 6:12-13

*It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He **called** His **disciples** to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:*

Jesus was always setting the example as to what one should be like. Jesus wanted the disciples to see the importance of prayer. Prayer was a major part of Jesus' life; before any major decision, Christ would spend time in praying to His Father. In this Scripture passage it was because He was about to call and choose the twelve disciples.

After spending the whole night in prayer, he called out the twelve by name. Before we can rightly serve, we need to be clearly called. What Jesus was asking of them was to totally and radically change their way of life. They were going to become "Jesus people". When people looked at them they would know, by their lifestyle, that they were Jesus' disciples.

Jesus called his disciples for the purpose of ministry; the Bible said he called them "apostles". This defined to them what they would be – evangelists, messengers, preachers, advocates, champions, pioneers. They would be the forerunners of yet many more disciples to come.

Another point was that He called them to Himself. They were about to enter into a deeper and more personal relationship with Him. They would take on a new discipleship lifestyle.

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Luke 14:27

*“Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My **disciple**.*

Another aspect of what it means to have a discipleship lifestyle is to carry a cross. Jesus was not saying that everyone would carry a physical cross as He would, but that they would have to carry all the pain and suffering of what that cross meant. A discipleship lifestyle will not be easy, and it will be full of lots of challenges. The enemy will try to stop you at every turn.

We need to pick up this cross willingly and follow after Jesus. We need to remember that He will not ask us to walk where He has not already been. He will not leave us or forsake us, but there will be things that, as disciples, we must carry ourselves.

If we are not willing to walk in these steps with Christ, then we will not be able to be one of His disciples. All our comings and goings must be with Christ. There is not a another way to heaven – it is only through Christ Jesus.

Suffering and challenges will demonstrate to Whom we belong, as well as showing the kinds of persons we are in character and nature. The cross is the great equalizer. The cross is to be part of the discipleship lifestyle.

Luke 14:33

*“So then, none of you can be My **disciple** who does not give up all his own possessions.*

Possessions will either possess you or you will possess them; Christ wants us to live a lifestyle where He owns all and we are just stewards of these things. Many disciples end up in a lifestyle whereby they become “bound” to things. They cannot

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move or even give because they are so ensnared by so many different things.

Jesus wants people who are going to be free from bondage to the things of this world. He wants people who are not held back by their possessions. We have to be willing to give up all for the cause of Christ. These words are strong words for the disciple, but Christ wanted them to count the cost before they said, “Yes, Lord”.

In a very real sense, Jesus had nothing, but He had everything. Where is our treasure located, here on earth or in heaven? Each day the discipleship lifestyle is one of putting up treasures in heaven, not for our glory, but for Christ’s glory. We need to sow so we can reap.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: Are we trying to get all, or are we giving up all, for the kingdom of heaven? The discipleship call gives us a free choice to come or to go, but with the “discipleship lifestyle” there is only one way to go.

John 8:31-32

*So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly **disciples** of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*

The teachings of Jesus are liberating to the disciple. The lifestyle of the disciple is walking day by day according to God’s word. These words of His are not there to try to bind us, but to set us free. We know so little of the Word and that’s why the enemy has so much success over, and in, our lives.

As disciples, we need to believe, and then walk, the pathway of submission to His words. When we do so, we can then

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be truly called His disciples. The promise is that when we know the truth, that same truth will set us free.

People all over the world are looking for freedom in all kinds of places, failing to realize that if they would follow Christ's Word, they would experience freedom – the freedom of a discipleship lifestyle.

John 13:35

*“By this all men will know that you are My **disciples**, if you have love for one another.”*

The discipleship bears fruit - one of these fruits is love. Christ first loved us, so we should follow His example by loving others, even our enemies.

Christ took all the commandments and “boiled them down” to only two. The first is to love God with all our hearts and the second is to love our neighbour as ourselves. There is no one that loves you more than you do yourself.

People need to see that there something different about us; they need to see that we love others as we love ourselves. Rather than always looking inward, we need to look outward to others.

In I Corinthians 13, Paul teaches the church the meaning of true love. To the Ephesian church, he teaches the husband that if he truly loves his wife, he will be willing to lay down his life for her. This is what Christ did for us! Out of great love for us, He was willing to lay down His life for us.

Our discipleship lifestyle must have, at its root, a love for one another.

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John 15:8

*“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My **disciples**.”*

Every tree is known by the fruit that it produces. Jesus wanted His disciples to know this truth – that if they are truly following after Him, people will see Christ shining through them. The proof is in the fruit; we will bear either the fruit of the world, or we will bear heavenly fruit. We need to seriously ask ourselves what kind of fruit we will bear.

Jesus told the disciples that they are like branches, called and chosen to be grafted into Him, the true vine. When we are grafted in, we rely on the root system and the vine as our strength and life support. Jesus warns us that, if we, as branches, do not produce fruit, we will be removed and cast into the fire.

What people should in us see is not so much the gifts of the Spirit, but rather the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit should be evidence of our outward ministry, while the gifts have been put inside by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Christ wants us to bear lots of fruit, not just once in our while, but daily and abundantly. He wants us to have life and have it more abundantly.

As disciples in the body of Christ, we need to be “fruit inspectors”, helping one another to produce fruit worthy of our calling. Where we are strong, we need to help the weak. Where we are weak, we need to be helped by the strong. Also, as disciples, we need to be willing to undergo pruning by the Father, because it is through pruning (trials and struggles) that more fruit will be produced.

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Acts 11:26

*“And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the **disciples** were first **called Christians** in Antioch.”*

The church in Antioch recognized that they needed Paul to equip and train the disciples of Christ. Paul accepted their invitation, came to them and ministered in their church. The history of this church tells us that this church became strong and firmly grounded in Christ. They also caught the vision of sending out the Gospel message to others.

Paul trained and equipped the Antioch believers in the discipleship lifestyle. We know this was significant because the Scriptures tell us that Antioch was the first place where the disciples became known as Christians. The word Christian means “Christ-like”. People heard and saw how these disciples demonstrated the life of Christ within them. They were living a discipleship lifestyle that others could see. What a powerful testimony to this church and to the individual disciples!

II Peter 1:10-11

*“Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His **calling** and choosing you; for as long as you **practice** these things, you will never stumble: for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”*

A discipleship lifestyle is not something that just “falls out of heaven” or something that comes naturally to us. It has to be learned and then practiced; after a time of practice and living it out, we will then understand the purpose of Christ’s truth and His ways.

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We need to make certain about our calling and the way we are obeying and living out that calling; if we do not keep alert, we may find that we are walking down a road to destruction and not a road to freedom and life.

Practicing the discipleship lifestyle leads to good habits, and good habits will keep us from stumbling. Why? Because we will not be walking in darkness, but we will be walking in the light of Jesus Christ. Jesus tells His disciples that a discipleship lifestyle is the doorway into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This lifestyle brings us into the very throne room of Christ, but it all begins with a personal relationship with Him.

Christ promises that, when we walk in his ways, He will abundantly supply all our needs.

The key is to make certain of our calling and lifestyle. He called us and chose us and, because of that, He will look after us. As you walk in Him, He will walk in you. A discipleship lifestyle begins and ends in Christ.

Resolution:

We are called to live a moment-by-moment lifestyle that will model and reflect Jesus Christ to a lost world. We mirror Christ to others. They look at us and they should see Christ in us.

Your call is to become a disciple. The fruit produced by a disciple is that of making other disciples. Discipleship lifestyle is a daily commitment to the truth and teachings of Christ. It is a daily walk of following after Christ and His call on our lives. It is asking the question moment by moment, “What would Jesus do?”

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We are to become disciplined for a new way of living. We are to walk in Christ's footsteps. Our way of life should reflect Christ in everything we say and do. Just as musicians practice until they have the music perfected, our lives should be disciplined with a regimen of practicing and bettering ourselves in Christ. As we do so, we will see maturity and fruit from our labours.

For Christians, discipleship should become a culture with specific distinctives which readily identify them as citizens of the kingdom of God. We are called to be Christ's ambassadors, representatives of His Kingdom.

Today the goal of many students is to go to university. They seem to think that higher education will help them to get a better position in life. The idea of higher level education is to become more disciplined in a specific field of learning. You pay money to have others help discipline you with the repeated practice of studies and exams. Christian discipleship is the process of being disciplined by the Holy Spirit in Christ. We are to become the best we can in all ways for Christ.

Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What do I hear and understand God speaking to me about from this chapter? When I look in the mirror of God's Word, do I see a disciple sold out for Christ or just a Christian by name?

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RELEVANCE:

Are my actions and habits at home and at work demonstrating that I am a disciple of Christ? What actions and habits need to be changed in my everyday walk with Christ?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that you may become more discipline in your walk with Christ and that your life will reflect to those around you a lifestyle of total discipleship commitment. Pray that when the challenges of life come upon you, you will reflect and shine for Jesus.

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Chapter Fourteen

Called to Sow and Reap

*Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, four months between **planting** and **harvesting**. But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already **ripe** for **harvest**. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they **harvest** is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the **harvester** alike! You know the saying, one **plants** and another **harvests**. And it’s true. I sent you to **harvest** where you didn’t **plant**; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the **harvest**.”*

John 4:34-38 (NLT Bible)

We are all called to be workers, sowers and reapers of the gospel for Christ; the disciple may fulfill one or more of these roles, depending on what Christ has called him or her to do. The disciple is like a farmer in a spiritual sense. We are planting, and harvesting people lives for the Kingdom of Heaven.

Too often we receive the word of God into our own hearts, not realizing that each one of us has been given precious seed to broadcast throughout this world. We are to sow the seed in a huge field – the world. We also need to be aware that there are different seasons for different operations. We have the springtime when the seed needs to be planted, then the summer when the plants need to be cultivated and matured; then comes the fall when we go out to bring in the harvest. Lastly, there is the wintertime when the land is dormant. Different “fields” may well be experiencing different “seasons”. Yes, the grain may be ripe, but we need to ask God which field is ready for the harvest.

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In the planting and harvesting ministry, timing is everything. It is a ministry to which we are all called, and we need to be praying that more people will catch the vision and get involved. Many, many “crops” may be rotting in the fields because there was no one to bring in the harvest.

We are also called according to talents and gifting. God has put within each one a ministry potential. This ministry involves working together for one purpose, that purpose being to bring in the harvest.

There are a few words we need to define and reflect on that will help us to better understand this chapter and our role in sowing and reaping.

To *work* means to: bear, bring, conduct, convey, fetch, haul, lift, move, relay, take transfer, transmit, transport, toil, support, sustain, underpin.

To *sow* means to: broadcast, disseminate, implant, lodge, plant, and scatter seed.

To *reap* means to: acquire, bring in, collect, cut, derive, gain, garner, gather, get, harvest, obtain, win.

All three of these words are action words in which the disciple of Christ is called to be involved. They are all key to the call and ministry of the disciple of Christ.

We must see, know, and clearly understand that Christ has called us to go out. We are called to move forward, not to stand still, to give, not to keep. Freely we have received; therefore, we are to freely give. We need to ask God to show us where the nearest harvest field is, then join up with other members of the body to bring in the harvest. There is a great work to be done and

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we will never experience the true joy that Christ has for us unless we get involved in the activities of sowing, nurturing or cultivating, or harvesting this great crop that has been planted. Those who work together, we are told, will all rejoice together when the harvest is brought in.

We need to pray that God will soften our hearts, open up our eyes and ears so we may see and hear what is going on around us. The Holy Spirit is doing a great work; we just need to get in tune with what He is doing. When the end times come, the harvest will be even greater. God is calling out for laborers. How will we personally respond?

Scripture Signpost:

These Scriptures will act like signpost, indicating what the call of Christ should be in our lives. It is important that, as disciples, we understand how to sow and reap for the cause of Christ. Let us now hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Deuteronomy 24:19

*“When you **reap** your **harvest** in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*

God wanted the harvest to be a blessing, not only to the farmer who planted the crop, but also to the poor and to the needy stranger. We are not to grasp everything we can get for ourselves, but should give to others also.

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In today's world, giving to others would suggest that we think of the person who is 'passing through' or maybe someone who does not fit in with your local people or your culture. We should also remember the one who has no family; we should be family for them so that, for a little bit of time, they may be encouraged by us. We need to care for the one who has lost everything – maybe their partner in life has died and they are all alone.

We all have the same basic needs. No matter how rich or poor, we all need food. We all need to "harvest" something each day if we are to eat and survive. God wanted his people to be aware of the others around them and to care for them. For the farmer, God also attached a blessing to this way of thinking – that when they gave, they would receive a blessing in return. They had planted, and God gave the increase; now it was their privilege to encourage others by showing love and mercy to them. God and man working together produces the results, both in farming and discipleship living.

Psalm 126:5-6

*Those who sow in tears shall **reap** with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of **seed**, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his **sheaves** with him.*

There is a principle that man needs to understand about how God works with and through people. When David wrote this psalm, he shared a truth with man – a truth that can be very hard to comprehend and understand. We are to remember that if we have sown, a day is coming when we will reap. If you have sown in tears, and come back to that "field" at harvest time, you will reap joy. Many people have sown tears over a loss of a loved one, or over the pain of struggling children or a hurting friend. But if you

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have “sown tears” into their lives, you will in due season see a harvest once again.

Life is always going to be full of challenges that will bring us to the place of sorrow and tears; however, we do not have to remain there because, in time (if we look to God as our hope and strength) the sun will again rise over these dark days. We are told the darkest hour is just before daybreak – the sun always appears on the horizon the next day.

In the midst of challenges and sorrows, this Psalm says that the key is to keep taking your “seed bag”, going out into the fields and planting. No matter what the situation you find yourself in, keep “planting”; there will be a time of joyful harvest if we do not grow weary in well doing.

We should not always focus on the present, remembering that when we sow in faith, a harvest will arise from that seed of faith.

Matthew 9:37-38

*Then He said to His **disciples**, “The **harvest** is plentiful, but the workers are few”. “Therefore beseech the Lord of the **harvest** to send out workers into His **harvest**.”*

The disciples were accustomed to seeing things from a natural perspective; Christ wanted them to see things differently. He wanted them to see things from a spiritual perspective. From their natural perspective, they saw people with hard hearts going nowhere; whereas, as Christ looked out on the multitude, He saw a “great harvest”. The disciples saw difficulties and challenges; Jesus saw fields full of beautiful grain.

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The issue that Jesus wanted them to see was not the grain or even the fields; He wanted them to see that there were so few laborers. The challenge was not with the grain, but with the hearts of the laborers – the disciples. The disciples saw people as a lot of work, whereas Jesus saw people as a harvest of potential and opportunity.

Christ also wanted to show His disciples that there were seasons to ministry; there is a time of sowing and also a season for harvesting. Planting during harvest time may result in destruction of the harvest!

He wanted His disciples to see that He was the Lord of the harvest; He wanted the disciples to see the need to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out more laborers to bring in Christ's harvest. All around the world different fields are ripe for harvest. We need to be hearing from the Holy Spirit which fields are ripe and then answer the call of Christ to go there to bring in the harvest. Others have planted, others have cultivated; now we need to go and bring in the harvest for the glory of Christ.

Matthew 13:3-9

*And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the **sower** went out to **sow**; and as he **sowed**, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. "But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. "Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. "And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. "He who has ears, let him hear."*

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Matthew 13:18-23

*“Hear then the parable of the **sower**. “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been **sown** in his heart. This is the one on whom **seed** was **sown** beside the road. “The one on whom **seed** was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. “And the one on whom **seed** was **sown** among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. “And the one on whom **seed** was **sown** on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears **fruit** and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.*

Mark 4:14-24

*“The **sower** sows the word. “These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is **sown**; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been **sown** in them. “In a similar way these are the ones on whom **seed** was **sown** on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. “And others are the ones on whom **seed** was **sown** among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. “And those are the ones on whom **seed** was **sown** on the good soil; and they hear the*

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word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.”

Jesus would often teach the people through parables. He would tell people an earthly story which had a heavenly meaning. Jesus wanted His disciples and followers to look more deeply into what he was teaching them. So, He told them a story about sowing and reaping. He tells them of a sower broadcasting seed and how this seed fell on different types of ground; depending on where it fell, a variety of results occurred. The first thing was that they needed to be a sower from an earthly point of view his listeners understood what he was saying, but the Scripture tells us that the disciples completely missed the spiritual truth embedded within this parable.

The first thing they needed to know was that the sower was sowing the Word of God. Second, they needed to understand that the four types of soil on which this seed fell represented the kinds of hearts people have. The last point He wanted the disciples to understand was that, even though there are all these different kinds of hearts, they must not stop sowing the seed. We must keep sowing because, in due season, there will be a great harvest from that seed. We so often focus on the negative. Inevitably some seed will fall on hearts where it will produce little or nothing; Jesus wanted the disciples to see that, in spite of those challenges, there will be a harvest – some thirty, sixty and a hundredfold. Your few seeds deposited in faith will yield a harvest.

Yes, they needed to understand how some seed would fall in difficult places. The world is full of places that are hard, rocky or weedy, but we are to keep broadcasting and sowing the seed. We are all called to be sowers; we will receive negative responses to the seed we sow. But we should not grow weary because, in due time, there will be a harvest. Some disciples will labour in “field

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preparation” and, year after year, will keep planting. In time the seed will germinate and produce a harvest.

The disciple’s basic job description is to be a seed planter. We all need to understand the reality that there will be problems, but if God has called us to sow we need to be faithful in planting, planting and more planting.

Matthew 13:24-30

*Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who **sowed** good **seed** in his field. “But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and **sowed** tares among the wheat, and went his way. “But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. “The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not **sow** good **seed** in your field? How then does it have tares?’ “And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ “But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the **tares**, you may uproot the wheat with them. ‘Allow both to grow together until the **harvest**; and in the time of the **harvest** I will say to the **reapers**, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”*

Another principle that the disciples needed to understand was that there is an enemy out there whose aim it is to destroy all that for which they labor. There are not just four types of soils but there are various types of seed seeking to grow in those soils.

Jesus tells us that while the farmer was sleeping an enemy came and sowed tares (weeds). These can be seeds which may look much like grain in their early stages of growth, but when

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they get past the germination stage, they begin to steal the needed nutrients, sunshine and moisture from the good seed. Such tares can be very destructive and, if not properly dealt with, can destroy the good plant.

Jesus tells his disciples/laborers how to deal with the problem. He tells them to let the weeds grow until harvest time and, at that point, the laborer will go out into the fields and harvest them, bind them into bundles and then burn them. Such “plants” will not know until the end – when it is too late – that they are not good plants.

The enemy is always seeking to devour and destroy all that he can. He wants to steal the hearts of people and fill them with all kinds of bad seed which will, in the end, produce nothing of value. The enemy and deceiver comes at us in two ways; the first is to cause our hearts to be hard like a well-trodden pathway, or hearts that are filled with rocks or hearts that are very shallow. If that does not work, then he comes with thousands of types of bad seed that will take up all our time and energy and will, in the end, lead to destruction and death.

The disciple is called to be a “soil inspector” as well as a good seed planter. To do both well, we have to daily ask God’s help so that, in the proper season, we will harvest a crop that will bring honour and glory to Christ.

Matthew 13:31-32

*He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard **seed**, which a man took and **sowed** in his field; and this is smaller than all other **seeds**, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”*

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Jesus continues to teach His disciples concerning the principle of sowing and reaping. This time He uses the picture of a mustard seed. Here He links one of the smallest seeds to the reality of true faith.

People often say that they do not have enough faith to go out or to move forward. Jesus wanted the disciples to see that if they place just the smallest seed of faith that they have into His hands, it will grow and produce fruit and bless others. So often, we give up before we even start. We see nothing but the negative and the weakness of our faith. However, every journey (field) presented to us can be begun only by being willing to plant the smallest seed of faith. If we plant nothing, we will receive no harvest at all.

As disciples, we need to take that which God has given to us and then plant it. We must look within our hearts and search out where a little seed of faith dwells, and then plant that seed into God's kingdom.

A little seed of faith can produce a large "tree". It may take time to grow and, at first, we may wonder whether it will produce anything of value. But, in due season, it will produce if we just plant it and then trust God for the results.

Mark 4:26-29

*And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts **seed** upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the **seed** sprouts and grows- how, he himself does not know. "The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the **harvest** has come."*

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In this passage Mark describes how a planted seed grows. The seed will produce if we are just patient and do our part in nurturing that plant. The truth the disciples needed to learn was that while they were indeed seed planters, it is always God who causes the plant to grow. The farmer always wonders after he plants the field, “Will the crop grow?” He does not understand the underlying biology of how the plant grows, but the One who created the seed does know, and we just have to trust Him.

The disciple is called to plant, nurture, and then harvest the crop produced by that seed; God’s part is to take our “faith seed” we had when planting and then to make it grow under His anointing and power. He takes the natural, touches it with His supernatural power, and out of that will come fruit.

Everything must go through stages of growth but in due time it will mature. As disciples, we must keep our eyes and ears open for when the Father says, “Now, go forth and bring in the harvest.”

John 4:34-38 (NLT Bible)

*Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, four months between **planting** and **harvesting**. But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already **ripe** for **harvest**. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they **harvest** is people brought to eternal life. What joy a waits both the planter and the **harvester** alike! You know the saying, one **plants** and another **harvests**. And it’s true. I sent you to **harvest** where you didn’t **plant**; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the **harvest**.”*

The disciples were concerned that Jesus was not eating enough. They felt He was not taking good care of Himself, but

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food was not His number one priority. His top goal was to fulfil the will of His Father in heaven. He also wanted them to understand that time was short for Him. He was on a prophetic time line that needed to be fulfilled in all its detail. The Father had a purpose for the Son – just like the Son has a purpose for us. As disciples, we need to get in step with His timing and will for our lives, and for the lives of those around us whom Christ has made ready for the harvest.

The challenge was that the disciples needed to wake and see what was going on around them, both physically and spiritually. They could not see that the fields were ripe for harvest. They were just walking right on by, ripe field after ripe field.

God wants to harvest people for His kingdom; everything has been paid for, but now the work has to be done. All harvest preparations are in place. Now it is time to bring in the harvest! When this is done there will be great joy, both for the planter and the harvester. We, as disciples, play an all-important role in harvesting this crop for Christ. Some have planted, others have cultivated, and still others have been called to bring in the harvest.

Just as Jesus told his disciples that he was sending them, He has called us to go forth. We will reap where we have not planted. Others will already have done the work. Many men and women, pastor and missionaries, have planted and cultivated; there were even those who have been martyred for the cause of Christ. They have sown with their very lives so that we could reap a glorious harvest.

As disciples, the time has come to step up and move forward with Christ. Everything is prepared, but are we ready to go forth in faith for Christ Jesus?

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I Corinthians 9:11

*If we **sowed** spiritual things in you, is it too much if we **reap** material things from you?*

Paul wanted the Corinthian church to know that many of the principles in the physical world also hold true in the spiritual world. We are called to reap a spiritual harvest but, before we can do so, we must first plant spiritual seed. If we limit our investments in spiritual seed, we will receive only small returns on the little that we have invested.

Paul had poured himself into their lives as an equippier and teacher. He had been a father to them, but they needed to be reminded to give something back into his life as well. Paul was not commanding them to do so, but they needed to remember that the principle of sowing and reaping was both an earthly and a heavenly truth of God.

A disciple is called to sow or plant in every area of life. The disciple can only reap what he has planted; by sowing the seed of His word, disciples will experience the abundant life Christ wants to give us.

II Corinthians 9:10-11

*Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for **sowing** and increase the **harvest** of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.*

Seed has to be given to us by the Lord – it is not something that we can produce on our own. The seed is something for which we must ask God. Nevertheless, before we are entrusted with that seed, we must demonstrate that we will be faithful with what He

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has given to us. As disciples, we miss so much of God's blessing because we have not been faithful with the little things that He has given. We want the "all" first; forgetting that even in a human family relationship, a father will start the child with smaller portions and responsibilities before entrusting him with greater opportunities and challenges.

God gives to us so that we can give back to Him for the purpose of our growth. He sows into us so that, together, we can sow back into the lives of others. We are to sow the Gospel message, which is a message of grace and righteousness. As we look to Christ, He plants grace into our hearts. Simultaneously, He plants His righteousness, which allows us to come before the Father.

As we sow the Gospel message, we begin to experience liberty and freedom which, in turn, will bear the fruit of thanksgiving. Christ calls us into a ministry and a lifestyle that should be producing fruit. If we are not producing fruit, we need to be evaluating ourselves and seeing what is going wrong.

When we plant grace, righteousness, freedom, and thankfulness, we will receive back, not only what we planted, but much more grace, righteousness, freedom and thankfulness. This is God's way and law – when we sow abundantly, we will reap abundantly.

Galatians 6:7-8

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man **sows**, this he will also **reap**. For the one who **sows** to his own flesh will from the flesh **reap** corruption, but the one who **sows** to the Spirit will from the Spirit **reap** eternal life.*

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The Galatian church was missing out on a truth that, as disciples, they should already have known. They were being deceived into believing some things about God that were not true. God never changes. He is always the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We are the ones who need to change. The Galatian disciples had forgotten that they would reap the same kind of seed which they had sown. That is the law of nature and of God.

If you sow with your flesh (meaning mind or body), you will reap a harvest that you may not desire. So often we want to blame God or Satan for many of our problems. However, the key problem is that we have been “sowing to the flesh” and we now are only reaping what we have first planted. We need to take responsibility for our “farming practices”.

We need to open up our spiritual eyes and start sowing with our spirits. We need to be investing and sowing spiritually; by doing so, we will be laying up treasures in heaven where moth, dust or rust cannot destroy. We plant so sparingly when it comes to spiritual things; because of that, our spiritual bank account is so close to being empty. If you sow, you will reap. If you do not sow, you will lose that which you already have. Remember the three stewards who were given talents to sow and invest! While the master was away, one of them just buried his talent in the ground. He ended up not only losing that which was entrusted to him, but everything else as well. We have so much of God’s seed buried deeply in our hearts, but producing nothing. If we do not begin investing, we will lose it all.

We are called to plant and invest. Why? Because Christ wants us to experience “the joy of the new wine”, the joy of harvest time. We need to get out the Gospel, investing in people on the highways and byways of life! You will be glad you did. You

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cannot take earthly treasure with you. The only way you can get treasure in heaven is to invest in people here on earth.

The most important end goal is the harvest of eternal life.

Resolution:

What then shall I do, stay or go, sit or stand, remain or go forward? We must personally wrestle with the call of Christ for sowing, cultivating and reaping. This is not an option to “take it or leave it”. It is a command to go out, take a risk and get involved. Faith is not faith until we move beyond our own comfort zone.

As the last day approaches, the deciding factor will be between those who go and those who stay. Jesus said that the “sheep” and the “goats” said and did a lot of the same things, but one group was with Christ and the other group Christ didn’t know. We need to check the foundation on which we are building. A true disciple sees outside of his own wants and desires. He sees the real-life needs. We are in a life and death situation here on earth, and it is time for action.

The joy of ministry can only come from working in ministry. We are all called to be “farmers”. We will work on different “farms” and we will use different tools and equipment. We will even plant differently and cultivate differently and harvest in a variety of ways but there is one truth that is the same for all - it is God who gives the increase. That is why we need to be labour, not according to our will, but according to His will. Pray that God will give you wisdom and understanding on how to use your gifts and talents and to know the place to which He has called you to work. You need to understand what season you are in. This will make a difference in the kinds of tools and equipment that will be needed and used.

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that you will become more disciplined in your walk with Christ, and that your life will reflect to those around you a desire to work in God's vineyard. Pray for passion for the lost. Pray that your heart will be open. Pray that God will show you clearly where you are to minister in this great harvest field.

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Chapter Fifteen

Called to Leadership

*When the lord saw that he turned aside to look, God **called** to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses! And he said, here I am. ...Therefore, come now, and I will **send you** to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.*

Exodus 3:4 & 10

What is so needed today are people who have a call for leadership, men and women whom God has raised up for specific tasks and ministries - people who are willing to lead and be led.

There are a variety of leaders today with all kinds of abilities and gifts. But many of these called leaders, within their level of gifting, do not truly understand their calling or how they are to function. We are all leaders of some type or another, but are we leading where God has called us to be?

The world has had a variety of different types of leaders. Some leaders are controlling and often dictatorial. Then there are those who lead teams of people. Such Christian leaders are set apart by God and recognized by their peers as those who can lead.

Some people strive for leadership and there are others who almost have to be pushed into the position.

Let us take a few moments to define four key words, all of which are found within the word "leadership".

Lead: conduct, escort, guide, pilot, precede, show the way, steer, usher, influence, persuade, prevail, command, direct,

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govern, head, manage, preside over, supervise, experience, direction, example, guidance, model, principle.

Leader: boss, captain, chief, commander, conductor, counsellor, director, guide, head, number one, principal, ruler.

Leadership: administration, direction, directorship, domination, guidance, management, running, authority, command, control, influence, initiative, pre-eminence.

Ship: a boat that sails on water. Everything is stored within and all the people work together to sail it.

There are many books dealing with the subject of leadership. They usually focus on characteristics and principles of leadership, but few deal with the call of God to leadership.

There are also various descriptive words describing the call of a leader and for identifying a leader.

Leadership in the Bible is looked at a little differently. In the Old Testament we have God Who is the leader and He delegates His leadership responsibility to others. In the New Testament Jesus Christ is the Head of the church which is His body. The New Testament idea is that we are not so much leaders, but rather “under shepherds” with Christ as the chief shepherd.

The Bible really shows levels of leadership that are given out by God. He chooses the leader, and then empowers him for a certain ministry or task. They were also called to a specific purpose for a specific time, whereas others were called for a lifetime of ministry and service to others.

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We cannot all be leaders in everything; at some levels, all leaders are also followers. Those who teach will held at a greater accountability level than those who do not teach.

In this chapter, we want to pick out some leaders and see how God called and used their character traits to instruct, train, and lead others for His glory. Their testimonies can speak into our lives. We will see that God calls and validates His call of these people. They are not perfect, but they are people that seem to have enough faith to trust God for what He is doing in their lives.

Scripture Signpost:

Scripture is the window through which we can see/understand more deeply the call of Christ and the importance of understanding how we may be called by God to lead others. We need to humble ourselves and pray so that, as Christ's disciples, we may draw near and be directed by Him as to how and where we should be ministering.

Exodus 13: 17-18

*Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not **lead** them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." Hence God **led** the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt.*

God: The most important and the most obvious leader we should be following is God. He desires to walk with His leaders and His people hand in hand. God should be the one Who is directing, giving counsel, training and equipping. As it was in the time of Christ while He walked here on earth with the disciples, it

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is the same with us as disciples; we need to be filled daily by the Holy Spirit so that He can empower us and lead us on all the challenging roads that lie ahead of us.

He is the Head, we are the Body. To function properly we must come under His authority and will. He is the Leader Who sees all things here on earth. He has a plan and purpose for each one of us as disciples; therefore, we need to submit to Christ's leadership.

Exodus 3:4 & 10

*When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God **called** to him from the midst of the bush and said, Moses, Moses! And he said, here I am. ...Therefore, come now, and I will **send you** to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt.*

Moses was a man who had lived in the house of Pharaoh. He was accustomed to leading and commanding people. But, because of taking things into his own hands, he became confused about his call, as well as with his role as a leader. After fleeing to the desert, we find him working as a shepherd, tending sheep. It was during this time that God came to him and renewed His call to Moses to be a leader of the people of Israel.

His experience had caused him to challenge God's call; he even doubted his own ability to communicate and to lead people. Moses told God that he would go forward only if Aaron would be his spokesperson.

God had personally called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of bondage. He was to go to the world's most powerful leader and stand up to Him on behalf of God Almighty.

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Moses' call was not just to lead the people out of slavery, but he would have to get them ready to enter into a new land which God had promised them. Moses had to lead these people from being slaves – to being soldiers – to being citizens of a new country. Leaders are people who help others to make changes in their lives. They lead people from one destination to another in life. Leaders are not maintainers but, rather, change agents for followers.

Exodus 18:21 &25

*“Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as **leaders** of thousands of hundreds, of fifties and of tens...Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, **leaders** of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.*

Jethro and Moses: Later, as the Hebrews grew in number, Jethro encouraged Moses to add various levels of leadership. On the basis of ability, some were given leadership over 10, some over 50, some over 100, and some over 1000. It was a way to organize people and keep them moving forward. People needed direct leadership. Leadership from a distance was not going to work. People needed good strong leadership then, as they do today.

Another reason for delegating leadership is because leaders cannot be all things to all people. When the group grows too large, leaders do not have the time or energy to help everyone. Leadership is not just counselling but it is also training and equipping people to grow and stand on their own two feet. We need to be preparing others for leadership as the body of Christ grows. When leadership is properly trained and organized, the whole organism will continue to grow and mature.

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Deuteronomy 31:23

*Then He **commissioned** Joshua the son of Nun, and said, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you.”*

Joshua was a true servant who desired with all his heart to serve his leader, Moses. He did what he was called upon to do, having faith and trust in his leader. He became a true friend to Moses but never sought to have the top position. He just wanted to be a servant leader. He would later lead others as he himself was led by his mentor.

The time had now come for Moses to hand over leadership. Moses knew it would have to be someone who was a warrior at heart, but who had great compassion for his people – someone who knew how to wait upon and hear from the Lord God Almighty. As a leader, Joshua’s character had been proven over the years.

When the time came for the change, the former leader commissioned the new leader for this great task. Moses encouraged Joshua to be strong and courageous and to trust the Lord. However, it was not just Moses’ commissioning, but it was God Himself. Also, the people who knew and daily watched Joshua gave their affirmation.

Joshua had been mentored, trained, and equipped for this leadership call. His task was now to take the Hebrews over the Jordan River and conquer the land for the people. After becoming leader, Joshua’s first command was to call the people to prayer and fasting so that they could ready their hearts for the task that lay ahead. Because of his personal relationship with God, Joshua had the faith to lead and to move these people forward into the promised land.

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Judges 2:7 & 3:1 & 6:14

*The people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the **elders** who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel...Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan)...The LORD looked at him and said, "Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian. Have I not **sent** you?"*

Judges: The book of Judges is an account of leaders God raised up to deliver, train, and equip his people. These leaders were called to bring the people back under the leadership of God. Time after time the people would go astray and wander away from the call of God. They would repeatedly go back into bondage and would stay in that state for many years until their hearts would be convicted, and they would see that they needed to call upon the leadership of the Lord God Almighty.

What follows demonstrates how God selects, appoints, and raises up certain people for a specific time to lead His people.

Elders: The people of God did have leaders who were known as elders. It was their job to give direction to individuals and smaller groups of people. These elders had seen the work of Joshua and how God was with him. They were mentored by Joshua and, because of his leadership example, the people were blessed and ministered to by God.

Ehud: The challenges for leaders often occur when people have gone through times of blessing; the sad reality is that they begin to go wayward, falling away from the principles established by God and following their own wills and desires. Leaders must watch that they themselves do not fall into the trap of

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complacency; if they do, their followers will soon imitate their example and patterns of behavior. Some leaders in the Bible come from a place of obscurity. As in the case of Ehud, we may know little about them, but they leave a large mark on people and nations.

Gideon: Even if we do not look for responsibility, it may find us. God sometimes uses leadership responsibilities to build character and faith into our lives. Gideon was not interested in becoming a deliverer, but God was interested in him. God wanted to show Gideon His ability and power as God, and that Gideon needed to have faith to trust Him. The people had cried out for mercy and deliverance, but they needed a godly leader to break the ropes and cords of bondage in which they had been ensnared for years.

I Samuel 3:4 & 6 & 8 & 10 & 20

That the LORD called Samuel; and he said, "Here I am" ...The LORD called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he answered, "I did not call, my son, lie down again." ...So the LORD called Samuel again for the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli discerned that the LORD was calling the boy...Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." ...All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD.

Samuel: Sometimes, possibly when adult leadership cannot be found, God will commission a child for leadership. Many children and young people have been called by God and, when the time is right, He opens the door for their leadership. We need to

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see clearly that, in the end, God is the one Who raises up key people for leadership. We do not always realize that we reap what we have sown. If we do not take the time to seek God first concerning open leadership positions, we could be causing more challenges to ourselves and others.

His mother (Hannah) set Samuel aside for God's service. If He gave her a son, she was going to give him back to God. And it was only after a few days of moving to the home of Eli the priest that God called out to Samuel. This was the first step in the building of a long-term relationship.

Later, Samuel was used mightily of God to raise up, anoint, and rebuke kings of Israel. His leadership skills were personally crafted by the hand of God.

Ezra 7:6 & 10

*This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the LORD his God was **upon him**...For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

Ezra: Here is a man is called into leadership for the purpose of clearing the rubble from the temple foundation and beginning the process of rebuilding the physical structure. Not only that, but Ezra also was used by God to clear out the debris from people's hearts and to begin to rebuild a people for God's glory.

The leadership call on Ezra was to go back to the destroyed city of Jerusalem – a city that was unprotected by walls – to rebuild God's house. During this time, he also found the Word of

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God (the scrolls), using them to begin teaching the people. It was not long after this that revival began to take place. People repented, and hearts were changed.

God needs leaders to pick up the Word, take a stand for its truth and teach it to people so God can “set the captive free” and bring about revival.

Esther 4:14

*“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty **for such a time as this?**”*

Esther: Even though a foreigner in exile, she found herself queen of a country. But it didn’t stop there! She was going to be used by God to lead her people from death into life. She received guidance from her uncle on what to do. God used Esther to negate the evil influence of Haman on the king, and help the king to overcome a wrong decision that he had made.

Mordecai had raised Esther after her parents died. He became a leader and mentor for her. We can see the fruit of his leadership in the way Esther dealt with the king and with Haman, who wanted to destroy all the Jews.

Mordecai’s oft-used quotation directed to Esther is that God had likely raised her up “for such a time as this”. God sees the bigger picture and He knows what is needed in the future. We just need to have faith in Him and trust Him to know what is best for us. He calls people into specific leadership roles.

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Isaiah 6:8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Isaiah: Leadership is not always easy to find. There are times when God cannot find anyone to lead, to pick up the banner of Christ and go forward. This happened in Isaiah’s time, when Israel was in trouble as a result of following their own evil ways and desires. God says to Isaiah, “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?” The answer comes back from Isaiah – “God here am I, send me.”

In the North American setting today, it is hard to find leaders who will stand up and lead within the body. The church is suffering greatly because of the lack of leadership. God is calling, but many people are refusing to heed to the call of leadership. Many potential Christian leaders have a greater fear of man than they do of God.

We need trained leaders, not necessarily by schooling, but by mentoring. Later we see that this was something that Isaiah also believed. Leadership is a called position, but it is also a learned position. If we are called, then we need to become the best possible leader in response to that call.

Luke 6:12-13

*It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came, He **called** His disciples to Him and **chose** twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:*

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II Peter 1:3

*Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who **called** us by His own glory and excellence.*

Peter: He was called by Christ while he was working on his nets along the Sea of Galilee. Jesus called out to him and said, “Come follow me and I will make you a fisher of men. For the three years of his time with Jesus, Peter did not do a lot of fishing for men, but he and the other disciples were groomed and mentored to later become leaders of the church.

These untrained men were, in effect, going to school with Christ as the teacher; later they were used to change the entire world for Christ. They made a lot of mistakes. Peter denied Christ three times during Christ’s greatest hour of need, but in the end, Peter was called to a major position of leadership.

Peter’s call eventually resulted in his taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. His faith in Christ and obedience to His call eventually cost Peter his life. Leadership is not easy but in the end the rewards are great; they may not be realized here on earth but will certainly be experienced in heaven.

Acts 15:22

*Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to **choose** men from among them to **send** to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas - Judas **called** Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren*

James was also was a disciple of Christ; his main role was to give leadership to the church in Jerusalem. When disciples from different regions came to Jerusalem, they would report to the

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Jerusalem church leadership, of which James was probably the head.

In the book of Acts at the Council of Jerusalem, Paul & Barnabas reported what the Lord was doing amongst the Gentiles. Those who came to faith in Christ were both Jews and Gentiles, and there needed to be a godly understanding between these two groups within the church. James was the leader who proclaimed the final accord that would be delivered to the various churches, especially the church in Antioch.

Leaders need to see the bigger picture; they need to understand that their decisions are far-reaching. We are not islands unto ourselves. The decisions we make today, as individuals and as leaders, will affect people now and throughout subsequent history. The decisions that were made by these leaders back at the Jerusalem Council are still affecting the church of Jesus Christ worldwide today.

Acts 6:3 & 5 & 8

*“Therefore, brethren, **select** from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task... The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they **chose** Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch...And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.*

Stephen: We know little about Stephen other than that the disciples, with God’s approval, called and appointed him to the position of deacon in the church of Jesus Christ. The purpose of a deacon was to serve and minister to the widows and the poor. But

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Stephen had other abilities and giftings, one of which was to be a proclaimer of the Gospel.

Stephen had a deep personal relationship with Christ. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures and knew how they related to the Gospel of Christ. He led and served under other people, but God also used him to lead and minister to others.

Stephen became the church's first martyr.

Acts 9: 15-16

*But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a **chosen** instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."*

Paul: Christ had to get hold of Paul's life. He was a good leader but for the wrong side! As a Pharisee, Saul was already receiving authorization from the high priest and other leaders to put Christians in jail. Now, very unexpectedly, he was going to meet Christ face to face and be called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul's leadership was strong. He knew the Word well and was able to direct it pointedly. As a leader, he was not afraid to correct those who stepped out of line or were preaching another gospel. He even confronted Peter at the Jerusalem council.

We need strong leaders today who will take a clear stand on the Word. There is no room for political correctness. As a leader, not everyone will like your leadership direction. This also happened to Christ. He told all His followers what it meant to be a true disciple, at that time many left Him except the twelve (Luke 6:66). Leadership can be lonely, but we must remember that Christ

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will always be with us. It is not the numbers that count, but the quality of the disciple that matters.

II Timothy 1:8-9

*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and **called** us with a holy **calling**, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.*

Timothy came from a mixed-race family. As a leader, he would sometimes feel that he was being pulled in two directions, but Paul wanted to keep his mind focused on the fact that he was now part of the family of Jesus Christ. As a young leader, he was called to carry out Christ's will, both for himself and for the church.

Timothy had been led and trained primarily by Paul; the young leader was now being released by Paul to go out to the churches to help them with their problems and to encourage them to keep moving forward in Christ.

There was a divine purpose for Timothy's life. God had called him as a disciple, and now God was moving him into key leadership responsibilities. This is why he was receiving letters of encouragement from Paul.

Hebrews 13:17

*Obey your **leaders** and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*

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Romans 12:8 (NIV Bible)

If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Churches: The structure of church demands that we have leadership throughout the body of Christ. We cannot just be “free floating”, doing whatever we please as individuals. Because the church is a family, there will be a variety of people, cultures, and ages, from little children to senior citizens.

For the body to work in unity and harmony, our leaders need to be obeyed. Leaders must submit to God and we as followers need to submit to their authority – the authority that God and the church has given to them.

The leaders also have a responsibility to look after those that God has given them to lead. If leaders are not willing to look after and “feed” the people, they will soon find out that the people will not follow their direction or counsel. If God asks us to lead, He will help us to do what is right for the people.

Ephesians 4:11-13

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Disciples: Disciples are blessed with a variety of gifts by God, and are called to a variety of leadership levels. This Scripture passage

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has been titled by some as “the five-fold ministry”. Disciples are gifted by God to function in key leadership roles within the church. This verse clearly shows that, just as there are various levels of gifting, there are also varying levels of leadership.

Gifts do not come to us in finished form. We, as disciples, have to learn and understand the full meaning of our gift, and then practice it so we can be a better tool in Christ’s hands. It’s no different with leadership. We start at “stage one”, but through training, mentoring, and practicing, we can become better equipped for a particular service ministry.

Romans 13:1

*Every person is to be in subjection to the **governing authorities**. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*

Governments: There are a variety of leaders both in the church and within our communities. It is difficult for the disciple to mesh or harmonize the two. We know that the Scriptures tell us that the government leaders have been put in place by God. But why then do they often think and do things that run contrary to the Word of God?

These government leaders often force disciples to think deeply about their faith and what they really believe. There is also a thought amongst believers that these government leaders are being used by God to discipline His people because they do not stay true to God’s Word or communicate with Him in prayer.

Resolution:

The Bible is full of men and women who were called by God into specific leadership roles and tasks. Of some we know

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much; of others we have only a name with a few lines of description.

The key for the disciple is to know God's call, and once then to equip yourself to be the best tool possible for Christ.

Leadership is very difficult because people are constantly changing. Cultures are changing, moral standards are changing, traditions are changing, but we must praise God because He never changes! He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow! And if this is true, then the leadership principles in His Word have not changed either.

When leadership positions are awarded by God and others, they will come with authority and power. Without this blessing and calling by God, your leadership will be weak, and few will follow or be guided and helped by you.

When leaders require others to help them lead, they must ensure that God is calling them as well. Leaders need to be able see leadership qualities and character in potential leaders. Do they have a call for that particular ministry and what are their dreams for the future?

A good example of leadership can be found on a sailing ship. The crew has to work as a team with strict leadership principles in place; if one crew member makes a large mistake it could mean the wrecking of the ship and death of the crew. Discipline is drilled into the entire crew so that they will not have to think about their actions in an emergency; they will immediately know what to do because they have been thoroughly trained. It should be the same for the disciple of Christ. Walking as a leader according to the word of God should be second nature – it is simply who they are.

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Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What is God speaking to me about from this chapter? When I look in the mirror, do I see a leader or a follower or both? Am I already leading people around me?

RELEVANCE:

Are my actions and habits at home and at work demonstrating that I am a disciple of Christ? Am I leading with Christ's authority? Do I demand leadership positions or do people see my leadership abilities and seek me out?

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that you will have deeper understanding about leadership and what it means to lead. Pray that God will show you to what level of leadership responsibility he is calling. Pray that you be content with that position until He calls you to something different or to a higher leadership position.

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Chapter Sixteen

Called to Covenants

*For this reason He is the mediator of a new **covenant**, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first **covenant**, those who have been **called** may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*

Hebrews 9:15

Personal relationships eventually develop between people who make promises and covenants with one another. It seems to be in our human nature to want to enter into agreements that benefit both parties. Pledges, like ropes or chains, bind persons to each other. We love to pledge to these types of commitments. Such pledges are not easily broken. Each pledge involves a cost, proving our commitment and showing that this covenant has value to us.

There are three words in Scripture which can help explain the significance of this aspect of the disciple's call. The first is the word **covenant** meaning arrangement, commitment, contract, convention, pact promise, treaty, trust, deed, engage, pledge, undertake. Next is the word, **promise**, meaning to assure, contract, cross of heart, guarantee, pledge, take an oath, vow, assurance, bond, commitment, covenant, engagement, word. Third is the word **vow** which means to affirm, consecrate, dedicate, pledge, promise, undertake solemnly, oath, promise, troth. These words are all related to the concept of making an agreement.

Covenants are agreements which are tied to the future. We have a strong hope that, what we agree on today, will be fulfilled tomorrow. The Bible is full of what we call precious promises,

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made between two people or parties. As disciples, we are called by Christ to enter into a covenant with Him. When we do so, we must keep our part of the promise; He will always keep and fulfill His promise.

We have read before about how God promised to heal the land and deliver the people if they were to humble themselves and pray and to confess their sins. One covenant has at least two parties, and for the whole to work both sides must fulfill their obligations to the agreement.

We vow to each other and this becomes our pledge, binding us together. This agreement stays in place until somebody breaks it.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were three specific men who lived over three generations of time, and God showed Himself steadfast and trustworthy to all of them. He made specific short-term pledges as well as generational promises; in addition, he made covenants which could not be changed or broken throughout all eternity.

Often these promises were symbolized by some type of token; it could be a building or some type of memorial, bearing testimony to what had been promised or vowed. Christ did this with His disciple in the upper room, using the bread and the cup as memorials of His promise.

Scripture Signpost:

The Scriptures themselves are full of promises, pledges and vows. They are there to encourage us and to build our faith. Christ wants to take you even deeper into the meaning of His call to you. It is important that we understand that we bind ourselves to Christ

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in prayer so that, as disciples, we can draw near to Him. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Genesis 6:18

*“But I will establish My **covenant** with you; and you shall enter the ark - you and your sons and your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.*

Many things get done for the Lord when we take a step of faith. God told Noah what He was about to do to the earth. Judgment was coming but, because Noah was faithful to God, they entered into an agreement with each other. God would spare Noah’s family but he would have to build a large boat that would house two of every dry land creature.

Can you imagine what this was going to be like for Noah? He would have to tell his family, and then build this huge ship on dry land! But Noah knew the voice of God. They had a personal relationship with each other. God had a great love for Noah, so He fulfilled his promise to spare his family.

The world at the time of Noah was full of corruption; the people were doing that which seemed right in their own eyes. They thought that there was no true God and that there would be no type of punishment for the way they were living. They did not know that whatever they sowed, they would also reap. The day of judgment was coming.

People must see that there is a true God and that He is the creator of all things; they must realize that He knows all things and that we cannot hide from Him. Noah knew that he was called of God to build the ark, and that God’s covenants were trustworthy. In addition, we see that the covenant that God made with Noah

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touched, not only his own family, but also affected all future generations.

Genesis 9:13

*I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a **covenant** between Me and the earth.*

People must understand that there is a true God and that He is the creator of all things; He knows all things and we cannot hide from Him. Judgment had now taken place upon the earth. The population of all mankind was reduced to just a handful of people who would have to start all over again.

After many days in the ark and realizing the waters had covered all the land but were now receding, it was time to open the door and move out into this new land with the animals and his family. God wanted to put up a memorial for these people to remind them that God punishes sin, as well as to show them that He would never again destroy humanity with a flood. God set a rainbow in the heavens to remind people, each time they saw it, how He keeps His words and covenants.

To this day, the aftermath of many rainstorms – a rainbow – is a reminder to us that God is a covenant-keeping God. This should cause us to fear Him, respect Him, and humble ourselves before Him. We need to realize that if his covenant with Noah was fulfilled, He will also be true with all the other covenants and promises found within the Word of God.

Joshua 3:3 & 6

*And they commanded the people, saying, “When you see the ark of the **covenant** of the LORD your God with the Levitical priests carrying it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it...And Joshua spoke to the priests,*

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*saying, "Take up the ark of the **covenant** and cross over ahead of the people." So they took up the Ark of the Covenant and went ahead of the people.*

At the time of Joshua, many of the covenants of God had been written down and were kept in the Ark of the Covenant. This was to be a reminder to the people of God that He keeps his pledges and promises, and they better be diligent at keeping their part of the agreement if they hoped to enjoy prosperity and blessing from God.

When Joshua and the people were ready to cross over into the promised land, this Ark of the Covenant would be carried in front of them for all to see. The people needed to remember that it was God who was keeping His covenant with Moses and that they were reaping the benefit of these promises in their lives.

Joshua instructed the people to follow the ark, moving when they saw it move. It is the same today with the church; we follow Christ when and where he guides us by His Holy Spirit.

Where the ark was at a particular moment was also a challenge. The first challenge was a large river with fast flowing water. The next challenge was to conquer a fortified city with high walls and an army inside. God wanted the children of Israel to trust in His Word.

The priests, Joshua, and all the leaders had to be people of faith. They moved according to God's will. The leaders were called of God to lead. They were to set an example to the people by carrying out God's commands, believing in His power and in the trustworthiness of His covenants. As the Church, we have been given both the old and new covenants (Old and New Testaments). Will we be committed to trust the Word and obey it?

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II Kings 23:2-3

*The king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the **covenant** which was found in the house of the LORD. The king stood by the pillar and made a **covenant** before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this **covenant** that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the **covenant**.*

King Josiah not only read God's covenants but also made covenants with God. Nor did he do this in secret but did so before the elders, priests and all the people. Everyone needed to see and hear that the leadership was committed to the covenants of God. Are we, or are we not committed?

The king knew that the entire leadership and all the people needed to stand on the firm foundation of God's spoken Word. God's Word was trustworthy. However, God's Word was not just something they needed to hear – this word also needed to be firmly planted in their hearts.

The Word of God had been hidden within the temple for many years. When it was discovered by the priest who did not know that it was there, the king realized it needed to be taken into the hearts of the people. If we desire to see change in people and in countries, the Word of God needs to be available to take root in hearts. The heart is where true revival takes place. God's covenant in his Word is like seed planted in the soil of men's and women's hearts.

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The king vowed to keep the covenants of God's Word. Because Josiah, as well as the leaders and priests, made a vow to obey God's Word, the people also entered into covenant with God. We cannot push others into believing; we need to lead them into action by our example. Our actions are our testimony for the truth of God's Word. Others will follow us as leaders when we fulfill our covenants with God.

I Chronicles 16:15-17

*Remember His **covenant** forever, The word which He commanded to a thousand generations, The **covenant** which He made with Abraham, And His oath to Isaac. He also confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, To Israel as an everlasting **covenant**,*

Covenants are not just for the one, but are for the many. They not only touch our generation but affect many, many generations to come. Our actions today make history; that history touches others who are not yet born.

Covenants made with Abraham were fulfilled in Isaac's life. Further covenants with Isaac touched his life as well as the life of his son, Jacob. Even to this day we reap the fruit of the covenants made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though we live many generations beyond their time.

We must understand that God keeps His word. It is an agreement that He personally vows to keep with mankind. He is trustworthy, then and now, and to all generations that may yet follow. We are told to remember His covenants forever; this is all integral to the call of God in our lives.

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Malachi 3:1

*“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the **covenant**, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.*

God spoke (one last time in the Old Testament) through the prophet Malachi about how He was going to keep His covenants with mankind. The prophet told of a coming messenger who was going to fulfill part of the covenant and clear the way for the rest of the covenant to be fulfilled.

The one who would clear the way was John the Baptist. Then the Lord of Hosts Himself was going to come. This was prophesied 400 years before these two men would arrive. After Malachi's prophecy, Israel entered the quiet years where little, if anything, was heard from God. It was a time of silence before the mighty call of redemption was proclaimed.

In the fullness of time Jesus, through His life, was going to fulfill Malachi's prophecy so that everyone could hear the Good News. John the Baptist would introduce the message of repentance and Jesus would become the avenue through Whom people, by faith, could receive the forgiveness of sin.

John represented the end of one covenant and Christ the beginning of another covenant. The old would be fulfilled and a new one was about to be written. John completed the old and Jesus opened the door to the new. Humanity moved from the age of the law to the age of grace. People would be able to move from having God around us to “Emmanuel”, meaning “God within us”.

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Luke 22:20

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

At the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, He began to teach the disciples about the new covenant. This new covenant had built into it real life symbols that we were to remember. We remember better when we repeat actions on a regular basis. Jesus introduced to the disciples and to the church His new covenant which they were to remember whenever they partook of Communion.

The cup was pictured the new covenant with those who believed in Him. The cup represented His blood that had to be shed so that the price of the new covenant could be paid. The first Adam broke the covenant between God and man. Now Christ, the "second Adam", was going to restore our relationship with God, entering into a new covenant with man. This would be a covenant of Grace and Righteousness.

Christ's blood had to be shed, and that poured-out blood made binding the new agreement between man and God. The Good News was going to be sealed by the blood of Christ. We, as disciples, have been called to be carriers of this new covenant, planting the message in the hearts of a lost world. We have the Good News message and agreement providing hope. We are to bring the message of light into a dark place.

I Corinthians 11:25

*In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new **covenant** in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*

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Paul again reminds the Corinthian church of the importance of covenant keeping. When they had Communion, they were to observe it carefully because they were re-enacting the agreement and covenants that they had made with God. Each time they partook of Communion, they were to remember that they were covenant-keeping disciples.

We are called to keep our covenants with God. Communion keeps this commitment fresh in our minds. Communion is a lesson and teaching tool for our children as well as for the people who follow after us. We need to respectfully approach our time of communion together.

Communion should not be something we just “add on” or try to “fit into” our services; rather, it should in itself, receive the emphasis of a complete service. Every time we celebrate Communion, we need to reflect on what Christ has done for us and remember what we have committed and promised to do before God and others.

Each time we pick up the cup and partake of it, we are telling God and others that we are still in agreement with His words and promises.

II Corinthians 3:6

*Who also made us adequate as servants of a new **covenant**, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

The Holy Spirit is active when it comes to the covenants between God and man. His role is as a witness and guarantor that the covenants between the two parties are kept and carried out properly. The Holy Spirit is the One Who gives life to these

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agreements. These are not agreements on paper but, rather, they are living testimonies of God's love, mercy and grace.

Paul tells us (the church) that we are servants of this new covenant of God with our world. We are not just to fulfill these covenants as if they were "cold laws", but we are to be the parchment on which these covenants are written and the containers in which these living letters dwell. These covenants are life-giving, and we are to carry that life within us.

We carry an awesome treasure in our earthen vessels (bodies). Our purpose is to set free the captive who is in bonds, not bind them further. The covenants, when linked with the power of the Holy Spirit give life, and give life more abundantly. Our relationship with Christ makes us living letters who will be read daily.

Ephesians 2:12-13

*Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the **covenants** of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Now Paul writes to the Gentile believers. He wants them to know that they are not "on the outside looking in" but, because of the covenants that were made with Abraham thousands of years before, they were now partakers of a new covenant – a covenant that broke down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles.

Yes, we were strangers excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, but are no longer excluded. Christ's death and resurrection changed all that. We became partakers of the covenant

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of promise. We were without hope but now have hope. Christ's blood made a way for all. The blood of Christ made us family and part of the body of Christ.

In a sense, as Gentiles, we take on a new culture and tradition. We are now part of a new kingdom Whose head is Christ. As called disciples, we take on these new covenants which provide us with a new identity. We enter into a new and personal relationship with Christ.

Hebrews 7:22

*So much the more also Jesus has become the **guarantee** of a better **covenant**.*

The covenants have all been guaranteed to us by Christ. If anyone wants to question the validity of the covenants, they are advised to go to Christ who has co-signed for their worth and value. The King has sealed these covenants with His own blood and by His name. They are binding and lasting agreements. They cannot be undone or overturned by any physical or spiritual power.

This new covenant concerning which the Hebrews were learning was about to change their lives. Jesus was a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek and therefore Christ's covenants were binding and trustworthy. The Lord has sworn with an oath and will not change His mind; He is the same God today as he was yesterday and will be tomorrow. You can count on Him.

Hebrews 8:7-8

*For if that first **covenant** had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them, He says, "Behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new **covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah;*

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We have here a comparison between the first covenant and the second covenant. The first was not perfect because there was no way of escape by which man could be released from the bondage of this world. It was because of the first that the second was needed. Man could not keep the laws of God. It was impossible. There was no hope. But God did not want to leave us in this hopeless state, so he sent hope to us in the form of His son. He would pay the price so that we could be set free.

A new covenant was going to be brought into effect. A new covenant, a new way, a new truth, and a new life and it would all come through Christ (John 14:6). For some, this was going to be hard to understand. For the Jews, this new covenant “flew in the face of” hundreds of years of laws and traditions. However, but for both Gentiles and Hebrews, a door was about to be open that no man could shut.

Because Christ is our high priest, He also becomes our advocate, our everlasting bridge to the Father. He intercedes for us. Christ has done it all and fulfilled everything necessary for each one of us. The cords, ropes, and chains have been broken. We have been called into a new covenant with an eternity clause!

Hebrews 9:4

*Having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the **covenant** covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the **covenant**;*

In Old Testament times the Ark of the Covenant represented the presence of God for the Jews. Inside the ark were placed significant memorial materials which help them remember their great God. Aaron's rod that budded was one of the items; we now have the Holy Spirit Who generates everlasting life within us.

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Included in the Ark were the tablets of stone with the 10 Commandments. We now have the Old and New Covenants (Testaments), otherwise known as the Bible. Associated with the Holy of Holies was the sweet-smelling incense representing what we are to be to God and the world around us.

These treasures that were housed in a gold ark are now sealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Old has made way to the New. The Old has become the foundation stone for the New, which is Christ Jesus.

The jar of manna was to remind them of God's provision; now we (the Church) have the Lord's Supper, reminding us of Christ's provision for us. The Old had physical symbols – the New is a real life living Person. He represents all so that we can be filled with His living Presence.

Hebrews 9:15

*For this reason He is the mediator of a new **covenant**, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first **covenant**, those who have been **called** may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.*

The call of God which came to us through a covenant is the one that has been made with all mankind. We had no way to enter into heaven, but Christ – the “Door” – made the way open for us. He made it possible for us to escape the doom we deserved. The grace and mercy of Christ provided the way for whosoever would come to Him.

Christ became for us a mediator or bridge between ourselves and God. He intercedes for us so that we can enter God's Presence. Christ fulfilled the Old Covenant and brought in a New

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Covenant; we have the choice to enter into this new agreement with Him. Because of His shed blood the price was paid, so that the New Covenant could come into being. We could be redeemed from our transgressions. As fallen humanity, we broke the first covenant, but now because of Christ, we can participate in the fulfillment of the New Covenant.

We are called to make a covenant with Christ. The only way we can enter God's Presence is through Christ. That is why Christ said he is the only way, truth and life. He was the only One Who could offer this covenant because of what He did on the cross for us. "No," and again I say "No other has paid and made the way possible for all humankind."

Hebrews 13:20-21

*Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal **covenant**, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Christ wants to enter into an everlasting agreement with us; we need to receive and trust Him. The main reason for this covenant with us is to bring peace to our souls. When we are not aligned with Him in proper fellowship there can be very little peace for us. A slave has no peace, but Christ came to set us free from the bondage to sin and death in which we find ourselves.

To prove the binding authenticity of the covenant made by God to mankind, Jesus was raised from the dead. The necessary payment for the covenant was the sacrifice of innocent blood. It was a price that only Christ, God's Son, could pay for us.

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Given what God has done for us, as disciples, we need to make Christ Lord of our lives. Doing so brings us to salvation and forgiveness of our sins.

Resolution:

Just before Christ left the earth he promised to send a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, as a pledge or guarantee. Involved in the covenant that He was making with the disciples was the instruction that they wait for the Comforter. From that day forward, they would understand the meaning of God's Word promising that Christ was going to personally live within their hearts.

From that day until now the Holy Spirit comes to those who ask Christ into their hearts; He comes as a guarantee of Christ's promise and pledge to the church, His body. We can, each day, know His keeping power if we will just call upon His name.

Each day we sign pledge forms and agreements or we may make verbal agreements. It may take the form of signing a check, making an appointment, or verbal agreements made within a workplace. Promises and covenants within the church of Christ need once again to have meaning and commitment. We are giving up and "selling out" too soon. We may think that just walking away from these covenants and promises has no long-term effect, but they most certainly do. We are bound by our words. That's why Christ told the disciples that whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever they loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven.

We also have to remember that we are to reflect Christ to others. We are all that most people will ever hear or see concerning the Gospel of Christ. If we are married and have children, our

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Chapter Seventeen

Called to be Ambassadors

*Go therefore and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

Matthew 28:19-20

We are all called to be ministers; this ministry is that of being ambassadors of reconciliation. We are entrusted with the Gospel and, unless we want this message to die with us, we need to go out and take the Good News to others.

We, as ambassadors of the Gospel, are to be sharing the truth with others. As citizens of heaven, we are sent out to this world as representatives of our King Jesus Christ. As called disciples, we are commissioned for a purposeful ministry. We work with the body of believers who are called out from the world, but then we are commissioned to live in this world as shining lights for Christ.

There are six key words in this section that are important for us to note and understand. They will help us to grasp the meaning of the disciple's call to ambassadorship.

Commission means: appointment, authority, charge, duty, employment, authority, errand, function, mandate, mission, task, trust, empower, order, select, send.

The word **disciple** means to: convert, devotee, follower, learner, pupil, student.

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Next, we have the word **minister** which means: administrator, ambassador, delegate, diplomat, envoy, official.

Then we have the word **ambassador** which means: agent, consul, deputy, diplomat, emissary, envoy, minister, representative.

Then comes the word **carrier** which means: bear, bring, conduct, convey, fetch, move, transmit, transport, maintain, shoulder, stand, suffer, support, broadcast, communicate.

Finally, we have the word **mission** which means: aim, assignment, calling, charge, commission, duty, goal, quest.

These six words demand action and movement. We cannot just be hearers, but we need to be doers also. These words also give us a fuller picture of what a disciple of Christ is called to do. Our faith is a faith of action. It is out on the highway and byways of everyday life where we should be ministering.

The disciples were to start first in Jerusalem, then Samaria, and then were to go to the furthest parts of the world. We are to start first with family, then with neighbors, then our city, our country and from there out to other nations and countries. No one is exempt from this call.

A Christian is commissioned to go out:

As a **disciple** – one who is disciplined and mature in the Word of God. Our character should produce the fruit of the Spirit. And we should know, and be using, the gifts God has given us for His glory.

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As a **minister** – which we are all called to be! We are to seek God for His will and ask His empowerment for this ministry service. To minister is to simply testify about one's faith, both within and outside of one's local church. Ministry is not only preaching; it is really encouraging others to discover faith in Christ as well as to help those in Christ to become more mature in their faith.

As **ambassadors** – we need to see that we are people who are called out of an evil world, then sent back by God to be lights to that same dark world. An ambassador carries one country's message to another country. We are based in our homes, but we need to carry the message to our neighbors and communities, both small and large. Our message is one of reconciliation. Jesus wants us to tell people that they can have a personal relationship with God if they choose to do so. As ambassadors, we have been set free from the things of this world; now we go back to help set others free. We go forth with Christ's authority and power.

Scripture Signpost:

Hopefully, the following Scriptures will take you even deeper into the meaning of the call of Christ, and the importance of understanding that we are to be His ministers and ambassadors. We have a message to carry to those without Christ, both near and far. As ambassadors/disciples, we need to draw near to Christ with humility and in prayer, listening for His instructions and moving out in faith. Let us hear from the Word and commit to action as the Spirit leads.

Matthew 28:19-20

*Go therefore and make **disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy*

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Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

The word “go” calls us to action. It means to move ahead. In North America there are thousands of people coming and going from one place to another each day. We are so “busy being busy” and we are “burning out” because we are just going, going and going! Christ calls us to go out for Him, but he wants us to get the “when” and “where” from Him. He tells us what we are to do but we need to cry to Him in prayer about the when and where.

There is enough time in every day to do God’s will, but the problem is that we fill our time up with so many things that we desire to do. Christ calls us to go out as ambassadors of His, making disciples. We are all to be disciple makers. We are called and commissioned to reproduce offspring “after our own kind” in a spiritual sense. Where we have walked we are to help others walk and mature.

We are called to baptize people, training and equipping them in the things of Christ. We are to help them learn from the Word and by watching our daily walk. If we do this, He promises to be with us on the mountain tops as well as in the valleys, right up to the end of the age.

Followers of Christ are called and commissioned, following which, empowered by God, they are to work at producing more disciples of Christ.

Mark 16:15-16

*And He said to them, **Go** into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.*

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Again, in this Scripture passage, we are challenged to go out into the world. As disciples, we are called out from the world. The word “church” means, “called out ones”. Yes, we are called out for a specific purpose, that being so that we can be trained and equipped to share the Gospel of Christ. The best training is actual hands-on ministry. That’s when we learn best who we are, and who Christ desires to be in us.

We should also not let the word “preach” be a stumbling block to us. Here, Paul is not talking about the gift of preaching but is simply referring to sharing our faith in Christ with others.

People need to hear from someone about Christ, so that they can have the opportunity to believe. For the lost, we and our testimonies are their bridge to Christ. If we do not go out to serve and even be willing to lay down our lives, they will have no way of escape from eternal damnation.

Our call is a personal call of responsibility. We cannot rely on others to do the job. We must be willing to go and speak up for Christ. People’s eternal lives are depending on us. Paul says, “How how shall they hear without a preacher?”

Luke 24:47-49

*And that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be **proclaimed** in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are **witnesses** of these things. And behold, I am **sending forth** the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*

We are given a task to do and words to proclaim. We are to go out and make disciples; to do so, we must tell people about repentance and forgiveness. The gulf between lost mankind and

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God can be bridged – there is hope for them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have to help them turn away from their wicked ways.

Whatever we do must all be done in and through the name of Christ. We are to proclaim His good news. Christ turns hopelessness into hope. We are to be Christ's witnesses wherever we go. But to be able to witness, we first must be real in our own lives; if we are not genuine, we will struggle in our witnessing – because one can truly testify only to that which we have seen, heard, or experienced.

The heart of Christ's command is sending us – if we are not willing to go, we become rebellious and disobedient disciples. He may not call us to go to the “ends of the earth”, but His call involves speaking to our family, neighbors, city and country. Every disciple has been given this call; if we do not obey, we cannot call ourselves His disciples.

We go on the basis of a promise. He not only calls and commissions us but He also promises to look after us every step of the way. But we have to have faith and trust, believing that in Him all things are possible.

Luke 14:27

*Whoever does not **carry** his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

Part of our commissioning, as disciples, is to carry the cross that Christ has given us for life and ministry. Life is not easy, but we can gain the victory as we walk with Christ. Maturity comes when we practice our faith through our struggles. Life's challenges will be the cross that we will have to carry, but those challenges

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are there for a purpose, the purpose being to prepare us for service and to make us more like Christ.

We cannot be disciples in name only. We are called and commissioned by Christ to carry a cross just like He did. The difference is that we are not called to carry it alone. He is shouldering it with us.

There is a key phrase that we must note in this verse – if we are not willing to carry our cross with Christ, then we are not one of His disciples. The churches are full of people who call themselves Christians, but one day they will realize that they are not truly Christ's disciples. Do not wait too long to move from being “just a Christian” to being a true disciple. Christ pictures for us in many Scripture passages the description of the true disciple. If we do not look like that picture, I need to tell you the truth clearly – you are not one of His. Please pray today and change from your ways to Christ's way. Change direction and He will walk with you, helping you to be an ambassador of His to a lost world.

Acts 1:8

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My **witnesses** both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*

Christ calls and commissions us for service but He knows we cannot serve in our own strength and ability. This is why he told His disciples that, before they began their ministry, they were to pray and wait until they received power from on high. Too many ministries around the world are done in human power and strength, but not in God's strength.

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Each day, before we face the world, we should be praying that God will fill us with His power, because without the presence of the Holy Spirit, people will not be drawn to Christ through us. It is the Holy Spirit Who does the bridging and the work; we are just the vessels carrying this treasure within us.

Without the power of the Holy Spirit, our words of witness for Christ are dead. Our first responsibility is to wait upon the Lord. We should call on others to pray for us, anoint us with oil, and lay hands on us so that we may receive Christ's anointing. Without the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in us, and working through us, all our labours will be in vain.

Our responsibility is to wait upon Christ; when He calls and empowers us, we are to go forth in a ministry which Christ promises to bless. A word of caution: do not to use this as an excuse for not going out for Christ. Christ is ready to work through us, but are we willing to come to Him, surrendering and making Him Lord of all.

Acts 26:16

*But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a **minister** and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;*

Saul (later Paul) was about to have his life go in a completely new direction. When the true God, Jesus Christ, forcibly confronts an opponent, things will change. You (as was Saul) may be knocked down, shaken up, and even turned inside out. The direction of your life will change 180 degrees. However, we need not fear because God knows what is best for us. All we have to do is trust Him.

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As Christ called Paul, He also calls us. It may not be as dramatic as it was in Paul's case, but if we are hard of hearing and thick-headed, we may undergo the same type of confrontation with Christ. Christ desires us to walk with Him and to minister for Him. Our lives can make, and change, history if we would just have the faith to trust His still small voice in our hearts.

Paul was called to testify about what he had seen and heard. However, God was going to use him to testify, speak and teach about things which He would yet show him. Our God, Jesus Christ, equips and trains His disciples. He knows the future and, if we let Him, He will prepare us for the journey. Our personal relationship with Christ is the starting point to an understanding of Who He is. He is the one calls us, commissioning us for service both now and in the future.

Romans 15:16

*To be a **minister** of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, **ministering** as a priest the gospel of God, so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*

Paul wanted to convey to the Gentiles, and specifically to the Romans, that he was called and commissioned by Christ to minister to them. We need to learn from this that we need to be faithful to the call of Christ. Many in Paul's day did not want to hear or participate in what Paul was saying. That did not matter to Paul, but what did matter was that he could say to them that he was obedient to the One Who had called him.

Christ called him to be an ambassador of the Gospel to the Romans. He had been led by the Holy Spirit; the journey was full of twist and turns. It would not have been the way he would have planned this ministry campaign, but it was the way that Christ had

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designed it; through these God-ordained twists and turns the Gospel would go forth and Christ would be glorified.

The Romans needed to understand that Paul was there because Christ had called him, and sent him to them with a message. It would be their decision as to what they would do with Paul's message. As disciples, we are all called to go forth as messengers so that others may hear about Christ. People need to see Christ living and working in and through us.

Paul also wanted the disciples to understand that just as he was called to minister, so were they. He tells them in Romans 15:14 that they were full of goodness and filled with knowledge so that they were able to admonish one another concerning the things of Christ.

Everything that Christ was to the apostles and the disciples back then – He is still the same for us today. He calls, commissions and empowers us for service so that we can, in Christ's Name, go out and set the captives free.

I Corinthians 4:1

*Therefore, since we have this **ministry**, as we receive mercy, we do not lose heart,*

Ministry always involves struggle and even confusion; there is so much to see and understand. It seems the more we learn, the more we need to learn. Paul tells the church that they are called to a specific ministry as individuals and as part of the body of Christ.

Ministry is primarily a call to service, and we will need God's mercy and grace in everything we say and do. Even when we make mistakes, God's mercy is there for us. We will all fail in

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some way or another but we should not lose heart. We will make mistakes because we are in a place of learning – learning Who Christ is and about who we are in Christ.

To lose heart is often the result of losing focus. Our spiritual eyes stray from our purpose and goal. We begin to feel overwhelmed and we struggle with our calling. We thought we had the mind of Christ, so we stepped out in faith and something went wrong. This does not mean that we are failures; it just means that we need to learn from that mistake or experience and, by God's mercy, keep moving forward. We need to see that everything that we do each day is because of His mercy and love.

A soft heart will be sensitive to mistakes and hurts, but Christ has called and commissioned us. Therefore, we are to hold closely to that call upon our hearts, not giving up or hiding it. In faith, we are to persevere, for we may be on the very verge of pressing through to victory.

II Corinthians 5:18-19

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry** of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

We are called to a ministry, and Paul tells the Corinthian church the nature of that ministry. We are all called to the ministry of reconciliation. People of the world are out of step with the things of God. The wall of sin separates people from God; as disciples, we are commissioned to tear down that wall of separation.

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We have been reconciled to Christ. Now we need to help others to be reconciled. We have freely received that gift and now we need to help others to be set free. Not everyone will want this freedom, but there are millions who are open to it. Christ tells us that the fields are ripe to harvest. Unfortunately, the problem is that there are not enough disciples who understand what ministry is all about; they don't realize that, through the power of Christ, the captives can be set free.

In the Garden of Eden, the fellowship between God and man was broken. Prior to the entry of sin into the world, they truly walked in fellowship. Although that beautiful fellowship was broken, Christ came to restore it. He does so by calling us to be ministers of reconciliation. We take what He so freely gave to us, then go out and give it to others. This responsibility is ours. We have been given the command to go and share the message with others. We are to heed the call, picking up and taking the torch of reconciliation to our world.

II Corinthians 5:20

*Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

The word “ambassador” is little different from the word “ministry”. “Ambassador” does give us a clearer picture of what it is we are called to do. We have been commissioned as ambassadors to go out from Christ's Kingdom into Satan's domain and there represent Christ. The place that we occupy represents a small part of Christ's Kingdom here on earth. We seek to get people to seek asylum in Christ's embassy!

People of the world, trapped in Satan's kingdom, need a place to which they can run – a place of protection. As disciples,

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we have been commissioned to be that place of help. We need to be “mobile embassies” for Christ Jesus.

Our diplomatic “attache case” contains the means of hope for whoever will receive it. Within it is the means of reconciliation between man and God. We, as disciples and ambassadors are the carriers of this important truth. And, because we have been sent by our King, we also have “diplomatic immunity” from the enemy.

We are to go out into the highways and byways, appealing to people on behalf of God. Christ also extends the hand of welcome: “Whosoever will may come.” We carry the message, but every person still has free will to make the choice. Many will say “No”, but there are hundreds of thousands who will say “Yes” if we are willing to go and offer them “diplomatic amnesty” on behalf of Christ our King.

Paul tells the church to go out and beg people to come into the “embassy of heaven” and become citizens of this new country, the Kingdom of God.

Ephesians 3:7

*Of which I was made a **minister**, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.*

God not only calls us, but also empowers us with gifts that can be used to build up the body of Christ as well as to break down the strongholds of the enemy. Paul knew that he was called to minister, to serve, and to care for others. Here we should be careful not to mistake “preacher” for “minister”. Not all of us have been gifted to be preachers, but we are all called to be ministers for Christ.

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We must recognize that the calling to minister for Christ is a gift of God's grace. It is amazing that He desires to use us for His kingdom if we will but put our faith in Him. We are told that He will use the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. He will use each one of us as ministers if we will just have faith, and trust Him that He knows what He is doing.

Again, Paul says that all this was possible because of the working of Christ's power within him. He was not doing it in his strength and ability, but in God's strength and ability. Often, we will not minister because we cannot see beyond ourselves. We are called and commissioned to walk in Him and, by doing so, we then have the power to move mountains.

Ephesians 6:20

*For which I am an **ambassador** in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

The church needs to hear from God's spokespersons. The church of Ephesus needed to realize that Paul was not coming in his own authority, but that he was sent as an ambassador of Christ. Very likely Paul was literally in chains when he wrote the Ephesian Christians; the calling on his life felt like he was chained to Christ. He knew there was no way that he could avoid this burden, or break the chain that bound him to his Savior. The church today very often struggles with the authority of leaders and directions taken by them. Sheep want to take the pathway of least resistance, but the shepherd must stand up and clearly lead with Christ's authority; he will not be able to do so unless he is personally "chained to" Christ. Wherever Christ goes, he also must go.

Today the church is in trouble because the leaders are not giving the people a clear direction to follow; as a result, they

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become scattered, making them vulnerable to the “wolves”. Churches need to see that leaders are called by God. Paul’s boldness came out of his deep personal relationship with Christ.

There is no age limit to proclaiming the gospel – Paul never stopped. Whether a child or a senior citizen, and until we have no more breath, we must keep proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to all who will listen. Boldness comes out of doing. Each time Paul stepped into the Jewish synagogue he would have to trust that the Lord would put the needed words into his heart and mouth. God is not looking for perfection, but He is calling out to people to be His vessels.

II Timothy 4:5

*But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your **ministry**.*

Paul mentored several people in the faith; he took Timothy under his wing in order to train and equip him. He saw Timothy’s good character and leadership potential, knowing he would be useful in building the church of Jesus. Paul loved Timothy, often writing and encouraging him in the things of Christ. Paul did not want him to forget Christ’s call on his life.

Paul told Timothy that, in spite of the inevitable hardships, he was to be sober or clear-minded, keeping focused on Christ’s call. As Christians, many things will come our way, but we are not to be shaken by them. Hardships will test our faith and endurance, but we need to stay strong and anchored. Disciples should expect hardships – they are part of spiritual warfare.

We also need to notice that Paul encouraged Timothy in two areas of service, both of which all disciples should be involved in doing. One was to do the work of evangelist. We are all are to

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be proclaimers of the Gospel. The second area of service is to simply fulfill one's ministry. We are all called and commissioned for a specific ministry and we need to make sure that nothing distracts us from our area of service. We are, all to evangelize and we are all called to be servant / ministers.

Hebrews 8:6

*But now He has obtained a more excellent **ministry**, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.*

Christ, too, was a minister. Because of what He went through, the Father has elevated Him to a place where He now is able to enact a better promise. When we are faithful in the little things entrusted to us by Christ, he entrusts us with greater ministry. On the basis that Christ has fulfilled the first covenant, He now entrusts us with taking the second covenant into this lost world. Unlike Christ, we are not God, but we are ministers, called to various level of ministry service for Christ.

Resolution:

Our heart's desire is to serve, but our minds fill us with all kinds of questions and fears. This is why prayer is so important. Prayer is simply communicating with God daily, surrendering your will to His will, and surrendering your thoughts to His thoughts. It starts by being faithful in the little things and, as you experience steps of faith, you will be encouraged to move forward.

As disciples, we must accept the fact that God calls us for a purpose and that He empowers us to go out and be ministers and ambassadors for Christ. He sends us on a mission to take that special message we carry in our hearts, and share it with others.

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Our situation can be likened to the parable of the talents. Two invested that with which they had been entrusted, went out and taking the risk, invested it for their master. One was not as successful as the other, but they both were commended for their efforts by the master. The third just buried his talent in the ground and, on the day of accounting, he was scolded and lost all he had because he did not use what the master have given him. Most disciples in the church will find themselves in this category on the day of judgement. Instead of investing the gifts they were given, they buried them. You were given but instead of taking that which God had given two you hid it and buried it.

The call of God is very straightforward; we need to evaluate carefully which side of the fence we are on. Are we of the sheep or are we of the goats who “tell a good story”, but have no true relationship with Christ? If Christ is truly Lord of your life, it will not be you ordering your life, but it will be Christ living through you. You will be able to say, “It is no longer I that live, but it is Christ Who lives in me.”

As disciples, we have been all commissioned by God to be ministers and ambassadors, telling others the good news of Jesus’ life and words. We have a message which we must share with others. We are commissioned for a mission. Jesus prayed, “Not my will be done, but your will be done!” We need to pray, asking the Lord that His will be done here on earth.

It is time to take a stand, to be fully active in the body of Christ. We need to get to a place of maturity so that we will see fruit of the Holy Spirit flowing through our lives and into the world around us. It is never too late to start. Look in the mirror of the Word of God and ask Him to show you whether you are “on track” or if you have only had a religious experience where there is really no true commitment and surrender to Christ.

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that you may become more disciplined in your walk as a called disciple. Pray that God will show you where He has commissioned you for ministry. Pray that God will give you the strength to follow through as His ambassador in the lost world.

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Chapter Eighteen

Called to Love

*For you were **called** to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through **love** serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, you shall **love** your neighbor as yourself.*

Galatians 5:13-14

“Love” is one of the most challenging words in the English vocabulary. To some it means so much, but to others it has little or no meaning. People get married because of love; others will kill because of love turned to jealousy. The word has a vast array of meanings. “Love” can be used to describe one’s affection for an animal, a car, a friend, for a parent or for a piece of furniture.

As disciples, we are called by God to love Him and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. By nature, our tendency is to increasingly love and care for ourselves. However, as disciples, we are challenged to love our fellow believers. Further, we are even to love our enemies.

Love is an action word. One gives love, and another receives it. True love is given with no strings attached, a gift freely given to another. Words that define and give examples of “love” are: adore, cherish, treasure, delight in, enjoy, embrace, kiss, affection, attachment, devotion, friendship, tenderness, warmth.

Another word which carries the same meaning as love is the word “charity”. Charity means: alms-giving, contribution,

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donation, endowment, gift, relief, affection, agape, benevolence, compassion, generosity, love, tender-heartedness.

The Bible explains that love is one of the fruits of the Spirit. When a person enters into a personal relationship with Christ, the first thing we are told to look for in that disciple's life is some type of fruit. The one fruit that is much-talked-about is love. God's motivation for coming to earth in the Person of His Son was because of His heart of love for lost mankind.

The Greeks have seven different words which we translate into our one English word "love". The Greek New Testament uses four of them. "Eros" refers to erotic love, often in a perverted and unwholesome context. The second is "Philo" referring to a brotherly love, as between friends. The third is "Stergo", the kind of love that a mother and child experience with each other. Finally, we have "Agape" which is the kind of love God extends to us, a freely given one-directional love with no strings attached.

God wants us to love Him and each other with an agape type – a love given with no strings attached. We freely love just as Christ loved us.

Scripture Signposts:

Scripture is the foundation stone upon which we build our lives. Hopefully, these Scripture signposts will take you into a deeper understanding concerning the call of Christ in your life. Let us hear from the Word and commit to act in accordance with the Spirit's leading.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7

*You shall **love** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words,*

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which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

The key building block of every disciple's heart should be love. We build a heart of love with God vertically and then build a heart of love for humankind horizontally. Our hearts should be overflowing with love. Love should be the light that guides us, motivating our speech and actions. This love should fill our hearts and souls. Our very minds should be seasoned with love.

God's words and commands are motivated by His love; as disciples, with hearts and minds permeated by love, we should be carrying out these commands of God. We do what we do because of love. God's Word is a word of love for all who will receive it.

Love is a learned practice. In the spirit of God's love, we learn with whom to walk and talk. We are commanded, in love, to teach the truths of God to others. Whether sitting, walking, or lying down, we should be always teaching our children. Why? Because we love God and, if we truly love people, we will want them to experience God's love as well. This is a 24:7 ministry for us and for our fellow believers.

Proverbs 3:12

For whom the LORD loves He reproveth, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

"Tough love" is a phrase we hear nowadays. This expression implies that, if we really love someone, we will help and encourage them, even speaking a loving word of discipline into their lives. We are, in love, to reprove and admonish each

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other to do good so that we can all reach a higher standard in Christ.

We need to be willing to undergo discipline because we know that it is being done in love, and that it is for our best. Without discipline or admonishment, there can be little or no growth to maturity in one's life. We also need to understand that it is only for a season or short time. If we see the hand of the Lord in it, and humble ourselves to His loving hand, the time of discipline will go by quickly.

In the New Testament Jesus refers to this time of reproof as “pruning” and He always does it in a spirit of love. We are the branches on a vine; to be able to produce more fruit we may have to undergo a season of pruning. The end goal is to improve the branch so that it will joyfully produce fruit that will last, for Christ's glory.

Matthew 5:44-46

*But I say to you, **love** your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you **love** those who **love** you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*

Jesus wanted the disciples to know that they would have enemies. The way they responded to these enemies would directly affect the spread of the Gospel of Christ. People get upset for a variety of reasons; often they get upset with you just because you are a disciple of Christ. They think by being angry with you, they are “getting back” at God Himself.

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The best way to confront our enemies is by lovingly praying for them. Christ is concerned for our enemies because they are also His enemies; one of the ways that He can reach out to them is through our lives. We need to be channels and vessels of God's love to these people.

Christ exhorts the disciples not to love only those who love them; that is easy. But it takes real faith and grace to love those who hate and persecute you for no reason at all. The enemy, Satan, loves to use people to attack us because this is his way to get back at his Creator. Remember, Satan is a rebellious being, and he works through humankind to cause strife, division, and even death.

Because of God's great love, He pours out His blessing on the good and the bad. We, as disciples, may think it is not fair, but this is what grace is all about. There is a time coming where God's grace will stop flowing, and judgment will begin to come upon the land.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

This is a very familiar verse to many and it is one of the first verses that children memorize. God, in love, sent His Son, opening up a bridge for mankind to cross if he so chooses. Christ was willing to pay the price for the penalty of our sins. We could not do it. We were hopelessly lost, but the Father, out of great love for His creation, and because His deep desire to have a love relationship with us, sent his only Son to make a way of escape for us.

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God the Father does not want us to undergo spiritual death. He wants us to have eternal fellowship with Him. But true love would cost Him dearly; it was going to cost Him his Son. If we are to enter into this Kingdom of love, it will also cost us something – the surrender of our will for God's will.

Love motivates and changes our actions our thoughts, and most of all, our hearts. Everything the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do is motivated and driven by love. God's love is what gives to us eternal life if we will only receive it.

John 13:34-35

*A new commandment I give to you, that you **love** one another, even as I have **loved** you, that you also **love** one another. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love** for one another."*

Christ taught the disciples a new commandment which they were to understand and follow. Christ fulfilled the entire Jewish Law, but condensed it all down to just two commandments. One is to love God with all your heart and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Christ wanted His love for His disciples to flow out through them to others. Love would become the measuring stick indicating whether or not they (and we) were truly Christ's disciples.

The hardest thing for us to do is to love unconditionally, no strings attached. We are even to love the unlovely. Our hearts tell us to love only those we choose to love; however, members of the body of Christ need to have a loving spirit for everyone. We cannot pick and choose who we are to love – we are just to love all.

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Christ set the example. He displayed His love throughout his life – in His ministry, trial, death, resurrection, and in the sending of His Holy Spirit. His love was also evident in His promise to the disciples that He would come again to receive them unto Himself. We are called as disciples to love one another. It is not an option, but a command.

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

In the upper room where Jesus was telling the disciples about what was going to occur concerning His Next Hours, he focused on the subject of love and what it would cost Him – and them, if they chose to walk with Him.

The greatest gift that we can give anyone is to give up our lives for them. Christ was about to do so to show the disciples and the world how much He loved them. The cross was about to become the most powerful symbol of love that the world would ever know. Many thousands of disciples have laid down their lives at the feet of Jesus. Christ promised that whoever would lay down their lives for Him would one day pick them up anew in the Kingdom of God.

The disciples needed to see things differently now. They were now Christ's ambassadors of love to a lost world. Just as Christ came to give Himself, they would also have to give themselves. They were not to worry because He would be with them through the power of His Holy Spirit.

In this chapter Jesus tells His disciples that they are no longer slaves, but His friends. He clearly pointed out that, within a few hours, He would lay down His life for His friends.

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John 17:23-26

I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

In this passage Jesus prays to His Father for the disciples. Here we have recorded what has become known as the "high priestly prayer", a prayer birthed out of a heart filled with love. Christ had come as a gift from the Father, and His purpose was to show all mankind how much the Father loves them. Christ's life, as demonstrated in the gospel, demonstrates from beginning to end, the meaning of love.

The Father gifted the disciples to Christ; Christ now brings them to His Father. The disciples are a gift of God to Jesus and to the world. We, as disciples, are also a gift of God to this world. Jesus was now giving back into the hands of the Father those whom the Father had entrusted to Him on His earthly pilgrimage.

Christ's original disciples and the disciples that would come after them were a demonstration of the Father's love for a lost world. We are called to be His "channels of love". The Father's love flows through us, demonstrating His continuous goodness to a lost and sinful world.

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Christ asked the Father to love us with the same degree of love that was shared between the Father and the Son. How great must be the love of our unchanging Heavenly Father for us, His children! We are called by God and taken up in His great arms of everlasting love. What Christ had been given, He passed on to us.

John 21:15

*So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you **love** Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I **love** You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs."*

After Peter had denied Jesus three times, we find him very discouraged. He was back doing the one thing he knew best how to do – fishing. Jesus, however, wanted to make him a fisher of men. This is what Christ had originally called him to do, yet Peter found himself back to his original occupation, fishing for fish.

But Christ never stopped loving Peter even though he fell away by denying Christ. Jesus still wanted Peter to fall in love with fishing for men. Jesus met Peter where he was in terms of his love for Christ. Now it was time to move him from a love of fishing for fish to a love for fishing for men.

As they were on the beach eating fish over an open fire, Jesus confronted Peter, asking him three times about his love for Him. Christ told Peter that if he really loved Him, he would "tend His lambs" and "feed His sheep". Jesus was referring to sharing His love and teaching with lost people. Peter had to undergo a heart change which affected his attitude about people; that would motivate him to go out and call in the lost.

Christ's call was a call of love, and it would cost him everything. From that point, His life would be marked by calling,

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feeding, and tending Christ's sheep. Peter's ministry would have to come from a heart driven by love.

Romans 1:7 (NLTB)

*I am writing to all of you in Rome who are **loved** by God and are called to be his own holy people. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.*

Paul's letter to the Romans was a letter of love as were all his other letters to the churches. Paul loved the body of Christ and knew (just as Peter was taught by Christ) it would take a lot of love, discipline, and feeding to help it to grow to maturity.

Paul was called by Christ, just like Christ, in love, calls all true disciples. God's call is a call to love Him as well as God's people. To receive God's grace and love, His call of love is the path for everyone.

Love can be a difficult concept to understand, even for people raised in the church. Often people who do not attend church don't trust those who use the word "love". Nevertheless, through the power of the Holy Spirit we, as disciples, must bring back into our churches and communities a genuine and personal, living definition of what love really is. Love is a gift given by God for all humankind.

Just as Paul assured the Romans, we need to let people know upfront that God loves and cares for them. We are called to freely share this message with whoever will receive it. This is the disciple's primary ministry; the will of God is to perform this service in love.

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Romans 5:8

*But God demonstrates His own **love** toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

God demonstrated His love to us. Now, we need to go out and demonstrate to others our love for the Father. In order for a living love to take root and to grow in other people's hearts, it needs to be passed on.

To be seen, love needs to be clearly demonstrated. Love needs to come across to others as genuine and real. In order for People to become believers in God's love, we must first be totally sold out to God, believing in His love ourselves.

Love needs to come out of the depths of our hearts. Giving love sacrificially can sometimes hurt. We have to remember that we also were sinners; it was only because of God's grace that we have experienced a love that passes all understanding.

True love can often lead to the death of something for which we want or hope. Our wills need to die. At some time, we may even have to physically lay down our lives for others. Since the time of Christ, the path of discipleship has become a pilgrimage paved by the blood of the martyrs who gave their lives in love for the cause of Christ.

Romans 8:28 (NLTB)

*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who **love** God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

Our life is like a big puzzle made up of hundreds of little pieces; all these pieces are there for a purpose – to produce a beautiful picture that will glorify God. Paul wants the Roman

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disciples to know that God knows what He is doing. We just have to trust Him.

Things can, and will, work out; however, it is vital that we have a deep commitment of love for Christ. We need to adhere closely to Christ's purpose and plan for our life. He calls us for a reason. Each day we need to spend time in prayer, seeking God's will for that day. If we do not do so, we will burn up all kinds of energy and time doing things that will have little value for us or for Christ's Kingdom.

We have to be in step with God's will for our lives; He knows what we need and what we must go through if we are to successfully complete our race here on earth. It is exciting to know that God has a divine purpose and plan for our lives and that His plans for us are wrapped in love.

Romans 8:39

*Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the **love** of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul assured the church that there is nothing here on earth that can separate us from His love when we have a true love relationship with Christ. Often disciples become focused on the wrong things in life. We sometimes see nothing but the mountains and the challenges that they represent to us. Christ does not want us to fix our attention on these mountains (or deep valleys), but to look to Him, the One Who deeply loves us.

We need to remember that when we come to Christ we are adopted into the family of God. He is our Father and we are His children. Nothing should ever cause us to doubt that truth. We

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need not be overcome. Through Christ's power and love, we are made overcomers for Christ.

Necessarily, all truth and love is sourced through Christ. If we become separated from that reality, we will have all kinds of challenges and heartaches. Christ will not separate Himself from us. Will we vow that we will not allow anything to separate us from Him?

I Corinthians 13

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have **love**, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have **love**, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have **love**, it profits me nothing. **Love** is patient, **love** is kind and is not jealous; **love** does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **Love** never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. But now faith, hope, **love**, abide these three; but the greatest of these is **love**.*

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This is one of the most well-known chapters in Scripture, frequently read or quoted at weddings around the world. Paul wrote this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He wanted the Corinthian church to understand that the ultimate motivating factor for a disciple, in using his God-given gifts, is LOVE. For the Body of Christ, God gives every disciple gifts to be used in the church. Every gift is to be used for the purpose of reaching the world, but all must have love as their foundation.

This Scripture clearly defines what love is, and what love is not. Paul tied the word “love” into the whole concept of ministry. For disciples, love has to be the underlying motive in everything we do. It is also important to remember that love never fails. God’s love will never let us down; rather, it will lift us up and encourage us to keep going forward in Christ. There will be times when we will not understand, but we need to pray that God will give us wisdom and open our eyes up to what He is doing around us.

In order to have a well-rounded response to Christ’s call, the disciple needs to combine love with faith and hope. However, the essential ingredient in whatever we do and say in life is love.

Galatians 1:6 (NLTB)

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who **called** you to himself through the **loving** mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News.

Very shortly after their establishment, the Galatian church was in trouble. Paul had trained, equipped, and ministered directly in their midst, but “wolves” had snuck in and were teaching false doctrines, “devouring the sheep”. Paul was concerned about that they had fallen away from their first love. They had forgotten how Christ had lovingly saved and redeemed them.

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Christ had shown mercy to these Galatian Gentiles, and now they were heading off in another direction. They had been so misled, they actually thought they were still following the Good News of Christ. They had, in fact, slipped back into legalism which could only bring bondage and death.

Why were they abandoning Christ's call? Was it because they did not understand? More likely it was because they were being deceived into following another pathway. These Galatian Christians now needed to confess, turning back to the way of Christ, the One Who had set them free in the first place.

We also, as disciples, always need to be checking the cornerstone of our walk with God, making certain that we are not trailing off onto some other track that runs contrary to the Word of God. In these days, there are so many voices out there, calling out to us, many of whom are leading the "sheep" astray from the Word of God. We need to make sure that our commitment to the call of God is firm and secure.

Galatians 5:13

*For you were **called** to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through **love** serve one another.*

The whole purpose for the Father in lovingly sending His Son was to set us free from the bondage of sin and death. We need to be released from fleshly bondages. Our flesh strongly desires to feed its needs. The flesh also desires to run contrary to the will of God. People try all kinds of things to experience freedom but, because they do not seek God's power and strength, they end up in even more bondage.

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The purpose of God's love is to set the captive free. Our nature pulls us toward a selfish and sinful life. We need to be careful. Our nature, with its free will, can take us down a pathway leading in a wrong direction. We need to be careful not to abuse our freedom, allowing our fleshly desires to be gratified. We are under grace, but our walk must be directed by the Holy Spirit.

Another essential quality about love is that it is active in serving others. We are called not just to serve, but to do in love. Love covers a multitude of sins. Our focus should not be on self, but on others. If we have received freedom, then we need to take what we have learned and use it to help set others free. Remember, we are not doing this in our ability but solely through Christ's power and strength. He does the work of drawing people to Himself. We just serve Him.

Ephesians 4:15

*But speaking the truth in **love** we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

There are at least two things with which we can glorify Christ – our actions and our words. Words can bind people or set them free. Actions, as well as words, can create joy or depression both in our lives and the lives of others.

It is essential that disciples grow in love. We do not become perfect in love immediately upon receiving Christ. Christ comes to His disciples in perfect love; then, as disciples, we must ask Christ for the power to become more like Him. Love is a learned attribute; we have to practice love and make it part of our lives. By nature, our bent is towards sinfulness, not love.

Paul tells the Ephesian church that, as a body, they must grow in love. We must grow in love as individual disciples and

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also as a corporate body. Christ is our Head and, because we are attached to Him as a church, we then must reflect His love to others.

Older disciples must take up the task of mentoring the younger. Parents must teach their children. We must take the responsibility of equipping each other in love. When we do this and begin to move out and minister in love, there is no force here on earth or in heaven that can stop the power of love.

Ephesians 5:25

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,

Paul uses the illustration of the marriage relationship between a husband and wife. True marriage is built on love. The glue holding a marriage together is love. The eyes of love overlook the other's faults.

Giving is the evidence of love. One who loves truly is willing to lay down his life for another. A husband must love his wife so much that He would be willing to die for her. Because of this great love expressed by the groom, the wife will submit and give her all to him. This is the picture of love that Paul wanted the Ephesian church to see and understand.

It seems that almost every New Testament book written to a church spoke about the need to remember their first love. If we are married, we need only to remember our own wedding day when we could not get enough of each other, wanting to spend all our time together.

Christ sets the ultimate example of love – giving and sacrificing Himself in love. We are called to love each other to the

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point where doing so may even cost us our life. Discipleship is not a club. Discipleship is a life-changing commitment to loving God and loving each other.

Having been touched by the Spirit of Christ's love, we are called to a commitment in which we will not want to turn back to the old ways. Again, **once you have tasted of the new wine, who wants the old?**

I John 4:16-18

*We have come to know and have believed the **love** which God has for us. God is **love**, and the one who abides in **love** abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, **love** is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in **love**; but perfect **love** casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in **love**.*

John wants to impress the disciples concerning the power of God's love. God's heart has an infinite amount of love for all of us. He has prepared it and made it available for all who are willing to receive it. God is love. His nature and character is love. His name is love.

When Christ dwells in our hearts, He abides in us and we then can abide in Him; we are linked together as one in Christ. Love is perfected because of this relationship and walk that we have with Christ. This perfecting love builds confidence and this confidence helps us to become bold in sharing the Good News of Christ.

Our love relationship also gives us security and peace, knowing that on the day of judgment we will enter into Christ's

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glorious kingdom because of that love relationship. Loving Christ casts out all fear. When love has been perfected in us we do not have to concern ourselves with fear of punishment. If we ever find ourselves overwhelmed by fear, we need to check our relationship as to who we are in Christ.

Jude 1:1-3 (NLTB)

*This letter is from Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and a brother of James. I am writing to all who have been **called** by God the Father, who **loves** you and keeps you safe in the care of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more mercy, peace, and **love**. Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.*

Jude's desire was that Christ's disciples would recognize the great love that Christ had for them. Jude prayed that all disciples would recognize the Father's loving call, and that His call would result in us being kept in Christ's care.

He prays that God will give to us more mercy, peace and love. Mercy allows us into His presence. Peace assures us that He is with us each day and wherever we go. His generous love for us will cause us to reach out and touch other lives for the kingdom of Christ.

Jude reminds us that we share our salvation in common with other believers. Salvation makes us family, and places within our hearts an abundance of love for our fellow brothers and sisters, as well as for the lost.

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Because of God's great love, Jude hopes that disciples would stand up and defend the Gospel of Christ. God's love has entrusted us with this great task. We should not avoid fulfilling this command or grow weary in presenting it to others.

We have been given the gift of grace; we now have the task of sharing God's grace with others. We do so, not because we have to, but because we love to see God's salvation extended to others. We are called into the army of Christ to stand up and defend the message of Christ.

RESOLUTION:

How do we get past loving ourselves to loving others? The truth is you cannot do so in your own strength. You need the power of the Holy Spirit which can only come through a personal relationship with Christ.

God's love is the kind of love which He desires us to share with others. It is a love that expects nothing in return. It is a love that says to another, "I will love you no matter what you do to me, or what you may do to yourself or others."

In giving of ourselves, we naturally hope that our efforts will bear fruit. However, that is not our end goal or purpose. Love breaks down strongholds between people and groups. Love is very hard to resist.

Peter learned the meaning of love in all its fullness. After denying Jesus three times, he doubtlessly believed his life as a disciple was over. After all, what kind of God would still love you after you had just denied Him in His greatest hour of need? Peter did not know what to do, so he just went back to that which he knew well – fishing. However, Christ did not give up on Peter,

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going right out to where Peter was fishing. He called out to Peter, but Peter did not even seem to know who Jesus was. Christ had prepared a meal and called Peter to join Him; their whole talk was on the subject of love. Peter appeared not to grasp what Christ meant, but after this personal encounter Peter, no longer depressed, began to move forward. Jesus had renamed him “Rock” years earlier, and now he was ready to stand up and move forward in love, living up to his name.

The wedding ring is a symbol of love and commitment between a man and a woman, promising they will be faithful to each other and support one another through the good, challenging and bad times. The rings encircling their fingers represent a never-ending commitment to each other. This is a picture of the reality of how it should be between us and Christ, as well as and between us and others in His church.

Disciples also have regular times when they celebrate Communion. Communion is also called a love feast. It is a time to reflect on what God has done, and is doing, for us. We remember His great act of love, dying on the cross for us. The love feast is a time when everyone who comes together is equal in God’s sight, regardless of wealth or position. All disciples are part of the Body of Christ. This is what we can truly call amazing love. At the foot of the cross the ground is level. We are all equally loved in the eyes of God. We all have the same value and worth to Him.

God’s love covers a multitude of sins – this is a truth which we must clearly understand. When we put on Christ’s righteousness, God sees us differently. He sees us with eyes full of love. He calls us because He loves us, and He also calls us, so we can share His love with others.

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Personal Discipleship Reflections:

What is God speaking to me about in this chapter? When I look in the mirror, is my focus just on myself, or do I see someone who has been called and desires to love others?

RELEVANCE:

Are my actions and habits at home and at work reflecting the fact that I am a disciple of Christ? Do I truly believe that I have been called and commissioned by God to serve Him with all my heart, wherever and whenever, with the love which He has personally shared with me?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that you may become more disciplined in love in your role as a called disciple. Pray that God will show you where and how to love and minister to others around you. Pray that God will give you a spirit of love, and that you will be able to follow through as His ambassador of love to a lost world.

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Chapter Nineteen

Called to Devotion

*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his **calling** and choosing of you; for as long as you **practice** these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

II Peter 1:10-11

Devotion can manifest itself in many ways. The disciple is called to a life of devotion and service to our King, Jesus Christ. Once you enter into a personal relationship with Him, things are going to change in your everyday walk. You will begin to focus on things that are now very important to you. The priorities of life will be reordered. Once your devotional life takes root, it will begin to affect your heart, your thinking, and your outward actions. People will wonder at the change and ask you about what has happened in your life.

Discipleship involves commitment to the teachings of Christ. Walking in the footsteps of Christ changes one's direction in life and leads to producing fruit that will bring glory to the Master. It involves a choice, and then a decision, the cost of which will be our very lives. Devotion to Christ is an "all in all" commitment.

There are at least five previously unknown areas that will begin to take on new meaning in your life. Coming to Christ gives birth to issues that you didn't even know were there. You will begin to see and hear things differently, and you will hunger and thirst for God with all your heart.

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“Devotion” is key to a disciple’s walk in Christ. Devotion is defined as: loyalty, faithfulness, fidelity, constancy, commitment, allegiance, dedication, love, admiration, care, godliness, holiness, worship, observance, prayer, church service.

If we are going to mature and bear fruit for Christ, devotion is the foundation stone upon which the next five concepts must be built.

Devotion to prayer: We need to develop a strong line of communication with Christ. Prayer is simply communication. God wants us to talk and fellowship with Him just like we would with our family or friends. The challenge is to make time for this personal relationship with God.

Devotion to praise: We are told that it is not what goes into the mouth that counts, but what comes out of it. As we draw closer to Christ, our hearts should want to begin to worship and praise Him because of the great love and grace which He has shown us. Praise can be used by God to release the stress and anxiety that we face each day. As we travel through the events of each day, our hearts should be like a fountain of praise to our King.

Devotion to ponder: David tells us that we should meditate upon God and His Word. Timothy tells us to study to show ourselves approved as good workmen. We need to get into the Word so that the Word can get into us. We will only reap what we plant. The Word is like a sword, protecting and delivering us in our daily battles.

Devotion to practice: Each profession, no matter what it is, takes practice. Our discipleship walk also will take practice – this is how we learn and mature. Sometimes believers are afraid of “practice” because it doesn’t sound very spiritual. Nevertheless, as

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is often said, “Practice makes perfect.” Maturity can only come through correcting mistakes over and over again. It takes time for our natures to become godly. Practice also builds boldness and faith so that we can keep moving ahead as disciples.

Devotion to proclaiming: One other pillar of the disciple’s life is to be a proclaimer of the Gospel of Christ. To remain “fresh in the oil of the Holy Spirit” we need to be giving to others that which we have been given. If we do not share the Truth with others, we will become stagnant and old. Proclaiming the gospel is the job and privilege of every disciple. We are all called to do so. If Christ has truly done something in our hearts, we will want to share it with others, telling them Who He is. Christ said that if we proclaim Him before men, He will testify about us before the Father in heaven.

These attributes of devotion must all work in conjunction with one another. They are not five different boxes that you try to unwrap individually. They must all work hand-in-hand, leading us to maturity.

Now let's take a few more moments to try to get a better understand concerning the meaning of these five aspects of devotion.

The word **prayer** is defined as: devotion, intercession, appeal, petition, supplication.

Next, we have the word **praise:** express admiration, applaud, pay tribute, compliment, rave about, admire, honour, exalt, adore, reverence, magnify.

Then comes the word **ponder** which means: think about, contemplate consider, reflect on, meditate on.

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Fourth comes the word **practice** meaning: exercise, use, implementation, training, rehearsal, repetition, preparation.

Last is the word **proclaim** meaning: declare, announce, state, make known, give out, publish, broadcast, trumpet, reveal, testify.

Each of these words are like pillars of a building; they hold the building together and are the structure that holds up the roof. These five things must be part of the superstructure of every disciple's life.

Scripture Signposts:

We build on the Scriptures, the foundation stone for our lives. It is our hope that these Scripture passages will take you deeper into what the call of Christ is for your life. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do what the Spirit leads us to do.

Deuteronomy 32:3

*For I **proclaim** the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God!*

Moses was at the end of his life's journey. Many years earlier he had been called by the Lord through a burning bush. There God had challenged him to go back to Egypt and deliver the people of God from slavery. Many years had gone by since then. Many of his family and friends had come and gone. He had now completed the task of leading the people through the wilderness and had just anointed Joshua as their new leader.

Moses was now taking time to reflect back on how God had been with him, and we have penned for us in the book of Deuteronomy the "song of Moses". In this song Moses tells his

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hearers to proclaim the name of the Lord. His Lord was great and faithful and the people are instructed to ascribe greatness to their God.

Throughout the rest of this song Moses paints a beautiful picture of the character and nature of God. Moses gave to the people a song with which they could praise God as they journeyed into the promised land. This song was really Moses's prayer that the people would not forget the God Who miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

I Chronicles 16:8-9 (NLTB)

*Give thanks to the Lord and **proclaim** his greatness. Let the whole world know what he has done. Sing to him; yes, sing his **praises**. Tell everyone about his wonderful deeds.*

Praise and proclamation should always fill the disciple's heart. When your heart has been touched by God, you will want to begin praising Him. When one truly understands from what one has been delivered, one cannot help but want to tell others about the redeeming love of God. His grace is so magnificent.

We are told to go out and tell the whole world about the greatness of God. We are to tell others what He has done. Testimony and praise are the natural response of hearts that have been touched by God.

History is the account of a living God Who moves in people's hearts, empowering them to bring change to this lost world. We just have to look around to see the handiwork of a living God Who is personally interested in the lives of people.

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I Chronicles 16:23

Sing to the LORD, all the earth; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.

Again, in this Psalm of thanksgiving, we are encouraged to sing and proclaim the good tidings of the Lord. God is the God of salvation. Whatever the location or situation, it is God alone Who brings us salvation.

We are to go out throughout the earth and tell the Good News to everyone. This should be a daily action. As a result of our personal walk with Him, we will want to go out and tell others all the things that we discover about Him each day. Our heart will be full of singing. He has done, and is still doing, wondrous things in our lives.

Today He is no different than He was in Old Testament times. As Christ works through His disciples in the church we, as a body of believers, will want to praise Him and proclaim all His good tidings to those around us, and across every country of the world.

II Samuel 22:4 – Psalm 18:3

I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

David knew a lot about enemies. It seemed that wherever he turned, he had to fight somebody who did not like him. He knew that if he called upon the Lord from a heart of praise, God would deliver him. He could sing to the Lord and, in that way, bear testimony that God was worthy of praise.

David faced problems from family members, from people of other countries, and from his own king for whom he had fought

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for and served. Life was not easy, but David personally knew his God and could give testimony through song about who He is and how great He is. All challenges are like enemies; can we do what David did?

David could look at his life and could see how God saved him from his enemies. It was not easy for David, but God was always faithful to him. Sometimes he found himself in great despair and alone, but God would step in and deliver him from all his enemies, not only from those without, but also from those within himself.

Psalm 150:1-6

Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty expanse. Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 150 exhorts us to praise God at all times and in every circumstance, we face. Life is full of struggles and trials, but God is faithful to deliver those who call upon His name. No place or circumstance in which we may find ourselves should prevent us from reaching into our hearts to begin praising the Lord.

We should praise God with all we have and with all we are. We are to praise Him with instruments and dance. We are to express praise with our entire being and ability. Any and every available musical instrument can be used to glorify God; the

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psalmist lists trumpet, harp, lyre, timbrel, stringed instruments, pipes and loud cymbals.

We are also to praise Him with our actions and deeds. With our very breath we should be praising. God calls us to praise Him with our all. We are to praise Him for the way we have been created and made. We, as a body of believers, are a many-pieced orchestra; our unique individual differences make our praise beautiful in the Lord's ears.

Proverbs 5:21

*For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He **ponders** all his paths.*

Isaiah 56:7

*Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of **prayer**. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of **prayer** for all the peoples.*

When we come into the presence of God, we are on holy ground. It is not so much the actual location, but the fact that we are with God, that makes it sacred. Whether on the streets, in valleys, or on mountain tops, the Lord calls us to pray. What we need to understand is that prayer is the lifeline or communication line, keeping us alive and effective in our action as disciples.

God tells us that when we enter into His house, it becomes a house of prayer. Prayer is communication; communication builds relationship and fellowship with Him. So, whether we are in a temple or a prayer closet, this is where we can meet joyfully meet with God.

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If we are in an attitude of prayer with God, that makes the moment a “house of prayer” where we can then present our offerings and sacrifices to the Lord and have them accepted.

Isaiah 61:1-2

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to **proclaim** liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; To **proclaim** the favorable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.*

Here Isaiah prophesies about the coming of the Messiah, concerning Who He is and what He will do. It is recorded for us in the New Testament that Christ Himself quoted this verse in a Jewish synagogue. Christ was the fulfillment of this prophecy, given over a thousand years earlier.

Jesus came with a purpose. He saw what was going on here on earth and He came to bring Good News. He wanted to help the afflicted and heal those with broken hearts. He was there for those who mourned and grieved, encouraging and strengthening them, giving them hope.

Just as Christ proclaimed who He was, we are also to proclaim Who he is to others. We need to get out on the streets, proclaiming the wonderful news which liberates captives and brings freedom to those who are in prison. Christ came to minister to the needs of others and He desires us, through the power of His Holy Spirit, to do the same.

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Matthew 23:3 (NLTB)

*So **practice** and obey whatever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they do not **practice** what they teach.*

The Pharisees were known for telling people what to do and how to act, but they themselves did not lead by example. Christ was harsh on these religious leaders because they were tying people up and making them captive to all kinds of rules and traditions.

These leaders should have been setting the example for others to follow. The common Jewish people should have seen the Pharisees practicing everywhere what they preached, not just in the temples or synagogues. Our faith should be a way of life, a faith in which we believe and live by each day.

A call to discipleship call is a call to practice what we teach. If we don't live according to the words we teach and preach, our words are just empty vessels, having no power to redeem or deliver anyone.

Luke 11:28 (NLTB)

*Jesus replied, “But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into **practice**.”*

If we desire to be blessed by God, we need to practice what we preach. Often, we can be hearers of the Word of God, then go out and live no differently than the day before. The Word of God will bring change and will give us the power to change if we will just obey it with all our hearts.

Proficiency in something can only be realized by practicing over and over again; that is how we will become better at what we

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are trying to learn. We need to practice and practice until what we are doing becomes second nature to us.

Acts 1:14

*These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to **prayer**, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

After Christ's ascension into heaven, the disciples spent serious time in prayer, waiting upon the Lord in order to learn what He would have them do next. Every great move of God must be first seasoned with prayer. The churches of Acts were about to be born because the disciples were praying and seeking God's face.

We try to come up with all kinds of tactics and methods to expand God's church and kingdom. But what we really need to do is humble ourselves in prayer, confess our sins, and ask Him to fulfill His will in our lives and in the life of the church.

Christ has a plan and purpose for us as well as for the church; we must get in tune with what it is, and then have the faith to carry it out. These people, who had recently been mourning the death of Christ, didn't realize that out of that dead and risen "seed", the church was about to be born.

Very shortly after this prayer meeting, the participants were filled and empowered from on high. They now had the necessary spirit of wisdom and understanding to begin to proclaim the Good News. Within days the church grew from a few hundred to many thousands because the "soil" was broken up and softened by the rain of prayer.

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Romans 12:9-13

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to **prayer**, contributing to the needs of the saints, **practicing** hospitality.*

In this passage Paul lays out a pathway which the Roman disciples should be following. He told them to love without hypocrisy, being totally genuine in their words and actions. He wanted them to flee from evil; it was to be a stench in their noses. Paul wanted them focus on and hold to that which is good.

He wanted the disciples to demonstrate a different attitude toward others. They were to show brotherly love and honour each other. We need to realize that we are each “a treasure in earthen vessels”. We are of great value to Christ and to His body, the church.

As disciples, we are to be diligent and fervent in spirit. We are to be focused and driven by a desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to have hope in the One Who gives, and sows hope in our hearts. We are to persevere in the hard times; this can only happen by being devoted to God, praying and spending time with Him.

Prayer will bring us in tune with the heart of God, empowering us to give, minister, and serve others. Our selfish human natures are not prone to be giving, but here we are told to give to the needy and practice hospitality. We are called to give to others because He has so generously given all of Himself to us.

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II Corinthians 11:3

*But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of **devotion** to Christ.*

We face an enemy who desires to bring division between us and God, attempting to craftily lead us astray. Paul reminded the Corinthian church what had happened to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Our minds are often the weak point between ourselves and God. The devil fills our minds with all kinds of thoughts and fears, keeping us from growing and moving forward with Christ. Our minds can be fertile ground for lies and deceit. Our minds can become dizzy with unwholesome thoughts to the point where we don't know how to get off this train of destruction.

The key is to be one hundred percent devoted to Christ by listening to His voice and learning His ways. If we do so, we will not be led astray. Building a strong personal relationship with Christ is the way to defeat the enemy.

We also must learn from those who have gone before us. History can be a great teacher for all who will study and learn. Paul told us to learn from the life of Eve. Be totally devoted to Christ.

Philippians 4:6-7

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by **prayer** and **supplication** with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

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Stress and anxiety are weapons that the enemy uses to drain us of God's power and strength. If he can get us focused stressfully on the problem, we won't see or hear God's solution to the problem. Everything we do must be done through prayer and supplication. A proper attitude is essential.

We are to make our requests known to the Lord, but always in a spirit of thanksgiving. Can we praise God for the affirmative as well as negative answers? When we learn to pray this way, totally releasing everything into His hands, we will have the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Prayer guards our hearts and minds from manipulation by the enemy. Even when we are in the midst of a storm we can still have peace in our hearts. That peace comes only through Christ Jesus. Inner peace is one the greatest witnessing tools that we can demonstrate to a lost world. When they see that we can have peace in the midst of the storm, they will also want it.

Philippians 4:9

*The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, **practice** these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

Each day is a day of learning. The longer we live, the more there is to learn. Paul was a teacher of teachers, but he also was a student of Christ. The key to growth is taking the things that we have learned and then practicing them.

With practice comes confidence and faith. A relationship of trust is built so that, when we are called on by the Lord to do something, we can step up and move forward for Christ's glory. Paul says that as we practice, we will be drawn closer to Christ – the result of all this practicing will be peace.

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The world is hungering for peace and we, as disciples, have the answer. However, it will require standing up for Christ and moving forward in His strength and ability. He wants to teach us so that we can go out and teach others. Christ promised to be with us through everything, so we need not be overcome by fear. Through practice and prayer, we can overcome fear with faith.

I Thessalonians 5:17

Pray without ceasing.

Paul exhorts the church to keep praying, not giving in or giving up. We are involved in a lengthy battle but in due season we will overcome if we do not grow weary. When you do not know where to go, pray. If you do not know what to do, pray. If you do not know what to say, pray.

Prayer is the doorway to overcoming in Christ. Prayer is the first, second and the last step but it must be combined with action. Prayer is the rain that softens the hard ground, but the ground still needs to be tilled and planted if we are to see a harvest.

In this verse, Paul wanted us to understand that, as we face each day's struggles, trials, and blessings, we should always be in prayer. We need to be in prayer concerning our words and actions. Without prayer regarding everything we say and do, we will discover that we are just doing things in your own strength – which will soon run out.

II Thessalonians 1:11

*To this end also we **pray** for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your **calling**, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power.*

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Each day should be a day of prayer. We should not only be praying for ourselves, but even more for others. Paul prayed for others because he knew the power of prayer. Prayer moves the hand of God and helps encourage people to stay close to God.

Paul's concern was that people would stay true to their calling in Christ. He wanted the disciples to be found worthy of Christ's calling right to the end of their lives. To fulfill Christ's end goal for us, we need to walk the pathway of prayer – that's where Christ sheds the light for our journey.

When we are faithful to God in our prayers and actions, God begins to fulfill the desires He has placed in our hearts. He wants us to be recipients of His goodness and His power. He knows that we cannot be worthy on our own – we need to walk in faith and in the power of God. Christ does not want us to be defeated; He wants us to overcome the world. He wants us to move from death to life.

Hebrews 13:15-16

*Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of **praise** to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

This passage encourages us to continue offering up prayer and also praise. For disciples, praise can be difficult because there is so much negative turmoil going on around us all day.

The key is to have a deep personal relationship with the heart of Christ; we will then see things through His eyes and this will cause us to want to continually praise Him. We will understand what He is doing and planning, both for us and for those around us.

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We are exhorted to press ahead, sowing good things into the lives of others. As we do so, we'll have even more for which to praise Him. Our doing good by sacrificing our time and money will bring much pleasure to God.

James 5:16

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and **pray** for one another so that you may be healed. The effective **prayer** of a righteous man can accomplish much.*

Prayer is the doorway for forgiveness and healing of body, soul, and spirit. It starts by confessing to each other and to God. Confession is what releases the blessing of God on our lives and on the lives of others. Confession should also lead to praying for one another. It seems that as we confess, we are drawn into a deeper relationship with them, leading to the desire to pray for them.

We can receive deliverance from so many things if we would just pray and confess that with which we are struggling. Our prayer life, if done righteously, can accomplish many things for the Kingdom of God - not because of our righteousness but because of His righteousness.

Through prayer, God can identify and heal the afflicted areas of our lives. Prayer brings us in tune with God's will.

I Peter 2:9

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may **proclaim** the excellencies of Him who has **called** you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

God has called us for a purpose and that purpose is that our lives would be a testimony for His glory. We are to be the light in

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dark places and, if we do not shine for Jesus, then the darkness wins. The enemy cannot extinguish the light; only we can cover it up or put it out. Satan doesn't have the power to do that.

As disciples, our goal should be to proclaim Christ with our entire being. It is not us that people must see. Rather, it is Christ's excellencies shining through us that should be seen. We have been chosen and assigned to be part of a royal priesthood for his glory.

Peter tells us that we belong to God - we are his own possession. Because we are His, He will look after us and will take care of us. Our role is to have faith and trust Him in all things. He will see us through. We are called, and we belong. We have been adopted into his family; we are joint heirs with Jesus.

I Peter 3:7

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your **prayers** will not be hindered.

Understanding one another is not an easy task. We think and act in different ways. This is both a blessing and sometimes also can be a great challenge. When a man and woman marry, men must learn to understand their wife as a weaker vessel. This does not mean she is inferior; she has a different function and ministry.

We are to honour her as a fellow heir of the grace of Christ. Men must understand that when we honor the women in our lives, the door is open to the throne room of God's grace. We may wonder why our prayers are hindered; the truth is we may not be honoring her as we should.

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Our wives are a treasure to us; with respect to prayer, wives seem to be more in tune with the heart of God. We should be doing all we can to honor her and to understand who she is in Christ. If we do not do honor her, our call from Christ will not result in effective service until we begin to put her in her God-given place.

II Peter 1:10-11

*Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his **calling** and choosing of you; for as long as you **practice** these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.*

Peter wants us constantly examining our calling from God. We need to remember it is He Who has called and chosen us as vessels for His service. It is vitally important to take the things we have heard and learned, then continue to practice them in our lives. Most of all, we need to imitate the character of Christ; it is His desire that we become more like Him.

When the actions we practice are of God, they will help us to keep from stumbling. As disciples, we often do stumble and fall because of our lack of knowledge and understanding – the fault is not Christ's. He is always there to help us up. We need only call upon His name.

The blessing that comes through practicing godly actions is that it gives to us an “abundant” entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Christ is always there for us. We need to continue the practice of walking in His presence.

Jude 1:20

*But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, **praying** in the Holy Spirit.*

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True prayer must be offered up in the power of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who teaches, counsels, and guides us. Without Him in our lives there is little hope for growth and maturity.

Jude tells us that we are undergoing a building process in our lives. A foundation needs to be laid and a superstructure built. We need a sure foundation, a proper structure on that foundation, and then a roof to protect and shelter us from the storms of life. Building takes time. We need to be patient, letting God do it in His way and in His timing.

We do not need to be fearful of the Holy Spirit or what He may call us to do. If He has called us, He will also empower us to fulfill His purposes. The disciple must walk a Spirit-filled life. Paul tells us to pray daily for the filling of the Holy Spirit. Just like the Israelites of old who daily had to go out and collect manna, we also need to come before the Lord daily for our spiritual food.

RESOLUTION:

To be well-rounded disciples, we must be maturing in all these areas at the same time. It takes both effort and faith if we are going to stay on track. We also need to keep focused on the reason why we do these things. It's not because we "have to" but because we "love to". We do not want to grow cold or, worse yet, get to the point of losing our first love. Life is full of changes and it will seem that body, soul and spirit want to go in many different directions. This is where Christ can, and does, bring harmony and peace; we just need to call upon His name.

Christ has called us, but He also equips and empowers us; we just need to surrender our all to Him. He does know what is best for us and for those around us. We need to set borders and

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Chapter Twenty

Call to Truth and Righteousness

*Then Solomon said, " you have shown great loving-kindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in **truth** and **righteousness** and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great loving-kindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.*

I King 3:6

*The LORD is near to **all** who **call** upon Him, to **all** who **call** upon Him in **truth**.*

Psalms 145:18

*I am the LORD, I have **called** you in **righteousness**, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations.*

Isaiah 42:6

The disciple is called to walk in truth and righteousness. For many, especially in these times, this is not an easy task. Many around us, who call themselves believers in Christ, do not live as if God is first in their lives; something or someone else appears to be preeminent. God greatly blesses those who walk in truth and live a life of righteousness; often it is a way of life that we see too few living. Such people seem to think there is nothing wrong in telling "white lies" or to live a life full of hidden sins, all the while hoping that somehow, they will make it through.

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The above Scriptures again lay the foundation for what it means to be called as a disciple who walks in truth and righteousness. King Solomon saw this reality in his father, David, and knew it was a gift from God to those who would seek Him and call upon His name.

The dictionary defines truth as: *fact, reality, certainty, honesty, integrity*. We are called to speak in truth and live out truth in our lives. When we walk in truth, we then have confidence and boldness to overcome those temptations that the enemy puts into our minds or in our pathway.

The dictionary defines righteousness as: *virtue, morality, justice, uprightness*. The call to righteousness implies being both covered in righteousness and being full of righteousness. Righteousness is what makes us stand tall and upright, giving us strength in times of storms.

The apostle Paul spent much time teaching the Roman and the Galatian churches the meaning of truth and righteousness. True righteousness is what Christ brought to earth through His death and resurrection; this “truth righteousness” is intimately connected to grace. “Grace righteousness” is one of the most liberating truths by which the disciple can live his life.

Scripture Signposts:

Hopefully these Scriptures will take you even deeper into the meaning of the call of Christ and the importance of “truth righteousness”. The first step comes with a personal relationship

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with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Truth

Joshua 24:14

*Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and **truth**; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.*

When God calls us, He calls us to come to Him in sincerity and truth. We are not to come half-heartedly, but with all of our heart, open and clean before God. Today many people speak half-truths or what some call “white lies”. We tend to think that not being totally truthful will not hurt anybody; the truth, however, is that it hurts you, it hurts the person you’re speaking with, and it brings weakness to the body of Christ, the church.

Note the sin of Achan in Joshua 7:16-26.

Joshua had heard the word of truth from the Lord on how the Hebrews were to deal with Jericho and its spoils. The army was informed about what they should do, but Achan chose to hide some of the spoils for himself. He decided to disobey God’s truth and, because of this sin, the people of Israel lost a battle at the city of Ai. Later Achan’s sin was revealed and the truth came out, the results affecting not only him but his whole family as well. All were put to death.

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God's Word is truth, the truth that sets us free; we must walk in it daily. We are called to be persons of truth (like Jesus Christ) and, as disciples, adhere closely to the Word of truth (the Bible). It is our responsibility to follow this truth with a sincere heart.

The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira Acts 5:1-11.

Ananias and Sapphira came to the apostles and tried to trick them into believing they had given more than they really did. Both husband and wife reported the same untruth. They had the freedom to give whatever they wanted, but the problem was that they chose to be untruthful to their leaders, to the church, and to the Holy Spirit. They did not grasp that the Holy Spirit knows all things. Their deceit cost both of them their lives.

It is easy for disciples to fall into the trap of worshipping other gods, making things (like money in this example) to be more important than to God. God wants us to know that He, as Creator, is the only God we are to worship. He must be pre-eminent in our lives. In the olden days and, yet in many parts of the world, people have all kinds of images or different kind of spirits that they worship.

God has called us to live out His truth in our lives; in order to do so, we must put away all other gods that would lead us away from a genuine walk with the only true God. We are called to serve Him. Christ came from heaven to serve the Father here on earth.

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Nothing else took first place in His life. The truth is that we must serve Him with all our hearts.

I Samuel 12:24

*Only fear the LORD and serve Him in **truth** with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.*

Samuel challenged the people to serve God in truth and with all their hearts. The Word of God repeatedly tells us that it is not our sacrifices that He desires, but it is our whole heart that He wants. He wants a heart that seeks after God's truth and righteousness. We all face a daily battle as to Whom or what we will serve. Will we serve ourselves or serve God in all we say and do? Serving needs to be done with the right attitude – the attitude of love. He first loved us so we love Him by serving Him.

Samuel was a priest as well as a prophet. He would wait on the Lord until he heard the God's truth for the people. Throughout the history of Israel prophets, priest and kings forsook God, yet pretended to speak on behalf of God. Their words were nothing but man-made by people who wanted to appear spiritual. This is also what will happen in the last days. Such people are called antichrist, sheep in wolves' clothing, and false prophets; they will appear spiritual but will not speak the truth of God and His Word. Israel suffered greatly throughout the Old Testament because evil people did not serve God and speak His truth.

Service should mark relationship with the Lord. We need not fear the Lord when we know the truth about who He is. We are

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told to place to embed this truth of God deeply within our hearts. When we know and understand Who He is and what His will is for us; then we need to serve with a heart of integrity. We are called to live a life of truth, not a life based on fear. Fear often originates from ignorance. The correct meaning of fear in this passage simply means to hold God in high respect. When you have God in your heart and know His truth, you can then have a peace that passes all understanding.

Today's church leaders need to be praying and instructing people in truth and in the right way to live here on earth (1 Samuel 12:23). Jesus told the disciples that His way is the only way, that His truth is the only truth, and His life is the only life that we are to follow and live by (John 14:6). To serve in truth, we must be obedient to His Word and call. The consequence or price of disobedience is way too high. For as Samuel says, "If you choose to go your own way, both you and your king will be swept away." (1 Samuel 12:25)

Psalm 25:10

*All the paths of the LORD are loving-kindness and **truth** to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.*

It is clear from Scripture that God has a will and a path that He desires us to follow. He is our guide, calling and leading us in loving-kindness and truth. His desire for us is to obey His words - the teachings given to us in the Bible. When we conscientiously obey His commandments and testimonies, we can be assured that

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He will lead us with loving-kindness and truth along our personal life journeys.

Psalm 43:3-4

*O send out Your light and Your **truth**, let them lead me; Let them bring me to Your holy hill And to Your dwelling places. Then I will go to the alter of God, To God my exceeding joy; and on the harp I will praise You, O God, my God.*

Truth is not just something we somehow place in our hearts, but it is to be a guiding light for our walk here on earth. Truth leads us into the very presence of God – the Holy of Holies is a place of divine truth. The Psalmist asked God to send His light and His truth so that he could be led in the right direction. God desires to be a light unto our path, but that light can only shine on our pathway as we commit to live out His truth. God's light and truth will lead those who have been called to follow after His heart.

The psalmist's heart cry is that this divine light and truth will lead him to God's holy hill and into His dwelling places. The writer wants to go into the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God. He wanted his relationship with God to be totally pure and go deeper. He wanted to go to the altar of God which represented the heart of God. He wanted to enter into a deep union with God, marked by meaningful worship and praise. This is what Jesus came to do. His death resulted in the top-to-bottom tearing of (Luke 23:45). Why? So that, without any restriction, we can personally enter into His truth, love, grace and mercy.

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He concludes in verse four by saying, “O God, my God”. God’s call draws disciples into His presence. We call out to God and He calls out to us. Through His truth (the Word of God) and through His Spirit (the power of God) we can enter into the very presence of God, where our hearts can find peace and rest.

We can know for a certainty that, when we respond to His call in our lives, He will provide the light and truth that will guide us in our everyday walk with Him. His goal is to lead us with truth into His very presence. The Scripture tells us that His truth will bring us to His “holy hill” where He Himself dwells.

Psalm 51:6

*Behold, You desire **truth** in the innermost being, And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.*

Behold (“let it be known”) that God has called us in order to fill us with His truth – “our cups will run over” with God’s truth. He desires that every crevice of our hearts will be filled with the call to live in His truth. His truth is pure and never-changing. By knowing His truth, we can then be filled with His wisdom. God wants our entire beings to be saturated with His truth.

King David opens his heart to God through worship and praise. In song, he shares his deepest feelings and longings with God. He knows God’s heart and what God requires of him. He knows that God desires truth in the innermost parts of his being. He also realizes that with truth comes wisdom. Truth leads to wisdom and wisdom leads us into a life of deeper understanding.

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The call of truth on David's heart caused him to ask God to purify him and to make him clean. He, in effect, says to God, "Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."

David knew that if he was to come before a Holy God, he himself would have to be made clean. In fact, he asked God to blot out all his iniquities. All men and women are born into sin; the only way we can come into the very presence of God is through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is the blood of Christ Jesus that cleanses us and blots out our sin. David would have seen the sacrifices at the tabernacle and knew what God required. He knew that he had done many sinful things and the only hope he had was to lay himself at the mercy seat of God, where he could experience forgiveness and cleansing.

David came before God the same way we need to - by asking God for grace and for His loving-kindness (verse 1) and then confessing that he was a sinner (verse 2 & 3). We all stand before God as sinners, but God demonstrated His great grace and love by sending us His Son to die on the cross as an atonement for our sins. We are washed and cleansed by His precious blood. By this Gospel truth we have been called to live our whole lives.

Psalm 86:11

*Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your **truth**;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.*

The unknown things can become clear. We are not to walk in darkness, but we can walk in His glorious light. There is a process to becoming more mature in God, and it comes by

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submitting ourselves to His teaching. Understanding can only come through learning and doing.

He calls to us to adopt His ways, but we must commit ourselves to be united with His heart. We need to discipline ourselves to study His word so that, through His Holy Spirit, He can teach us how to walk with Him. We need to become one with Him. We can trust in God's Name and call upon Him at any time. All he asks His children to do is walk in His truth.

Isaiah 38:2-3

*Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³and said, "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in **truth** and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.*

We can see from this Scripture that Hezekiah knew the call of the Lord. He knew the truth of God's Word; when he heard from the LORD that he was about to die, he turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly. The call of God's truth can tear at our hearts. He knew that the only way to fulfill the call and truth of the Lord was to walk a life of prayer. When we pray we can hear the truth of our God. He reminds the Lord about how he has walked with Him; Hezekiah now prays that God will hear him and answer the longing of his heart. Prayer links the heart of man to the heart of God.

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Zechariah 8:7-8

*“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in **truth** and righteousness.’*

God spoke through Zechariah the prophet, telling them He would call the Jews back to Jerusalem. God never forsakes his people. Nor does he stop calling out to us; the challenge for is whether we will change and be obedient to His truth. He knows what is perfect and right for our lives.

He reminds the people that they are still His people and He their God. He did not turn His back on them, but they chose to turn and walk away from God’s truth. When God calls us, we need to obey and stand firm in that call. We can trust His words because they are pure and full of completely true.

John 1:17

*For the Law was given through Moses; grace and **truth** were realized through Jesus Christ.*

Moses was a personal servant of God. He walked close to the heart of God. God gave to Moses His Laws so that he could teach and equip the people for their walk with the Lord. Moses obeyed the call of God with all his heart. He had a deep and personal relationship with God.

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Christ built on the foundation of the law which came through Moses. To Moses was revealed the importance and truth of the law; Christ came to call mankind to the truth of God's grace. Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the law. Because of that truth, the Son of God was able to give His life as a ransom for sin. He shed His blood so that we could know and experience the truth of God's grace and mercy.

John 8:31-32

*³¹So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; ³²and you will know the **truth**, and the **truth** will make you free."*

When Jesus calls us to follow Him and walk in His truth it requires a step of faith on our part. We first must accept Him as Saviour, believing that He is truly the Son of God. Then our lives should "live out" His word. By doing so, others will see that we are truly disciples of Christ. He calls, we accept in faith, and then we live a life that glorifies His name.

We also need to realize that by accepting His call on our lives, Christ places His truth into our hearts. We must understand that Christ, "The Truth," has the power to set us free. Christ has called us to freedom, breaking the chains that bind us to this world. We were bound to a life of sin resulting in eternal death. Christ, by coming to earth as a human, and by shedding his blood and dying on the cross – this, by faith, makes us free for all eternity.

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John 16:13

*¹³“But when He, the Spirit of **truth**, comes, He will guide you into all the **truth**; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*

Before Jesus was crucified on the cross he told His disciples that they should not fear or worry because the Father would send them another Comforter. He would send the Holy Spirit to give life and power, both to the disciples and to His body, the church. The Holy Spirit is known as the Spirit of truth, because He is part of the Godhead; there is nothing but purity and truth that flows from Him. He comes to indwell us so that we can fulfill the call of Christ in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is in our lives to personally guide and counsel us concerning the will of God for our lives. Whatever truth He hears from the Father in heaven, He will speak that truth into our hearts. Will we quiet our hearts to hear His still, small voice? Each day, will we hear Him speaking in His Word or speaking to our hearts as we wait upon Him in prayer?

John 17:19

*¹⁹“For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in **truth**.*

Jesus, the Pure and Holy One, came to sacrifice His life for us so that we can be sanctified in the faith. We still have a sin nature but, because of Christ's death and resurrection we are now

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clothed in His righteousness. We can become sanctified through faith and belief in the Word of God. The Word is what makes us clean, but this sanctification process is the result of a daily walk. We need to spend time with Christ daily, to wash, purify, and make us clean.

Ephesians 6:14

*Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with **truth**, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

Paul tells the Ephesian church to stand firm and gird they loins with truth. The loins represent reproduction; in times past, loins were thought to be the center of man. God has designed us to bear fruit both physically and spiritually; Christ calls us to bear fruit grounded upon the truth of God. To produce lasting fruit our life source, Christ's Spirit, must fill us.

We need to remember that this is not forced upon us; it's something that we should be willing to do. Joyfully choose to stand firm and gird your loins with truth of Christ!

II Timothy 2:15

*¹⁵Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of **truth**.*

It is one thing to know the truth of God but it is much more important that we understand how to use the truth of God in our daily lives. We are called to be diligent hard workers in the service

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of God. We are to present ourselves approved to God; the only way we can do this is to be God's workman. Having been called to be workmen, three good things happen: 1) We will not need to be ashamed concerning our faith in Christ. 2) We will be able to accurately handle the Word of God. 3) We will know what the word of truth is.

I Peter 1:22-23

*Since you have in obedience to the **truth** purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, ²³for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*

God's call through His word of truth does a variety of things for us. The call of God bears enduring fruit. Peter tells us that this call to truth purifies our souls and produces in our hearts a sincere and fervent love for other disciples of Christ Jesus. We have been born again with an imperishable eternal seed in our hearts that it cannot die. This unique life has come to us through the living word of God which is enduring - nothing will ever destroy it.

Righteousness

Psalm 15:2

*He who walks with integrity, and works **righteousness**, And speaks **truth** in his heart.*

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The first verse of this chapter asks, “Who can abide in your tabernacle and who can dwell in your holy hill?” The answer to this comes in the second verse ... the answer is the person who walks in integrity, walks in righteousness and speaks truth from his heart. Only when we clothe ourselves in Christ’s righteousness and obey the truth of the Word of God can we live a life of righteousness and truth.

The challenge most disciples face is that they do not make time to place the truth of God’s word in their heart. As a result, their daily walk does not demonstrate integrity and righteousness. People around us should see that we are different than the world. Our lives should reflect the image of Christ Jesus to a lost world.

Proverbs 21:21

*He who pursues **righteousness** and loyalty finds life, **righteousness** and honor.*

We are encouraged to pursue righteousness. It is not something we automatically experience - it is something we must eagerly go after. We must make a decision to search out and live according to the righteous will of God. We are told that the pursuit of righteousness provides a fulfilling life that lasts. It brings honour. Those around us will respect us for our belief and lifestyle. But before this fruit can be produced in our lives we must be loyal to our commitment to God. There is no other way. It is the only way.

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Zephaniah 2:3

*Seek the LORD, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek **righteousness**, seek humility. ...*

Zephaniah tells us that God wants us to seek after righteousness. Doing so will take effort on our part. We must seek God in prayer and through His Word. We are to seek God with diligence, and be prepared to open many doors and “turn over every stone”. The call of God is a process of seeking out all that He is and to look for Him in every circumstance of life.

Matthew 5:6

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for **righteousness**, for they shall be satisfied.*

The world hungers, not just for physical food, but also very much for spiritual food. Jesus told us in the beatitudes that we are blessed if we hunger and thirst after His righteousness. We should long in our hearts for more of Him. After answering His call and receiving Him into our hearts, we begin to long for His righteousness. He is the only One Who can quench this thirsting of our soul. Christ is the living water of righteousness – only He can satisfy the deep needs within our hearts.

Romans 5:20-21

The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign

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*through **righteousness** to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Beginning at the time of Moses, man was under the law. The law was to be his tutor, directing him as to how to live. The coming of Christ brought about a major change for the human race. Christ came to do something that no man was able to do, before or after. He fulfilled all the requirements of the law. Even though sin reigned in our lives, bringing about eternal death, through the grace of Christ we could now be clothed in His righteousness. When we commit to personally trusting in Christ Jesus we are then ushered into a new, eternal, life with Him.

Romans 6:12-13

*Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, ¹³and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of **unrighteousness**; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of **righteousness** to God.*

The call of Jesus Christ requires that we present our lives to Him. We are not to continue in the ways of this world, obeying the lusts of the flesh. Our bodies are not to be instruments of unrighteousness. Wickedness is all around us and every person has the potential to do terrible things. This is why we need to die to self and put on Christ's righteousness. Christ calls us to a life of righteousness which can be accomplished only through His strength and power, never in our own strength. Our lives are to be

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instruments for Christ. He desires to flow through us and use us to build up His church.

Romans 6:17-18

*But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of **righteousness**.*

Man does not realize that without Christ in their hearts, they are slaves to sin. We are tied to the sin nature of this world where Satan rules. The sin of disobedience often happens daily; we turn our backs to God's will and do our own will. It is vital to commit our hearts to the teaching and truth of Jesus Christ. When we do so and are obedient, we then are freed from the bondage of sin, choosing to be slaves of Christ and His righteousness. God's call to true freedom is realized when we become servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:11

*Having been filled with the fruit of **righteousness** which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Back in the 15th chapter of the book of John, Jesus taught us that He is the vine and we are the braches. We are grafted into Christ, our life source. His righteousness then flows from Him into our lives. When we remain connected to Him we will soon see fruit in our lives. Paul tells the church in Philippi that they can be filled with the fruit of Christ Jesus. The fruit of Christ's

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righteousness will be evident in our lives so that we will be able to bless and encourage others. Everything we do can bring glory and praise to God. Our call to righteousness bears the fruit of righteousness when we are willing to give our lives unreservedly to Him.

II Timothy 2:22

*Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue **righteousness**, faith, love and peace, with those who **call** on the Lord from a pure heart.*

Paul tells Timothy that it is important that he pursues the righteousness of Christ. In our youth we are often tempted to run after the lusts of our flesh, not realizing that this pathway can lead to destruction and death. We are called to pursue the Lord with a pure heart, a heart that has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Everything we do should be seasoned with righteousness, faith, love and peace. As His channels to a lost world, this is what Christ desires to do through us. He is calling us to be ambassadors of His righteousness.

I Peter 2:24

*And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to **righteousness**; for by His wounds you were healed.*

As disciples of Christ, we need to clearly understand in our hearts what Christ has done for us. It was He Who bore our sins on His body when He went to the cross. The One Who knew no sin

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took on our sins, so we could die to sin, being set free from its chains and its penalty. We die to our sinful self-nature and take on the righteousness of Christ Jesus. His wounds and the shedding of His innocent blood became the bridge for our healing. Sin infects our bodies with corruption and death. Trusting Christ's call to believe in Him sets us free and releases us from the strongholds of sin. We are called to live a life of righteousness and truth with Christ in our lives.

I John 3:10

*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice **righteousness** is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.*

Living a righteous life is not part of our nature. By nature, we are sinful and disobedient. Disciples need a deep hunger to do God's will, not seeking after their own will. We need to be active in our Christian walk, making sure that we practice the righteousness of God. Doing so will yield the fruit of love for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

Resolution:

Truth and righteousness are difficult concepts, but they are the foundation stones for every believer's life. How can one live a life marked by truth and righteousness? The answer may seem a little simplistic, but having a deep and personal relationship with Christ is the key. When Christ calls us, He also equips us with all we need to live truthfully and righteously here on earth.

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Again, this is not something that we can do by ourselves. Each day needs to be begun with prayer so that we can be in tune with Christ for that day. Satan will always try to throw stumbling blocks along our pathway to try to trip us up. He desires that we fall back into the habits of our old sin nature. He wants to keep us bound, living a life of disobedience leading to destruction.

The only way, I believe, that one can follow Christ's call to truth and righteousness, is to truly understand what it means to be grafted into Christ. He is the vine and we are the branches; we need to ask daily to be filled and empowered by His Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes it possible to daily live a life marked by truth and righteousness. Yes, it is a daily growth process, but through Christ Jesus it is possible.

We also need to remember that we are not alone; when we place our lives into the hands of Jesus, we become part of His body, the church, which He has gifted in various ways, helping us to fulfill the call of Christ in our lives. Christ is the Head of the body and He will direct other members of His body to help us in our journey of living a truthful and righteous life. The key is to walk a life of faith and trust. Christ is always faithful to His Word. We just have to place our lives into His loving hands.

Finally, we need to purpose in our hearts to set the goal of living in Christ's truth and righteousness every day. Christ's call is a call to commitment and obedience. We need to remember that all Christ does is because of His grace and love. We just need to accept it.

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Prayer Directive:

Pray that God will reveal to you how you can walk more in step with His will, exhibiting His truth and righteousness. Pray that God will show you, through the study of His Word (His Truth), to see things that need to be washed and confessed. Pray also you will discern how the people with whom you associate are either helping or polluting your walk with Christ. What you do you need to do that will help you to walk in truth and righteousness? Pray that things of the world will be drained out of your life and that they would be replaced with the things of Christ poured into your heart, being filled with the fullness of His Holy Spirit.

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Chapter Twenty-One

Call to Sit, Walk and Stand

*For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first **sit** down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?*

Luke 14:28

*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might **walk** in newness of life.*

Romans 6:4

*Be on the alert, **stand** firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.*

I Corinthians 16:13

The Bible speaks about three key positions: 1) “sit” (seated or assembled), 2) “walk” (march, stride, move), and 3) “stand” (remain, continue, exist, stay, prevail, endure, last).

The disciple of Christ must take time to count the cost. Sometimes people do things because of the excitement of the moment. However, when challenges come they slowly drift away. Jesus experienced this when many of His disciples decided to no longer follow Him, because they found His words too difficult to live by (John 6:60-71). This is why we are encouraged to count the cost before we begin “building”. Christ is the Master Carpenter

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and we are the material that He uses to build for Himself a beautiful temple that will house His Spirit and glorify His Name.

Next we, as disciples, must realize that our faith in Christ guides our walk with Him on our journey here on earth. For three and a half years the disciples left all to follow Christ, to go wherever he led them. Their school was a hands-on training ground. They had to walk to many different places; because of this journey with Christ Jesus, they discovered and experienced the truth of His nature and character. They saw that he was indeed the Son of man but also that He was truly the Son of God.

Finally, the disciples came to a point in their lives where they would stand strong before their enemies and be able to stand strong in Christ Jesus. Their wisdom and knowledge were transformed into an understanding of their Lord whereby they would be able to defeat the enemy and build up the Kingdom of Heaven. We are to take a stand – unmovable in our faith, equipped, and ready for service.

Scripture Signposts:

Hopefully the following Scriptures will take you even deeper into an understanding of Christ's call to you and the importance of friendship with Christ which comes from a personal relationship with Him. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

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Sit (seated or assembled or set)

Ephesians 1:19b-23

*These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and **seated** Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

It is important first of all to realize where Christ is today. Paul wants the church to remember the Christ is seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. Christ is far above “*all rule and authority and power and dominion*”. His name is above all other names. Christ is in control over all things, both now and in the future. We also need to comprehend and clearly understand that He is the Head of His Church, which is His body. Christ is the one who fills with all power and authority. We need not be overcome by fear, but rather need to know that we are secure because of our faith in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him,

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and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Not only is Christ seated with the Father, but we are called to be seated with Christ. This happened only because of Christ's great love and mercy that He extended to us. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but because of the work of Christ, we have been made alive and are raised up with Him. We are already seated with him in heavenly places! Here on earth, too, we have a unique position with Christ Jesus.

The idea of being seated demonstrates that we have a relationship with our Master and Teacher. He is seated with us, instructing us in what His will is for our lives. We need to take time each day to sit with Christ, listening and learning from our Lord and King. He wants to show us the riches of His grace which He daily showers on us. When we take time to see His magnificent grace, our hearts will be filled with thanksgiving and praise. That's why Paul teaches the Ephesian church a variety of truths that we also receive because we are "in Christ."

Walk (to move, go to take action)

Ephesians 4:1-3

*¹Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to **walk** in a manner worthy of the **calling** with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with*

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patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To fulfill Christ's call, we need to walk in faith during our lifetimes here on earth. Paul exhorts the church to walk worthily of Christ's calling. Christ has called us in all humility and gentleness. We are His children and He desires to walk with us each day. All we have to do is put our hands into His hand and let Him lead us. We need to walk patiently with Him and with each other. Just like an orchardist, God is pruning and nurturing us so that we may produce fruit for His glory.

We need to persevere in our walk with Christ as there will be many challenges that we will face here on earth. To achieve success, we need to work, laboring together with our fellow disciples. We need to walk in peace and unity with Christ and His Body, the Church. We are called to pursue this goal diligently. It should be our focus and goal each day of our lives.

Ephesians 4:17

*¹⁷So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you **walk** no longer just as the Gentiles also **walk**, in the futility of their mind,*

When we think of walking we often think of it only as a physical activity but we need also to understand that, because of how we are created, our walk with Christ also affects our emotions, our minds, and our spirits. We are called not to walk any

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longer as the Gentiles do or as the world does. Paul tells us that this world walks in futility, leading to destruction and death. We are called to walk in the newness of life in Christ. We have become new creatures and now we are to walk/live a life exemplifying His heavenly Kingdom. We need to walk not according to our minds or man's wisdom, but by hearts guided by Christ and led by His Spirit.

Ephesians 5:2

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; ²and **walk** in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.*

Just like a child likes to imitate his father we, as children of Christ, need to imitate Him. We are called to walk in love just like Christ loves us. We are also to give of ourselves, dying to the ways of this world. Our own wills are to be put to death so that we can live wholeheartedly for Christ Jesus. Christ gave Himself up for others. We need to give ourselves to Him and to His Body, the Church. We need to give our lives as an offering and sacrifice; such a walk is a fragrant aroma to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We often forget that our time here on earth is but the twinkling of an eye. Life is short and that is why we need to be careful how we live out our walk. It may seem like we sacrifice a lot, but we need to remember that the Father sacrificed His Son for us. All of eternity will prove that any sacrifice on our part has truly

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been worth it! It all starts with repentance and receiving Him as our Lord and Savior.

Ephesians 5:15-16

*Therefore be careful how you **walk**, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of your time, because the days are evil.*

Finally, Paul exhorts the disciples (the Body of Christ) to be careful how they walk. We need to watch where our feet are leading us. We need to make sure that our feet are planted on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ; if not, we could stumble and fall. Paul exhorts us to walk wisely. This means that we should take time to get into the Word of God so that the Word of God can get into us. The Bible is a road map – it is a light unto our pathway (Ps 119:105).

God has given each one of us a certain amount of time here on earth; we need to be using this time wisely so that we may experience all that God has for us. We live in evil times. Things are going from bad to worse and it is going to become much more difficult for the disciple of Christ. In the last days great persecution will befall the church. This is why we must carefully walk with Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit is with us each step of the way to guide us and teach us, but we must submit ourselves to His will (Matt 6:10).

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Stand (to be upright, firm in one thoughts and actions)

Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14

*¹¹Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to **stand firm** against the schemes of the devil. ... ¹³Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to **stand firm**. ... ¹⁴**Stand firm** therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*

Next, we are called to take a stand for Christ Jesus. This position is possible when we spend time with Christ in prayer. Disciples need to realize that this call to stand firm means that we are going to find ourselves in a battle with the devil and his army. The way we stand firm is by putting on the full armour of God. Evil days are upon us. Terrible things are going on around us throughout the world. If we stand, and remain firm in Christ, we will be able to resist the works of Satan.

The reality about our call to stand is that we must daily put on the full armour of God and, through prayer, ready ourselves for battle. Though this process takes time, it demonstrates that we are under the authority of the Commander-in-Chief as we go into battle. But it also important to realize that we do not stand alone, that we need to call other members of the Body of Christ to come alongside and stand with us. Daniel even called upon God Who sent the angel Gabriel to come and fight. In Joshua's case, the Commander-in-Chief of God's army appeared to Him. We also

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have the example of Elijah who told his fearful servant once more to go out and look – the servant then sees the army of the Lord all around them.

Resolution:

Most of this teaching was directed at the Ephesian church and is not necessarily one of the easiest calls to follow. Paul calls upon the church as a whole to observe these truths, but wants us to know that individual disciples also have a unique responsibility in the way they serve Christ and each other. Paul opens up his heart to them with the hope of grounding them more deeply in their faith. The Ephesian disciples were surrounded with hundreds of different kinds of gods and images of gods which were worshiped. Paul wanted them to understand that Christ Jesus was with them in everything they did, despite the paganism around them.

It is clear at the very beginning of Paul's letter to the Ephesians that he wanted to make sure that they realized that they were "in" Christ (Eph. 1:4,7, 9, 10, 13) and that they had been adopted as His children (Eph. 1:5). He also reminded them that they had been called (Eph. 1:18) by Christ. Because of the acceptance of the Gospel of salvation, Christ has now sealed within us the Holy Spirit of Promise. This then empowers us for service in the Body of Christ.

Paul also wants us to realize that, when we accept this call of Christ, we experience new relationships – not only with Christ,

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Chapter Twenty-Two

Call Revoked

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

This chapter has been deliberately placed at the end of this book because I wanted, not only for us to understand how God calls us, but also how He wants to work through us and bless us. But we also need to know there are times when His call is revoked (taken away) from a disciple. This is most often the result of the sin of disobedience where we go the opposite way to God's will or turn our back on Him. In the Old Testament we have people like Samson and Saul who knew the call and plan of God but thought they could accomplish it in their own way. In the New Testament we read about sin that quenches the work of the Holy Spirit. As in human relationships, there can be times of strain and brokenness in our relationship with God. In our walk, we need to be careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit to the point where His anointing and power leaves us.

In our world today, there are many churches and individual disciples who started right but are now far from the heart of God. These people walk in the flesh. They moved from a personal faith in Christ to "having a religion". The outward appearance is pious but the heart is cold and wicked. This comes through in the description of at least one of the seven churches in the book of Revelation. It also comes in through the parable Jesus taught (near

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the end of his earthly ministry) concerning the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31-46). The “goats” thought they were doing everything right for Christ, but He and turns to them and tells them He never knew them; they were then cast into outer darkness.

He also warns us of people whom He calls “false Christs” (Matt. 24:23-24). Also, in those last days, the hearts of many disciples will grow cold (Matt. 24:12). It is clear that we need to evaluate the spirit in which we are walking.

The dictionary defines “revoke” as: *cancelled, annulled, rescinded, withdrawn, retracted, repealed, invalidated*. We never want to end up in a situation where this applies to us. We want to be filled daily by the Holy Spirit and walk in His power.

The call and anointing of God is not to be taken lightly. God desires to dwell with us but we must walk with Him and daily seek His filling, responding appropriately to His call and anointing. Otherwise we will just be whitewashed vessels with nothing inside. We will be devoid of God’s treasure in our hearts. If we become unfaithful and disobedient to Him, we will suffer the consequences of God’s call being revoked.

Scripture Signposts:

Hopefully these Scriptures will take you into an even deeper understanding of the call of Christ and the importance of friendship with God that comes as a result of a personal

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relationship with Christ. Let us hear from the Word and commit to do as the Spirit leads.

Samson

Judges 16:18-21

*When Delilah saw that he had told her all that was in his heart, she sent and called the lords of the Philistines, saying, "Come up once more, for he has told me all that is in his heart." Then the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hands. ¹⁹She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him. ²⁰She said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And he awoke from his sleep and said, "I will go out as at other times and shake myself free." But he did not know that **the LORD had departed from him**. ²¹Then the Philistines seized him and gouged out his eyes; and they brought him down to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains, and he was a grinder in the prison.*

God raised up Samson to be a judge for His people. Samson knew the call of God and what it meant to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God. But he chose to walk in sin's direction. The sins of pride and lust entered into his heart and, instead of hearing the call of God, He began to hear the call of the world on his life. The results of falling into sin cost Samson his sight and his strength. He ended up being bound and thrown into prison.

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Samson was lured away by an ungodly woman who lied to him and finally got him to a place where she had a man and he shaved off the seven locks of his head (Judges 16:19). After Samson woke, he didn't realize that the Spirit of God had departed from him. Samson had started the race well, heeding the call of God; however, he missed out on much with which God could have blessed him.

Even today many pastors, teachers and followers of Christ have fallen into unspeakable sin, thinking that nobody knows. However, the truth is that God always knows our hearts. We cannot hide from His all-seeing eye. It is amazing how many people still try to serve the Lord, not knowing that the Spirit of God has departed from them. We need to get on our knees and cry out to God if we hope to finish well the race that He has put before us.

Eli

I Samuel 2:30 ... 34

*“Therefore the LORD God of Israel declares, ‘I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever’; but now the LORD declares, ‘**Far be it from Me**—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed. ... ³²‘You will see the distress of My dwelling, in spite of all the good that I do for Israel; and an old man will not be in your house forever.*

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I Samuel 4:18

*When he mentioned the ark of God, **Eli** fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years.*

I Samuel 2:35

'But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always.

Eli experienced the call of God on his life but, over time, he began to drift away from that call. He knew God's voice but chose to slide back into the ways of the world. The challenge we all face is to avoid disqualification (because of one own selfish desires) even after starting the race well.

Because of Eli's actions and inactions, his whole family was also disqualified. What we do affects, not only our children, but can have repercussions for many generations to come. Eli's own sons lived a wicked life and brought the house of Eli into disgrace. Finally, one day while sitting on a chair at the gate, Eli heard what had been happening to the ark of God, he fell off his chair and broke his neck.

Finally, God declares what He expects from His prophets and priests. First, He is looking for someone who will be faithful to Him in all areas of their lives. Second, He desires someone who

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will live his life according to the wishes of the heart of God. He desires someone who will carry out His will as a spokesperson to the people on His behalf. God would bless such a person's household and he would walk before the Lord's anointed forever. Eli lost it all because He did not closely follow God's call on his life.

Saul

I Samuel 15:11, 23, 26

*"I regret that I have made Saul king, for **he has turned back** from following Me and has not carried out My commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night. ...²³ "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because **you have rejected** the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king." ...²⁶ But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for **you have rejected** the word of the LORD, and the **LORD has rejected you** from being king over Israel."*

I Chronicles 10:13-14

So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it,^{1 4} and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse.

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I Samuel 16:14

*Now the Spirit of the LORD **departed** from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.*

Saul was called by God for the purpose of becoming the first king of Israel. God promised to bless him if he would just remain true to the call of God. We are told Saul turned his back toward God and stopped fulfilling and living by the commands of God.

Samuel spoke on behalf of God saying, “*For **you have rejected** the word of the LORD, and the **LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.**”* Saul rejected the Word of God and his life began to spiral into rebellion. He relied on the sin of divination. He became insubordinate and his life became full of iniquity and idolatry.

Because of Saul’s rejection of the call of God on his life, we are told of two tragic things that happened to him. First, the Spirit of God departed from Saul and he spent the rest of his life terrorized by an evil spirit. Second, he died in his trespasses and sins - all because he did not seek the Lord’s guidance as to what he should be doing. When we reject or turn our back on the call of God, the result can be devastating and everlasting.

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New Testament:

Ananias and Sapphira

Acts 15:3, 9

*But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the **Holy Spirit** and to keep back some of the price of the land?...⁹ Then Peter said to her, “Why is it that you have agreed together to put **the Spirit of the Lord to the test**? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well.”*

Here we have two more people who heard the call of God but decided to lie to God. They did not truly understand that God is all-knowing and all-seeing. They thought they could deceive the disciples/apostles of Christ, making themselves look good in front of others. They did not realize that these disciples were walking in obedience to the call of God, and that the Holy Spirit had told them of their planned deception.

No one had told them that, after they'd sold their land, they had to give all the money to the disciples. The sad part ... their big problem ... was that they chose to deceive the early church and the Holy Spirit with lying words. Because of that they were judged. The consequence for both of them was instant death. Their experience teaches us that when God calls us and asks us to do something for His glory, we need to be careful that we do not try to take some of the glory for ourselves.

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Resolution:

Paul explains to the Thessalonian church how important of God's call, for we are told, "*For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.*"⁸ *So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.* (I Thes 4:7-8) There is a great price to be paid for rejecting the call of God on our lives. God has a divine purpose for our lives. He has created us and breathed life into us; we must always be careful that we do not disobey Him nor turn our backs on His call.

It is so sad today to see the thousands who start the race well, but are now living a life of loneliness leading to destruction - all because they turned away from the call of God. We do need to know that it is never too late to confess and turn back to following the call of Christ on our lives. The time is short, and I must tell you that today is the acceptable time to cry out to Jesus Christ and to put your life back into His hands.

We do not want to be the branches that were once grafted into the vine, bore no fruit, and then withered and died. The Vinedresser cuts off such dead branches and casts them into the eternal fire of hell. (John 15:1-11)

Personal Discipleship Reflection:

What is God speaking to me about from this chapter and how can I apply some of these Scriptural truths to my life? Are

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there areas in my life that are sinful, or do I have habits which are pulling me away from the heart of God?

Relevance:

Am I walking in obedience to God's call on my life? Do I see any areas in my life where I am walking away from the call of God? Do I still know the presence and anointing of God on my life?

Prayer Directive:

Pray that God will show you those areas in which you are sliding further away from His call on your life. Ask him for forgiveness, quickly confess sin to Him before it is too late. Time is short, and we need to appear before him washed in the blood of the Lamb. Pray that your eyes, ears, and heart will be open again, once more, to His voice and to His Word.

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Conclusion

*²⁰But **you have an anointing** from the Holy One, and you all know. ... ²⁷As for you, the **anointing** which you received from Him **abides in you**, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His **anointing** teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, **you abide in Him**.*

I John 2:20

The disciple of Christ must remember that he has been called by Christ and, because of that calling, Christ anoints for ministry. We do not serve in our own power and strength but in His power and strength. But what keeps us moving forward as the natural outgrowth of Christ's call is our constant connection with Him. We are to constantly abide in Him. We need to have a daily movement-by-moment relationship with our King, Jesus Christ. Christ calls, but He is also the Teacher Who will instruct and guide us in our everyday walk.

When one studies the subject of the call of God on the disciple, we can see that it is both very broad and very deep. Even this book acts only as an introduction to this subject. Many, many hundreds of pages could be written because this subject is the bedrock of faith upon which all other things are built.

God calls people, but He also calls into being churches and ministers for His purposes. He calls us as individuals, and then binds us together with others who have like minds and hearts. He

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teams us together so that that we will not be alone; it is the bringing together of people that gives birth to churches and ministers for His glory.

As disciples, we need to remind ourselves of God's call on our lives. We can do so by writing it on a card and placing it on our mirror or refrigerator door. Doing so will remind us each day of God's call and how we can connect with it that day. Some might call this our goal or purpose in life – the key to fulfilling God's destiny for us. As we follow our God-given call, God will inevitably do some grafting, nurturing and pruning in our lives so that we may even produce fruit in areas that we never dreamed possible.

I have been in ministry for 38 years now. Each year has been a time of moving through a process of being molded by the Potter. Each day has been a day of fine tuning, and each major event has been a refining fire that molds me more into His image. One thing that has driven my life and ministry for Christ over the years is the knowledge that I will one day be judged by Him and Him alone. Just as it happened to the three stewards, Christ will ask me what I did with what He gave to me (talents, gifts, finances, people). Did I bury them or did I invest them into others' lives? I also know that as I teach/preach, the Bible is very clear that there will be a greater judgment on me. God entrusted us (as preachers and teachers) with His children; how did we nurture them? People are God's greatest treasure. We should be doing all we can to help them fulfill their God-given calls here on earth.

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For our time here on earth, our overall goal for when we meet Christ face-to-face, should be to hear him say, “Well done my good and faithful servant, enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Every day of life I now experience God taking me into new depths of His heart. Things that I thought were impossible, or not part of my call, He now grafts those things into my life, and my “branch” becomes broader and bares more fruit. I have seen many seasons and changes in my life. I have had times when I begged God to take me home. I was tired and discouraged. Then, through prayer, I’d hear the call again. The sword (His Word) became sharper and more powerful; His word brought forth things in other lives that only He, the Creator of the universe, could do. Every great valley led to another mountain. When one steps out in faith and climbs, God empowers that vision, making clear His call. He will walk with you until one day you stand at the top and look down, beholding His great majesty and wonder.

I believe that when we get to heaven we will be able to do nothing but spend the first 1000 years praising Him because at that time everything will make sense. We will then understand what God has produced with one little seed of faith such as exemplified in Phillip’s one-on-one sharing the gospel with the Ethiopian. God’s call is for the purpose of reaping eternal fruit for His Kingdom.

I want to end this book with a song by the words of Michel W. Smith, “When I Think of You”, with the African children choir of Ghana.

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Verse one

When I think of you, I see you dancing you're dancing.
When I think of you, I hear you singing to me.
When I think of you, I see you praying you're praying.
When I think of you, I hear you **calling** for me.

Chorus

Yahweh, there is no one like you Lord
Yahweh, hallelujah, we sing
Yahweh, there is no one like you Lord
Yahweh your banner for me
Your banner for me is love.

Verse two

When I think of you I see you dancing you're dancing.
When I think of you I hear you singing to me.
When I think of you I see you praying you're praying.
When I think of you I hear you **calling** for me.

Chorus

Yahweh, there is no one like you Lord
Yahweh, hallelujah, we sing
Yahweh, there is no one like you Lord
Yahweh your banner for me
Your banner for me is love.

There is no one like you, there is no one like you, my
Yahweh, Yahweh

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There is no one like you, there is no one like you, my
Yahweh, Yahweh

There is no one like you, there is no one like you, my
Yahweh, Yahweh

There is no one like you, there is no one like you, my
Yahweh, Yahweh

Verse three

When I think of you, I see you dancing you're dancing.

When I think of you, I hear you singing to me.

When I think of you, I see you praying you're praying.

When I think of you, I hear you **calling** for me.

Chorus

Yahweh, there is no one like you Lord

Yahweh, hallelujah, we sing

Yahweh, there is no one like you Lord

Yahweh your banner for me

Your banner for me is love.

God's call to me has caused me to rise up and dance before my God here on earth and, soon, before Him in Heaven. God, I can never repay you for all your love, grace and mercy that you have so faithfully poured into me. The Key Truth I have discovered is that the call of God leads to the Hand of God.

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Appendix

Called Defined

Old Testament Hebrew Words

7121. Qara'; to cry out, to call aloud, to roar; to proclaim, to pronounce, to preach; to call, to summon (to court, Deut. 25:8), to invite (Ex. 2:20; I Sam. 9:13); to implore; to call together, to appoint, to praise, to celebrate; to call by name, to name; to call out, to recite; to be called, to be summoned, to be named; to read aloud (Ex. 24:7); to dictate (Jer. 6:18); to muster an army (Judg. 8:1). The basic meaning of *qara'* is the enunciation of a specific vocable or message. It is usually addressed to a specific recipient and intended to elicit a specific response. Rarely does it refer to a random outcry (Ps. 147:9; Isa. 34:14). This verb is used to represent the specification of a name. The act of naming is sometimes an assertion of sovereignty over the thing which is being named (e.g., Gen. 1:5; Ps. 147:4; Isa. 40:26). God wanted Adam to assert his own authority in this world (Gen. 2:19). Naming a person may specify an individual's primary characteristic (Gen. 27:36), be an evaluation (Isa. 58:13; 60:14), or recognize an eternal truth (Isa. 7:14). Another important meaning is "to summon" for a specific task (Gen. 12:18; Ex. 2:7; Isa. 55:5; 65:12). Another prominent usage has to do with calling upon the name of God, i.e., to summon His aid (Gen. 4:26; Ps. 145:18; Isa. 55:6). Usually, the context has to do with a critical need (Ps. 34:6; 81:7) or chronic need. The people were urged to pray to God (I Kgs. 8:43) to reverse the curse (Isa. 55:6,13). The prophets predicted that even the Gentiles (Isa. 55:5) would call upon God and serve Him (Zeph. 3:9) and He will answer them (Isa. 65:24). Joel 2:32 uses *qara'* in this sense: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." Immediately after Jesus' death, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter quoted this verse (Acts 2:21). In that same vein, the term means to declare a prophetic message (I Kgs. 13:32) in the sense of proclamation Gen. 41:43; Ex. 32:5; Judg. 21:13; Esth. 6:9). Also, *gara'* means to shout (Deut.

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20:10; I Sam. 17:8), to call out loudly in order to get someone's attention so that contact can be initiated (Job 5:11). Sometimes it is sustained calling (Gen. 3:9). This Heb. root occurs 689 times in the O.T.

New Testament Greek Words

2564. Kaleii; call, with a personal obj., to call anyone. invite (Mt. 20:8; 25:14); of the divine invitation to participate in the blessings of redemption (Rom. 8:30; I Cor. 1:9; I Thess. 2:23; Heb. 9:15); to name; in the pass. voice, to be called by name. It suggests either vocation or destination. Noun: *klesis* (2821), a calling; *kletos* (2822), called. In the Epistles an effectual call (Rom. 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; I Cor. 1:2, 24, etc.); appointed (Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1). Deriv.: *eiskaleo* (1528), to call in (Acts 10:23); *epikaleomai* (1941), to be called; *metakaledi* (3333), to recall; *proskaleomai* (4341) to invite; *sugkaleb* (4779), to call together; *parakaleo* (3870) to call near, to comfort.

2784. Kerusso; to preach, to be a herald, proclaim (Mt. 3:1; Mk. 1:45; Lk. 4:18,19; 12:3; Acts 10:37; Rom. 2:21; Rev. 5:2). In I Pet. 3:19 there is no reference to evangelizing, but to the act of Christ, after His resurrection, in proclaiming His victory to fallen spirits. To preach the Gospel as a herald (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 13:10; 14:9; 16:15, 20; Lk. 8:1; 9:2; 24:47; Acts 8:5; 19:13; 28:31; Rom. 10:14, etc.); to preach the Word (II Tim. 4:2). Deriv.: *prokerusso* (4296), from *pro* (4253), before, and *kerusso* to proclaim before or ahead (Acts 3:20 T.R.; 13:24); *kerugma* (2782), a proclamation by a herald, denotes preaching, the substance of which is distinct from the act of preaching (Mt. 12:41; Lk. 11:22; Rom. 16:25; I Cor. 1:21; 2:4; 15:14; II Tim. 4:17; Tit. 1:3); *kerux* (2783), a herald used of the preacher of the Gospel (I Tim. 2:7; II Tim. 1:11) and of Noah as a preacher of righteousness (II Pet. 2:5).

*Taken from Lexical Aids to the Old Testament Page 1635
The Hebrew – Greek Key Study Bible, Spiros Zodhiates, 1985

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Glossary of Words

Ambassador: agent, consul, deputy, diplomat, emissary, envoy, minister, representative.

Authority: change, command, control, dominate, dominion, force, government, influence, jurisdiction, might, power, right, rule, strength.

Believe: to accept, be certain of, be convinced of, count on, depend on, have faith in, place confidence in, rely on.

Body: to build, form, frame, shape, association, bond, collection, company, corporation.

Call: to announce, to summon, awake, invite, ordain, to invoke solemnly.

Carry: to bear, bring, conduct, convey, fetch haul, lift, move, relay, take transfer, transmit, transport, support, sustain, underpin, broadcast, communicate, display, give, publish, release.

Change: convert, metamorphosis, reformed, reorganize, transformed, exchange, replace, trade.

Charity: alms-giving, contributions, donation, endowment, gift, relief, affection, agape, benevolence, compassion, generosity, love, tender-heartedness.

Choice: alternative, option, pick, say, selection, variety.

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Commission: to appointment, authority, charge, duty, employment, authority, errand, function, mandate, mission task, trust, empower, order, select, send.

Confession: a statement of guilt or obligation in a matter pertaining to oneself, acknowledgement of sin or sinfulness, acknowledgement of belief or profession of faith. Synonyms: acknowledgment, admission, disclosure, revelation.

Covenant: arrangement, commitment, contract, convention, pact promise, treaty, trust, deed, engage, pledge, undertake.

Devotion: loyalty, faithfulness, fidelity, constancy, commitment, allegiance, dedication, love, admiration, care, godliness, holiness, worship, observance, prayer, church service.

Diligent: to active, attentive, busy, careful conscientious, painstaking, persevering, tireless.

Disciple: adherent, believer, convert, devotee, follower, learner, pupil, student, supporter.

Discipleship: forsaking everything to follow; discipline; the one who has been taught and trained by a master; one who is mentored by another who has also been mentored himself.

Discipline: to drill, exercise, method, practice, regimen, regulations, training, conduct, control, orderliness, restraint, self-control, strictness, chastisement and correction.

Empowerment: to allow, authorize, commission, delegate, enable, entitle, license, permit, qualify, sanction, warrant.

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Following: to come after; come next; step into one shoes of ; accompany; act in accordance with; be guided by; comply; conform; give allegiance to; heed; mind; note; obey; observe; watch; adopt; copy; emulate; live up to; to pattern oneself upon; take as an example; to devoted to; support.

Friendship: affection, alliance, attachment, benevolence, closeness, good fellowship, harmony, intimacy, love and rapport.

Holiness: to set apart and dedicated to the service and worship of God. Synonyms: consecration, dedication, devout, faithful, god fearing, pious, righteous, saintly, blessed, dedicated, sanctified.

Humility: humbleness, lack of pride, lowliness, meekness, modesty, self-abasement, servility, submissiveness, unpretentiousness.

Knowledgeable: to acquainted, aware, conscious, familiar, understanding, well informed, educate, intelligent, learned.

Lead: conduct, escort, guide, pilot, precede, show the way, steer, usher, influence, persuade, prevail, command, direct, govern, head, manage, preside over, supervise, experience, direction, example, guidance, model, principle.

Leader: boss, captain, chief, commander, conductor, counsellor, director, guide, head, number one, principal, ruler.

Leadership: administration, direction, directorship, domination, guidance, management, running, authority, command, control, influence, initiative, pre-eminence.

Lifestyle: a manner or custom that we hold to; a way of life that we personally live.

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Love: adore, cherish, treasure, delight in, enjoy, embrace, kiss, affection, attachment, devotion, friendship, tenderness, warmth.

Mission: aim, assignment, calling, charge, commission, duty, goal, quest.

Obedience: abide by, act upon, adhere to, be ruled by, carry out, embrace, follow, perform, serve.

Partakers: to engage, enter into, participate, share, take part, consume, eat, receive, share.

Ponder: which means to, think about, contemplate consider, reflect on, meditate on.

Power: ability, capability, competence, potential, energy, force, intensity, might, muscle, strength, vigor, authority, command, control, dominion, influence, rule, sovereignty.

Practice: exercise, use, implementation, training, rehearsal, repetition, preparation.

Praise: express admiration, applaud, pay tribute, compliment, rave about, admire, honour, exalt, adore, reverence, magnify.

Prayer: communication, devotion, invocation, litany, supplication, appeal, petition, plea, request, intercession.

Proclaim: to declare, announce, state, make known, give out, publish, broadcast, trumpet, reveal, testify.

Promise: to assure, contract, cross of heart, guarantee, pledge, take an oath, vow, assurance, bond, commitment, covenant, engagement, word.

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Purpose: aim, design, function, idea, intention, object, point, principle, reason, desire, goal, hope, target, single-mindedness, steadfastness, will, result.

Reap: to acquire, bring in, collect, cut derive, gain, garner, gather, get, harvest, obtain win.

Revoke: *cancelled, annul, rescinded, withdrawn, retracted, repealed, invalidated.*

Righteousness: *as virtue, morality, justice, uprightness.*

Sanctification: it means the process by which God is cleansing, consecrated, is the process by which an entity is brought into relationship with or attain the likeness of the holy. Synonyms: absolve, anoint, bless, cleanse, consecrate, purify, and set apart.

Service: assistance, avail, benefit, help, supply, use, usefulness, maintenance, overhaul, business, duty, labour, work, ceremony, function, observances, tune, recondition.

Seated: to assembled

Sin: crime, error, evil, guilt, misdeed, offence, transgression, trespass, unrighteousness, go astray.

Sinner: evildoer, offender, reprobate, transgressor, trespasser, and wrongdoer.

Sow: to broadcast, disseminate, implant, lodge, plant scatter, seed.

Stand: which mean to remain, to continue, to exist, to stay, to prevail, to endure and to last.

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Stewardship: husbandry, housekeeping, management, conduct, conduct of affairs, manipulation, operation, running, handling, managership, agency, commission, care, charge, control, authority, superintendence, oversight, surveillance, patronage, protection.

Submission: to surrender, yielding, compliance, meekness, obedience, resignation.

Transformed: change, alteration, conversion, metamorphosis, transfiguration, revelation, overhaul, remodeling, reshaping, remolding, redoing, reconstruction, rebuilding, reorganization, rearrangement, reworking, renewal, revamp, remaking

Truth: fact, reality, certainty, honest, integrity

Vow: to affirm, consecrate, dedicate, pledge, promise, undertake solemnly, oath, promise, troth.

Walk: to march, to stride, to move.

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Disciple's CALL

Project L.A.M.B.S. International

Making disciples is the call and mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus urged the disciples to follow Him. He laid down before us the teaching and the walk that we need to follow with Jesus as our supreme example. It is imperative for every believer and the church to know that disciples are not born but they are made. For the church to be strong in the last days, we must be about the business of equipping the saints (disciples) for the work of service.

Dr. James Humphries has been ministering for over 40 years, and has experience in a variety of ministries including church planting, children's ministry, street ministry, youth ministry, camp ministry, pastoral work and directing and teaching in schools all over the world. In addition, he has taken part in traveling and ministering in the USA, Mexico, Ukraine, Myanmar, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Thailand and across most of Canada. He completed his B.R.E. and his M.A. from Briercrest, and his Doctorate of Ministry from Providence Theological Seminary in the spring of 1999.

In January 1996, Dr. James Humphries resigned as pastor of a local church with a vision to reach further abroad with the Word of God and to use it to train labourers for Christ (Matthew 9:36-38). He shared this with Dr. David Smith and Dr. Chuck Nichols of Providence Theological Seminary and they greatly encouraged Dr. James Humphries and his wife Irene to develop what God was laying on their hearts.

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In March 1997, they traveled to Jamaica where they met several pastors who were very concerned about the need for training and disciplining their young people as leaders in their churches. Dr. James Humphries and Irene did not know this would be the starting point to an international ministry of discipleship training around the world known as Project L.A.M.B.S. International.

To date, Project L.A.M.B.S. has ministered in Canada, Myanmar, Ukraine, Africa, Jamaica, Mexico, Israel, Thailand, Japan, Dominican Republic, Naga Land and China. We offer over 30 different courses. Our graduates number over 1000, and are serving worldwide. Out of this group of graduates, we have equipped and trained directors, teachers and pastors who in turn are carrying out II Timothy 2:1-2 to an even larger group of people.

In 2002 it was discovered that Irene had cancer again. God gave Irene another three years and because of that she was still able to travel and teach in many different countries. Shortly after what was to be her last trip, Irene was hospitalized in February, 2005. A few weeks later she went home to be with her Lord and Saviour on March 9.

My second wife Hkaw Win was raised and trained mostly in the land of Myanmar. She has earned B.th, University Degree and a master of Divinity Degree in Myanmar. In April 2007 she finished a second Master's Degree at Providence Theological Seminary in Christian Education. After July 1st, 2007 she headed

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back to Myanmar to head up the Christian Education Department for the Myitkyina Kachin Baptist Association and oversaw various ministries to 62 churches. After her four-year term was completed, she has been traveling and working as an interpreter and doing translations concerning various kinds of discipleship books and materials.

Over the last ten years we have lived in the countries of Myanmar and Thailand preparing a variety of resources in the Burmese (Myanmar) and Kachin Languages. To date we have published over 20 different kinds of books. Our goal is to equip and establish people as Disciples of Christ. Please pray for God's leading and wisdom. Our walk with Christ has taken us down many challenging pathways but we have seen the faithfulness of our Lord and Savior in every area. His grace has been sufficient.

Founder and Director,

Dr. James and Hkaw Win Humphries

Disciple's CALL

Discipleship / Leadership Booklets

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- 2. Called to His Purpose**
- 3. Abiding in the Vine**
- 4. Knowledge, Wisdom and Understanding**
- 5. Scripture: The Disciples' Anchor**
- 6. Baptism: The Disciples' Testimony**
- 7. The Disciples' Church**
- 8. Servant Leadership**
- 9. Teacher / Learner, Learner / Teacher**
- 10. Being Wise Builders**
- 11. Shepherds of God's Sheep**
- 12. End Times**
- 13. Relationship Pilgrimage**
- 14. Christ's Disciple**
- 15. Disciple's Prayer Life**
- 16. Communion**
- 17. Ambassadors for Christ**
- 18. Full Armour of God**
- 19. Good News for Challenging and Changing Times**
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