

UPDATED EDITION *with* STUDY GUIDE

DISCIPLINES
of a
GODLY
MAN



R. KENT HUGHES

“I am so weary of the peculiar therapeutic atmosphere in which we live today that is scared stiff to tell anybody to do anything or to warn anybody of dangerous consequences of failing to take responsibility for his or her life. So to find someone taking seriously the biblical call for ‘agonizing to enter the kingdom’ and striving like a gymnast to become godly and boxing and sweating like a champion to get victory over sin is the most refreshing thing I could have set my eyes on.”

John Piper, Founder and Teacher, desiringGod.org; Chancellor, Bethlehem College & Seminary; author, *Desiring God*

“Every Christian man, whether a new believer or a mature Christian, will be challenged again and again by this remarkably wise and fascinating book. Kent Hughes skillfully weaves together the teachings of Scripture with real-life examples as he powerfully teaches us what true Christian manhood looks like in the ordinary details of our lives. I highly recommend this update of a book that is becoming a Christian classic.”

Wayne Grudem, Distinguished Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies, Phoenix Seminary; author, *Christian Ethics*

“Discipline is a subject about which the Scriptures say much—but contemporary authors have been peculiarly silent. Kent Hughes fills a gaping void with this superb volume. You’ll be challenged and encouraged as you read. And if there is a spark of spiritual desire in your soul, this book will surely kindle it into a blazing passion for godly discipline.”

John MacArthur, Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California; President, The Master’s University and Seminary

“There are some books, though very few, that remain ‘evergreen’—that through the years remain as useful and challenging as the day they were written. There’s little doubt that *Disciplines of a Godly Man* is one of these. For that reason, I’m delighted to see it just so slightly refreshed as it’s prepared to challenge a whole new generation of men with its biblical principles and timeless wisdom. I trust it will prove itself as edifying to them as it has to me and so many others.”

Tim Challies, blogger, Challies.com

“The best contemporary book of spiritual guidance I’ve read in a long time. Usually for this type of food I have to look for a book that is at least seventy-five years old. This book is a surprising exception. And it has the added advantage of being very relevant to specific needs in today’s world.”

Ajith Fernando, Teaching Director, Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka; author, *Discipling in a Multicultural World*

“This is one of the best books I’ve read. What an outstanding volume. I guarantee: Digest this book and you will bid the blahs farewell.”

Charles Swindoll, pastor; best-selling author

Disciplines of a Godly Man

Disciplines of a Godly Man

Updated Edition

R. Kent Hughes

Disciplines of a Godly Man

Copyright © 1991, 2001, 2019 by R. Kent Hughes

Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law. Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing, original edition, 1991; first printing with study questions, 1995

First printing, 10th anniversary edition, revised edition, 2001

First printing, trade paperback edition, 2006

First printing, updated edition, 2019

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from *The New American Standard Bible*®. Copyright © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission.

Scripture references marked PHILLIPS are from *The New Testament in Modern English*, translated by J. B. Phillips ©1972 by J. B. Phillips. Published by Macmillan.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-6130-6

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-6904-3

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-6133-7

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-6131-3

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-6132-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hughes, R. Kent, 1942– author.
Title: Disciplines of a godly man / R. Kent Hughes.
Description: Updated Edition. | Wheaton: Crossway, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018052585 (print) | LCCN 2019005932 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433561313 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433561320 (mobi) | ISBN 9781433561337 (epub) | ISBN 9781433561306 (tp)
Subjects: LCSH: Discipline—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Spiritual Life—Christianity. | Christian men—Religious life.
Classification: LCC BV4647.D58 (ebook) | LCC BV4647.D58 H84 2019 (print) | DDC 248.8/42—dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018052585>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

LB	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	
13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

For my sons,
Richard Kent Hughes II
and
William Carey Hughes

Contents

Acknowledgments	11
-----------------------	----

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1 Discipline for Godliness	15
----------------------------------	----

PART 2: RELATIONSHIPS

2 Discipline of Purity	31
3 Discipline of Marriage	47
4 Discipline of Fatherhood	61
5 Discipline of Friendship	75

PART 3: SOUL

6 Discipline of Mind	91
7 Discipline of Devotion	107
8 Discipline of Prayer	121
9 Discipline of Worship	137

PART 4: CHARACTER

10 Discipline of Integrity	155
11 Discipline of Tongue	169
12 Discipline of Work	183
13 Discipline of Perseverance	195

PART 5: MINISTRY

14 Discipline of Church209

15 Discipline of Leadership225

16 Discipline of Giving239

17 Discipline of Witness251

18 Discipline of Ministry263

PART 6: DISCIPLINE

19 Grace of Discipline277

RESOURCES

A Resources for Spiritual Growth287

B James and Deby Fellowes’s Witness to Their Faith289

C Personal Reading Survey295

D Selected Proverbs Regarding the Tongue307

E Hymns for Personal Adoration and Praise313

F Choruses and Scripture Songs for Personal Adoration
and Praise317

G Praise Psalms Especially Appropriate for Personal Worship319

General Index321

Scripture Index332

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my secretary, Mrs. Sharon Fritz, for her care and pride of workmanship in typing the multiple revisions of the manuscript; Mr. Herbert Carlburg for weekly proofreading and many suggested improvements; Mr. George Grant for his expert editing though busy in far-off England; Mr. Ted Griffin, for his discerning eye, which made clear the incomprehensible, and for the preparation of the study questions; and my wife, Barbara, who possesses the gracious wisdom to cut through the irrelevant and get to the heart of things with the perpetual James-like question, “So what difference does this make in the way we live?”

And now I must thank Mr. Sheldon Nordhues, for his cheerful dedication in bringing this edition up to date, and, of course, Mr. Greg Bailey, editorial director for Crossway, for his masterful editing—for which future readers will surely be thankful.

PART 1



INTRODUCTION

Discipline for Godliness

Sometime in the early summer before entering the seventh grade, I wandered over from the baseball field and picked up a tennis racket for the first time—and I was hooked! It was not long before I became a ten-year-old tennis bum. My passion for the sport became so intense, I would idly hold a tennis ball and just sniff it. The *pssst* and the rubbery fragrance upon opening a can of new tennis balls became intoxicating. The *whop, whop* and the lingering ring of a sweetly hit ball, especially in the quietness of early morning, was to me symphonic. My memories of that summer and the one that followed are of blistering black tennis courts, hot feet, salty sweat, long drafts of delicious rubbery, tepid water from an empty ball can, and the short shadows of midday heading slowly toward the east, followed by the stadium “daylight” of the court’s lights and the ubiquitous eerie night bats dive-bombing our lobs.

That fall, I determined to become a tennis player. I spent my hoarded savings on one of those old beautifully laminated Davis Imperial tennis rackets—a treasure that I actually took to bed with me. I was disciplined! I played every day after school (except during basketball season) and every weekend. When spring came, I biked to the courts where the local high school team practiced and longingly watched until they finally gave in and let me play with them. The next two summers I took lessons, played some tournaments, and practiced about six to eight hours a day—coming home only when they turned off the lights.

And I became good. I was good enough, in fact, that as a twelve-and-a-half-year-old, 110-pound freshman, I was second man on the varsity tennis team of my large three thousand-student California high school.

Not only did I play at a high level, I learned that personal discipline is the indispensable key for accomplishing anything in this life. I have since come to understand even more that it is, in fact, the mother and handmaiden of what we call genius.

Examples

Those who watched Mike Singletary¹ “play” football and observed his wide-eyed intensity and his churning, crunching *samurai* hits are usually surprised when they meet him. He is not an imposing hulk. He is barely six feet tall and weighs maybe 220. Whence the greatness? *Discipline*. Singletary was as disciplined a student of the game as any who have ever played it. In his autobiography, *Calling the Shots*, he says that in watching game films, he would often run a single play fifty to sixty times, and that it took him three hours to watch half a football game, which is only twenty to thirty plays!² Because he watched every player, because he knew the opposition’s tendencies—given the down, distance, hash mark, and time remaining—and because he read the opposition’s minds through their stances, he was often moving toward the ball’s preplanned destination before the play developed. Singletary’s legendary success was a testimony to his remarkably disciplined life.

The legendary Jack Nicklaus, the most successful professional golfer of all time, once quipped, “The more I practice, the luckier I get.” Michael Phelps’s eight (yes, you read it correctly—eight!) *gold* medals at the 2009 Olympics in Beijing were the result of thousands of hours and miles in the pool of disciplined *boredom*. The glory of a Steph Curry three-point shot that wins a basketball game at the buzzer is the apex of a life of inglorious discipline! It is common knowledge

1. Mike Singletary played linebacker for the Chicago Bears of the NFL from 1981 to 1992. He was a perennial All-Pro, a two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year, and a member of the Super Bowl XXV-winning Bears team. He is now a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

2. Mike Singletary with Armen Keteyian, *Calling the Shots* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1986), 57.

that Curry practices in the offseason for three hours a day, six days a week in the summer. It is also well known that after elaborate preparation he will shoot between six hundred and seven hundred baskets, counting only the ones he makes. On intense shooting days, the number increases to at least a thousand.

Matthew Sayed, in his international bestseller *Bounce: Mozart, Federer, Picasso, Beckham, and the Science of Success*, observes that British soccer superstar David Beckham's trademark free kick—his “bend it like Beckham” trajectory—began when, as a boy, he would go to an East London park and kick his ball from the same spot for hours on end, perfecting the topspin that gave his kick its devastating dip. “My secret is practice. I have always believed that if you want to achieve anything special in life you have to work, work, and then work some more.”³ Canadian icon Wayne Gretsky, regarded as the greatest ice hockey player ever, became what he was because early on he disciplined both his mind and his body for the rough-and-tumble game. As a boy, he systematically charted the angles of the ricocheting puck so that he came to anticipate what was going to happen on the ice better than any player in the game. The “Great Gretsky” was there when the puck arrived. Listen to how Gretsky describes himself: “I wasn’t naturally gifted in terms of size and speed; everything I did in hockey I worked for.” And then later, “The highest compliment that you can pay me is to say that I worked hard every day. . . . That’s how I came to know where the puck was going before it even got there.”⁴

We are accustomed to thinking of Ernest Hemingway as a boozy, undisciplined genius who got through a quart of whiskey a day for the last twenty years of his life but nevertheless had the muse upon him. He was indeed an alcoholic driven by complex passions.⁵ But when it came to writing, he was the quintessence of discipline! His early writing was characterized by obsessive literary perfectionism as he labored to develop his economy of style, spending hours polishing a sentence or searching for the *mot juste*—the right word. It is a well-known fact that he rewrote the conclusion to his novel *A Farewell to*

3. Quoted in Matthew Sayed, *Bounce: Mozart, Federer, Picasso, Beckham, and the Science of Success* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 62.

4. Quoted in Sayed, *Bounce*, 50.

5. Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 168, 169.

Arms seventeen times in an effort to get it right. This is characteristic of great writers. Dylan Thomas made over two hundred handwritten manuscript versions of his poem “Fern Hill.”⁶ Even toward the end, when Hemingway was reaping the ravages of his lifestyle, while writing at his Finca Vigia in Cuba, he stood before an improvised desk in oversized loafers on yellow tiles from 6:30 a.m. until noon every day, carefully marking his production for the day on a chart. His average was only two pages—five hundred words.⁷ It was discipline, Hemingway’s massive literary discipline, that transformed the way his fellow Americans, and people throughout the English-speaking world, expressed themselves.

Michelangelo’s, Leonardo da Vinci’s, and Tintoretto’s multitudes of sketches, the *quantitative* discipline of their work, prepared the way for the cosmic *qualitative* value of their work. We wonder at the anatomical perfection of a da Vinci painting. But we forget that da Vinci on one occasion drew a thousand hands.⁸ In the last century, Henri Matisse explained his own mastery, remarking that the difficulty with many who wanted to be artists was that they spent their time chasing models rather than painting them.⁹ Again, the discipline factor!

Closer to our own time, Winston Churchill was rightly proclaimed the speaker of the twentieth century, and few who heard his eloquent speeches would have disagreed. Still fewer would have suspected that he was anything but a “natural.” But the truth is, Churchill had a distracting lisp that made him the butt of many jokes and resulted in his inability to be spontaneous in public speaking. Yet he became famous for his speeches and his seemingly impromptu remarks.

Actually, Churchill wrote everything out and practiced it! He even choreographed his pauses and pretended fumbings for the right phrase. The margins of his manuscripts carried notes anticipating the “cheers,” “hear, hears,” “prolonged cheering,” and even “standing ovation.” This done, he practiced endlessly in front of mirrors, fashioning his retorts and facial expressions. F. E. Smith, a close friend of

6. Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly about the Arts* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989), 76.

7. “Scriveners’ Stances,” *MD* 13, no. 7 (July 1969): 245–54.

8. Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination*, 76.

9. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *Letters of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), 93, 94.

Churchill, said, “Winston has spent the best years of his life writing impromptu speeches.”¹⁰ A natural? Perhaps. A naturally disciplined hard-working man!

And so it goes, whatever the area of life.

Thomas Edison came up with the incandescent light after a thousand failures. Samuel Beckett said,

Ever tried.

Ever failed.

No matter.

Try again.

Fail again.

Fail better.¹¹

Jascha Heifitz, the greatest violinist of the twentieth century, began playing the violin at the age of three and early began to practice four hours a day, a discipline he continued until his death at age seventy-five, when he had long been the greatest in the world—some 102,000 hours of practice. He no doubt gave his own “Hear, hear!” to pianist and composer Ignacy Jan Paderewski’s response to a woman’s fawning remarks about his genius: “Madame, before I was a genius, I was a drudge.”

We will never get anywhere in life without discipline, be it the arts, the trades, business, athletics, or academics. Whatever your particular thing is, whether it is swimming, football, soccer, basketball, tennis, surfing, mountain climbing, bull riding, motocross, chess, math, computer science, the guitar, the sitar, writing, poetry, or painting—whatever it is—you will never get anywhere without discipline.

This is doubly so in spiritual matters. In other areas, we may be able to claim some innate advantage. An athlete may be born with a strong body, a musician with perfect pitch, or an artist with an eye for perspective. But none of us can claim an innate spiritual advantage. In reality, we are all equally *disadvantaged*. None of us naturally seeks after God, none is inherently righteous, none instinctively does good

10. Quoted in William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill; Visions of Glory: 1874–1932* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), 32, 33.

11. Samuel Beckett, *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983), 7.

(read Rom. 3:9–18). Therefore, as children of grace, our spiritual discipline is everything—everything!

I repeat: *discipline is everything!*

Paul on Discipline

This being so, the statement from Paul to Timothy regarding spiritual discipline in 1 Timothy 4:7—“train yourself for godliness”—takes on not only transcending importance, but personal urgency. There are other passages that teach discipline, but this is the great classic text of Scripture. The word *train* comes from the word *gymnos*, which means “naked” and is the word from which we derive our English word *gymnasium*. In traditional Greek athletic contests, the participants competed without clothing so as not to be encumbered. Therefore, the word *train* originally carried the literal meaning “to exercise naked.”¹² By New Testament times, it referred to exercise and training in general. But even then it was, as it remains, a word with the smell of the gym in it—the sweat of a good workout. “Train yourselves, exercise, *work out* (!) for the purpose of godliness” conveys the feel of what Paul is saying.

Spiritual Sweat

In a word, he is calling for some *spiritual sweat*! Just as the athletes discarded everything and competed *gymnos*—free from anything that could possibly burden them—so we must get rid of every encumbrance, every association, habit, and tendency that impedes godliness. If we are to excel, we must strip ourselves to a lean, spiritual nakedness. The writer of Hebrews explains it like this: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). Men, we will never get anywhere spiritually without a conscious divestment of the things that are holding us back. What things are weighing you down? The call to discipline demands that you throw it off. Are you man enough?

12. Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 775.

The call to train ourselves for godliness also suggests directing all of our energy toward that goal. Paul pictures this elsewhere: “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control” (1 Cor. 9:25–27). Intense, energetic sweat! We should singularly note that a little after Paul’s command to “train yourself for godliness,” he comments on the command and the intervening words, saying “for to this end we toil and strive” (1 Tim. 4:10). The word *toil* means “strenuous work,” and *strive* comes from the Greek word from which we get “agonize.” Toil and agony are called for if one is to be godly.

When one seriously trains, he willingly undergoes hours of discipline and even pain so as to win the prize—running ten thousand miles to run one hundred meters at one’s best. The successful Christian life is a sweaty affair!

No manliness, no maturity! No discipline, no discipleship! No sweat, no sainthood!

Why the Disciplines?

Understanding this, we now get down to the reason for this book, which is that in today’s world and church, Christian men who are disciplined are the exception, not the rule. Why? The answer is that the popular, politically correct culture of the new millennium suppresses manliness, and especially the manliness and leadership of men who attempt to follow Christ. The reasons are feminism, entertainment, and legalism, and together, they are daunting.

Feminism

During the 1970s, certain feminist strategists initiated the so-called “Girlhood Project” with the intent of effectively blurring, and even erasing, the distinction between males and females. According to author and social critic Barbara Defoe Whitehead, feminists called for “a new sexual standard based on traditional boyhood. In their plays and pursuits, little girls were to be made more like boys. Among cultural elites, a traditionally feminine daughter became a mild social embarrassment,

while a feisty tomboy daughter became a source of pride.”¹³ Now, men are afraid to raise boys.¹⁴ The “copy the boys” approach was applied to all of life: to sexuality, to speech, and even to body type, with the tomboy ideal of a wiry, athletic body. Along with this, naturally active and competitive boys were penalized for their boyish behavior, while girls were lauded for ruggedness and athletic prowess.¹⁵

The effect today is a culture that celebrates a woman who has a body that is sculpted, by exercise and diet, to look like that of a man, and who talks like a man and acts like a man. Amid this cultural inversion, a rugged, assertive, and disciplined man is deemed a threat. If a guy lifts his head to take charge in a mixed-gender situation, he is labeled as a chauvinist or a sexist pig. So a generation of men has been neutered and neutralized as to their natural ruggedness and willingness to undergo the disciplines that will turn them into real men. And Christian men are particularly susceptible to being cowed by the culture, because discipline for godliness demands a particular toughness and rugged individuality in a castrating, God-denying culture.

Entertainment

The second culprit in the neutralizing of men is the addiction to entertainment. A face lit by a luminous screen is a study in passivity. Fleeting images, intermingled with the thousand commercials and banner ads of an average week’s viewing, instill passiveness. There is no time for engagement or reflection, much less action. The viewer becomes a passive, munching, sipping *drone* (a male bee that has no sting and gathers no honey). There are guys, voyeurs, who have substituted viewing for doing and imagine that they have scored a touchdown or taken a hill by virtue of having watched it—passive living legends in their own inert minds.

13. Barbara Defoe Whitehead, “The Girls of Gen X,” *The American Enterprise*, January/February 1998, 56.

14. Andrew Reiner, “The Fear of Having a Son,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/14/well/family/the-fear-of-having-a-son.html>. Reiner notes: “In a 2010 study, economists from the California Institute of Technology, the London School of Economics and New York University discovered, among other things, that adoptive American parents preferred girls to boys by nearly a third. . . . Adoptive parents are even willing to pay an average of \$16,000 more in finalization costs for a girl than a boy . . . many fertility doctors observe that 80 percent of patients who are choosing their baby’s gender prefer girls.”

15. Michelle Conlin, “The New Gender Gap,” *Business Week*, May 26, 2003, 14.

Sexual voyeurism is a pathetic delusion because in it a man's God-given testosterone (which is meant to infuse manliness) becomes a medium of enslavement and impotence. Sexual voyeurism steals a man's virility and initiative. Godly discipline becomes a receding mirage for the voyeur. And this also applies to the millions in the thrall of the gaming world (addicted to games like *World of Warcraft* or *Fortnite*), which keeps men playing games into their thirties in their *Star Wars* pajamas—warriors in their imaginations. Those enslaved by the world of entertainment will never attain manliness, a life disciplined for godliness—a life overseen, instructed, and energized by *the Man* of all men, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Legalism

Underlying much of the conscious rejection of spiritual discipline is the fear of legalism. For many, spiritual discipline means putting oneself back under the law with a series of Draconian rules that no one can live up to—and which spawn frustration and spiritual death.

But nothing could be further from the truth if you understand what discipline and legalism are. The difference is one of *motivation*: legalism is self-centered; discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, “I will do this thing to gain merit with God.” The disciplined heart says, “I will do this thing because I love God and want to please him.” There is an infinite difference between the motivation of legalism and discipline! Paul knew this implicitly and fought the legalists bare-knuckled all the way across Asia Minor, never giving an inch. Now he shouts to us, “Train [discipline] yourself for godliness”! If we confuse legalism and discipline, we do so to our soul's peril.

Where Things Are

The reality is that men are much less spiritually inclined and spiritually disciplined than women. Women are more likely to believe in God, find religion important, attend religious services, pray, and attend Bible studies and prayer meetings.¹⁶ Surprisingly, for every Bible sold,

16. Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, May 11, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

it is more likely to be a man purchasing it.¹⁷ And yet, men are less likely to read it.¹⁸ But it isn't just the Bible that men are less likely to read. Women overwhelmingly read more than men,¹⁹ and buy more Christian books, fiction and nonfiction.²⁰

It is also a fact that far more women are concerned about the spiritual welfare of their mates than vice versa. The magazine *Today's Christian Woman* has found that articles focusing on the spiritual development of husbands have garnered the highest readership.²¹ All this is sustained by hard statistics. A study found that 62 percent of women believed religion can answer today's problems, while only 52 percent of the men agreed.²² The typical evangelical Protestant church service has 55 percent females versus 45 percent male attenders.²³ Furthermore, married women who attend church do so without their husbands 25 percent of the time.²⁴

Why? Certainly the pervasive American male credo of self-sufficiency and individualism contributes. Some of this may also be due to the male avoidance of anything relational (which, of course, Christianity is!). But I do not concede that women are simply more spiritual by nature. The parade of great saints (male and female) down through the centuries, as well as spiritually exemplary men in some of our churches today, clearly refutes this idea. But the fact remains that men today need far more help in building spiritual discipline than women.

Men, what I am going to say in this book comes straight from the heart and my long study of God's Word—man to man. In writing this, I have imagined my own grown sons sitting across the table, coffee cups in hand, as I try to impart to them what I think about the essential disciplines of godliness. This book is eminently user-friendly. The church in America needs real men, and we are the men!

17. "Onward and Upward: Christian Book Titles See Sales Rise Higher and Higher," Nielsen, August 6, 2015, <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/onward-and-upward-christian-book-titles-see-sales-rise-higher.html>.

18. "Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center.

19. Kathryn Zickuhr and Lee Rainie, "A Snapshot of Reading in America in 2013," Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/01/16/a-snapshot-of-reading-in-america-in-2013/>.

20. "Onward and Upward," Nielsen.

21. Bill Hendricks, Christian Booksellers Association report, February 28, 1991.

22. Hendricks, Christian Booksellers Association report.

23. Hendricks, Christian Booksellers Association report.

24. "Quick Facts on the Gender Gap," Church for Men, <http://churchformen.com/men-and-church/>.

Cosmic Call

We cannot overemphasize the importance of this call to spiritual discipline. Listen to Paul again from 1 Timothy 4:7–8: “Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

Whether or not we have disciplined ourselves will make a huge difference *in this life*. We are all members of one another, and we are each either elevated or depressed by the inner lives of one another. Some of us affect others like a joyous tide, lifting them upward, but some of us are like undertows to the body of Christ. If you are married, the presence or lack of spiritual discipline can serve to sanctify or damn your children and grandchildren. Spiritual discipline, therefore, holds huge promise for this present life.

As for “the life to come,” spiritual discipline builds the enduring architecture of one’s soul on the foundation of Christ—gold, silver, and precious stones that will survive the fires of judgment and remain a monument to Christ for eternity (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–15). Some may minimize the importance of spiritual discipline now, but no one will then! “Godliness is of value in every way”! The disciplined Christian gives and gets the best of both worlds—the world now and the world to come.

The word *discipline* may raise the feeling of stultifying constraint in some minds—suggesting a claustrophobic, restricted life. Nothing could be further from the truth! The obsessive, almost manic discipline of Mike Singletary liberated him to play like a wild man on the football field. Hemingway’s angst over the right word freed him to leave a mark on the English language second only to Shakespeare. The billion sketches of the Renaissance greats set Michelangelo free to create the skies of the Sistine Chapel. Churchill’s painstaking preparation freed him to give great “impromptu” speeches and brilliant ripostes. The disciplined drudgery of the musical greats released their genius. And, brothers in Christ, *spiritual discipline frees us from the gravity of this present age and allows us to soar with the saints and angels.*

Do we have the sweat in us? Will we enter the gymnasium of divine discipline? Will we strip away the things that hold us back? Will we discipline ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit?

I invite you into God's gym in the following chapters—to some sanctifying sweat, and to some pain and great gain.

God is looking for a few good men!

Food for Thought

What is spiritual discipline, and why is it so important? What usually gets in our way (see Rom. 3:9–18)? What can a lack of spiritual discipline do to your life?

Reflect on 1 Timothy 4:7–8 (“train yourself for godliness”). What is the literal meaning of “train” here? Practically, step by step, what does this mean you should do?

What does Hebrews 12:1 say about this? What things are holding you back in your walk with God? Why are you hanging on to them?

Is there a cost to spiritual discipline? Check out 1 Corinthians 9:25–27. What could greater discipline cost you? Are you prepared to pay the price? Why or why not?

The author writes, “No manliness, no maturity! No discipline, no discipleship! No sweat, no sainthood!” True or not true? How do you feel, deep inside, about this challenge?

How does spiritual discipline differ from legalism? Which do you most often practice? Is a change needed? If so, how can you bring this about?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Can we really become disciplined men of God—a spiritual Mike Singleary or Winston Churchill? Aren't we just setting ourselves up for defeat? Answer this in your own words, without using evangelical clichés.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

The Christian Life (Sinclair B. Ferguson)

Desiring God (John Piper)

Devoted to God (Sinclair B. Ferguson)

The Hole in Our Holiness (Kevin DeYoung)

How Does Sanctification Work? (David Powlison)

Inside Out (Larry Crabb)

The Joy of Fearing God (Jerry Bridges)

Make It Home before Dark (Crawford Loritts Jr.)

The Mortification of Sin (John Owen)

Reset (David Murray)

You Can Change (Tim Chester)

PART 2



RELATIONSHIPS

Discipline of Purity

One need turn on the television for only a few minutes to feel the heat of the oppressive sensuality of our day. Most of the oppression is crude. A boring trip around the TV channels at midday invariably reveals at least one couple wrapped in bed sheets and much sensual monotony. But the heat has become increasingly artful, especially if its purpose is to sell. The camera focuses close up, in black and white, on an intense, lustful male face, over which is superimposed an amber flame, which then becomes a glowing bottle of Calvin Klein's Obsession as the face intones its desire. Other spots feature subtle cinematic images with prose from D. H. Lawrence—"to know him, to gather him in . . ."—and Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary as she wanders around her illicit lover's bedroom.¹ The sticky steam of sensuality penetrates everything in our world!

Indeed, our world today is very similar to the world of Corinth described in Paul's letters. But even with the fact that we are thoroughly "Corinthian," many sensualists want more. Professor David A. J. Richard of New York University Law School, who advocates freedom for hard-core pornography, argues that "pornography can be seen as the unique medium of sexuality, a 'pornotopia'—a view of sensual delight in the erotic celebration of the body, a concept of easy freedom without consequences, a fantasy of timeless repetitive indulgence."² *Pornotopia?* Now there's a word! It sounds like a new section of Disneyland: Autopia,

1. Barbara Lippert, "Talk on the Wild Side," *Chicago Tribune*, Sept. 3, 1990.

2. Quoted in Robert H. Bork, *The Tempting of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 212.

Pornotopia, Fantasyland. “Absurd!” we think—and it is—but sadly, Richard’s arguments have been given serious weight. It is no wonder we live in a culture that sweats sensuality!

And the church has not escaped, for many in today’s church have wilted under the heat. *Leadership* magazine once commissioned a poll of a thousand pastors. The pastors indicated that 12 percent of them had committed adultery while in the ministry—one out of eight pastors!—and 23 percent had done something they considered sexually inappropriate. The researchers also surveyed a thousand *Christianity Today* subscribers who were *not* pastors and found the figure to be nearly double, with 23 percent saying they had had extramarital intercourse and 45 percent indicating they had done something they themselves deemed sexually inappropriate.³ One in four Christian men are unfaithful, and nearly one half have behaved unbecomingly! These are shocking statistics—especially when we remember that *Christianity Today* readers tend to be college-educated church leaders, elders, deacons, Sunday school superintendents, and teachers. If this is so for the church’s leadership, how much more for the average member of the congregation? Recent statistics chronicle an increase.⁴

This leads us to an inescapable conclusion: The contemporary evangelical church, broadly considered, is “Corinthian” to the core. It is being stewed in the molten juices of its own sensuality. Thus, it is no wonder that the church

3. “How Common Is Pastoral Indiscretion?,” *Leadership*, Winter 1988, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1988/winter/88l1012.html>. The article adds: “The survey probed the frequency of behavior that pastors themselves feel is inappropriate. *Since you have been in local church ministry, have you ever done anything with someone (not your spouse) that you feel was sexually inappropriate?* The responses: 23 percent yes; 77 percent no. The ‘inappropriate’ behavior was left undefined—possibly ranging from unguarded words to flirtation to adultery. Subsequent questions were more specific. *Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse since you have been in local-church ministry?* Yes: 12 percent. No: 88 percent. And of that 88 percent, many indicated their purity had not come easily.”

4. Ed Stetzer, “Hugh Hefner, Mourning, and Legacies: Beyond the Pipe and the Robe,” *The Exchange*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/september/hugh-hefner-mourning-and-legacies.html>.

Stetzer mentions a recent study that documented that 54 percent of professing Christian men view pornography monthly, and an astonishing 97 percent admit to having viewed porn at least once in their life. See <https://www.provenmen.org/2014PornSurvey/>. A subsequent Barna study found that 57 percent of pastors and 64 percent of youth pastors struggle with pornography. One of the most surprising findings of the survey was that 56 percent of teens and young adults believe that not recycling is immoral, but only 32 percent consider viewing pornographic images immoral. When discussing pornography with friends, it is viewed as either encouraged, accepted, or neutral 89 percent of the time for teens and 95 percent for young adults. See “The Porn Phenomenon,” Barna, February 5, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>.

- has lost its grip on holiness;
- is so slow to discipline its members;
- is dismissed by the world as irrelevant;
- is rejected by so many of its children; and
- has lost its power in many places—and that Islam and other false religions are making so many converts.

Sensuality is easily the biggest obstacle to godliness among men today, and it is wreaking havoc in the church. Godliness and sensuality are mutually exclusive, and those in the grasp of sensuality can never rise to godliness while in its sweaty grip. If we are to “discipline [ourselves] for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7 NASB), we must begin with the discipline of purity. There has to be some holy heat, some holy sweat!

Lessons from a Fallen King

Where are we to turn for help? The most instructive example in all of God’s Word is the experience of King David as it is told in 2 Samuel 11.

Life at the Top

As the account begins, David is at the summit of his brilliant career—as high as any man in biblical history. From childhood he had been a passionate lover of God and had possessed an immense integrity of soul, as attested by Samuel’s words when he anointed David as king: “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). God liked what he saw. God liked David’s heart!

His was a brave heart, as was evidenced when he met Goliath and returned the giant’s fearsome rhetoric with some spine-tingling words of his own—then charged full speed into battle, nailing Goliath right between the headlights (1 Sam. 17:45–49).

David had an archetypal sanguine personality brimming with joy, enthusiasm, and confidence, and overflowing with irresistible charisma. He was the poet—the sweet psalmist of Israel—so in touch with God and himself that his psalms pluck the heartstrings of man even today. Under his leadership all Israel had been united. David

hardly seemed a candidate for moral disaster. But the king was vulnerable, for there were definite flaws in his conduct that left him open to tragedy.

Desensitization

Second Samuel 5, which records David's initial assumption of power in Jerusalem, mentions almost as an aside that "David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem" (v. 13). We must note, and note well, that David's taking additional wives was *sin*! Deuteronomy 17, which set down the standards for Hebrew kings, commanded that they refrain from three things: (1) acquiring many horses, (2) taking many wives, and (3) accumulating much silver and gold (vv. 14–17). David did fine on one and three, but he completely failed on number two by willfully collecting a considerable harem.

We must understand that a progressive desensitization to sin and a consequent inner descent from holiness had taken root in David's life. David's collection of wives, though it was "legal" and not considered adultery in the culture of the day, was nevertheless sin. King David's sensual indulgence desensitized him to God's holy call in his life, as well as to the danger and consequences of falling. In short, David's embrace of socially permitted sensuality desensitized him to God's call and made him easy prey for the fatal sin of his life.

Men, it is the "legal" sensualities, the culturally acceptable indulgences, that will take us down. The long hours of indiscriminate TV watching or internet surfing, which is not only culturally cachet but is expected of the American male, is a massive culprit of desensitization. The expected male talk—double entendre, coarse humor, laughter at things that ought to make us blush—is another deadly agent. Acceptable sensualities have insidiously softened Christian men, as statistics well attest. A man who succumbs to desensitization of the "legal" sensualities is primed for a fall.

Relaxation

The second flaw in David's conduct that opened him to disaster was his relaxation from the rigors and discipline that had been part of his active life. David was at midlife, about fifty years old, and his military

campaigns had been so successful that it was not necessary for him to personally go off to war. He rightly gave the “mopping up” job to his capable general, Joab, and then relaxed. The problem was, his relaxation extended to his moral life. It is hard to maintain inner discipline when you are relaxing in this way. David was imminently vulnerable.

David did not suspect anything unusual was going to happen on that fatal spring day. He did not get up and say, “My, what a beautiful day. I think I will commit adultery today!” May this lesson not be wasted on us, men. Just when we think we are the safest, when we feel no need to keep our guard up, to work on our inner integrity, to discipline ourselves for godliness—temptation will come!

Fixation

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king’s house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2 Sam. 11:1–3)

After a warm day, evening was falling. The king strode out on the rooftop for some cool air and a look at his city at dusk. As he gazed, his eye caught the form of an unusually beautiful woman who was bathing without modesty. As to how beautiful she was, the Hebrew is explicit: the woman was “beautiful of appearance, very” (v. 2). She was young, in the flower of life, and the evening shadows made her even more enticing. The king looked at her . . . and he continued to look. After the first glance David should have turned the other way and retired to his chamber, but he did not. His *look* became a sinful *stare* and then a burning, libidinous, sweaty *leer*. In that moment David, who had been a man after God’s own heart, became a dirty, leering old man. A lustful fixation came over him that would not be denied.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer made the observation that when lust takes control, “At this moment God . . . loses all reality. . . . Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.”⁵ What a world of wisdom there is in this statement! When we are in the grip of lust, the reality of God fades. The longer King David leered, the less real God became to him. Not only was his awareness of God diminished, but David lost awareness of who he himself was—his holy call, his frailty, and the certain consequences of sin. This is what lust does! It has done it millions of times. God disappears to lust-glazed eyes.

Men, the truth demands some serious questions: Has God faded from view? Did you once see him in bright hues, but now his memory is blurred like an old sepia photograph? Do you have an illicit fixation that has become all you can see? Is the most real thing in your life your desire? If so, you are in deep trouble. Some decisive steps are necessary, as we shall see.

Rationalization

From deadly fixation, King David descended to the next level down, which is rationalization. When his intent became apparent to his servants, one tried to dissuade him, saying, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” But David would not be rebuffed. Some massive rationalization took place in David’s mind, perhaps very much as J. Allan Peterson has suggested in *The Myth of the Greener Grass*:

Uriah is a great soldier but he’s probably not much of a husband or a lover—years older than she is—and he’ll be away for a long time. This girl needs a little comfort in her loneliness. This is one way I can help her. No one will get hurt. I do not mean anything wrong by it. This is not lust—I have known that many times. This is love. This is not the same as finding a prostitute on the street. God knows that. And to the servant, “Bring her to me.”⁶

The mind controlled by lust has an infinite capacity for rationalization:

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Temptation* (London: SCM, 1961), 33.

6. J. Allan Peterson, *The Myth of the Greener Grass* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1983), 29.

- “How can something that has brought such enjoyment be wrong?”
- “God’s will for me is to be happy; certainly he would not deny me anything that is essential to my happiness—and this is it!”
- “The question here is one of love—I’m acting in love, the highest love.”
- “My marriage was never God’s will in the first place.”
- “You Christians and your narrow judgmental attitudes make me sick. You are judging me. You are a greater sinner than I’ll ever be!”

Degeneration (Adultery, Lies, Murder)

David’s progressive *desensitization*, *relaxation*, *fixation*, and *rationalization* set him up for one of the greatest falls in history—and his *degeneration*. “So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, ‘I am pregnant’” (2 Sam. 11:4–5). David was unaware he had stepped off the precipice and was falling, but that realization would soon arrive—the bottom was coming up fast.

We are all familiar with David’s despicable behavior as he became a calculating liar and murderer in arranging Uriah’s death to cover his sin with Bathsheba. Suffice it to say that at this time in the king’s life, Uriah was a better man drunk than David was sober (v. 13)!

A year later David would repent under the withering accusation of the prophet Nathan. But the miserable consequences could not be undone. As has often been pointed out:

- It was the breaking of the *tenth* commandment (coveting his neighbor’s wife) that led David to commit adultery, thus breaking the *seventh* commandment.
- Then, in order to steal his neighbor’s wife (thereby breaking the *eighth* commandment), he committed murder and broke the *sixth* commandment.

- He broke the *ninth* commandment by bearing false witness against his brother.
- This all brought dishonor to his parents and thus broke the *fifth* commandment.

In this way he broke all of the Ten Commandments that relate to loving one's neighbor as oneself (commandments five through ten). And in doing so, he dishonored God as well, breaking, in effect, the first four commandments.⁷

David's reign went downhill from there on, despite his laudable repentance:

- His baby died.
- His beautiful daughter, Tamar, was raped by her half-brother Amnon.
- Amnon was murdered by Tamar's full brother Absalom.
- Absalom came to so hate his father David for his moral turpitude that he led a rebellion under the tutelage of Bathsheba's resentful grandfather, Ahithophel.
- David's reign lost the smile of God. His throne never regained its former stability.

Men, we must understand that David would never have given more than a fleeting glance to Bathsheba if he could have seen the shattering results. I believe with all my heart that few, if any, would ever stray from God's Word if they could see what would follow.

The record of the tragic fall of King David is God-given and should be taken seriously by the church in this "Corinthian age" as a warning regarding the pathology of the human factors that lead to a moral fall:

- The *desensitization* that happens through the conventional sensualities of culture
- The deadly syndrome that comes through moral *relaxation* of discipline
- The blinding effects of sensual *fixation*
- The *rationalization* of those in the grip of lust

7. J. Oswald Sanders, *Bible Men of Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 13.

In David's case, the cycle included *adultery, lying, murder, familial degeneration*, and *national decline*. The pathology is clear, and so are the horrible effects of sensuality. Both are meant not only to instruct us but to frighten us—to scare the sensuality right out of us!

The Will of God: Purity

Sometimes people under the Christian umbrella simply do not buy what I am saying in regard to purity. They consider such teaching to be Victorian and puritanical. Victorian it is not. Puritanical it gloriously is—for it is supremely biblical. In answering such people, I take them to the most explicit call for sexual purity I know, 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

If the reading of this passage is not convincing enough concerning the biblical ethic, we must understand that it is based on Leviticus 19:2, where God says, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy”—a command that is given in the context of warnings against sexual deviation. I also want to point out that in 1 Thessalonians we are called to avoid sexual immorality and are three times called to be “holy.” To reject this is to sin against the Holy Spirit—the living presence of God—as the Thessalonians passage makes so clear.

As the New Testament scholar Leon Morris has written:

The man who carries on an act of impurity is not simply breaking a human code, nor even sinning against the God who at some time in the past gave him the gift of the Spirit. He is sinning against the God who is present at that moment, against One who continually

gives the Spirit. The impure act is an act of despite against God's good gift at the very moment it is being proffered. . . . This sin is seen in its true light only when it is seen as a preference for impurity rather than a Spirit who is holy.⁸

Therefore, for a professed Christian to reject this teaching regarding sexual purity is to reject God, and this may indicate a false faith!

The Discipline of Purity

Men, if we are Christians, it is imperative that we live pure, godly lives in the midst of our Corinthian, pornotopian culture. We must live above the horrifying statistics or the church will become increasingly irrelevant and powerless, and our children will leave it. The church can have no power apart from purity.

This demands that we live out Paul's dictum: "train yourself for godliness"—holy sweat!

Accountability

An important place to begin our training is with the discipline of accountability. This has to be done with someone who will regularly hold you accountable for your moral life, asking you hard questions. If you are married, ideally you should use your spouse. But I also recommend another man, one who will give you no quarter in sensual matters. This should be someone who will ask you the *really* hard questions, such as: What are you looking at on the internet? You need someone of the same gender who will understand your sensuality from the inside out—someone you can be completely honest with, to whom you can confess temptations and attractions. You need someone who will help you toe the mark and keep your soul faithful to God. Mutual accountability is the ideal. In this connection, I think of a certain salesman who regularly maintains accountability via phone contact with other Christian salesmen, and even works at scheduling trips to cities at the same time they will be there.

8. Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 128.

Prayer

Along with this comes the discipline of prayer (more on this in chap. 8). Pray daily and specifically for your purity. I am amazed that so few men who are concerned about their lives pray about it. Enlist the prayers of your spouse and friends, and pray for others in this respect. Do not wait to be asked. Your friends need prayer for purity, and so do you!

Memorization

Next, fill yourself with God's Word through the discipline of memorization. Our Lord set the example *par excellence* in rebuffing Satan's temptations with three precise quotations from the Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Matt. 4:1–11). The psalmist said, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word" (Ps. 119:9), and, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (v. 11). Of course, he was referring to all of God's Word, not just the passages that deal with sensuality. Nevertheless, I have seen the disciplined memorization of 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8 change a man's life. (Other helpful passages include Job 31:1; Prov. 6:27; Mark 9:42ff.; Eph. 5:3–7; and 2 Tim. 2:22, some of which I comment on below.)

Mind

The discipline of the mind is, of course, the greatest of challenges (and I will discuss it more fully in chap. 6). And Scripture regularly presents its discipline as a discipline of the eyes. Men, it is impossible for you to maintain a pure mind if you are a television-watching, internet-surfing, video-game-playing "couch potato." In one week you will watch more murders, adulteries, and perversions than our grandfathers read about in their entire lives.

Here is where the most radical action is necessary. Jesus said, "And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell" (Mark 9:47). No man who allows the rottenness of R-rated movies and shows, the various "soft-core" pornography magazines,

and suggestive digital images to flow through his house and mind will escape sensuality.

If surfing for porn or flirting on social media is a temptation to you—tear it out. Cancel your internet service if you can, or at least install an accountability program on your device. If you use a smart-phone to gratify your lustful desires, replace it with a phone with no data plan. If you find yourself viewing pornographic films in the darkness, toss your TV. It is better to go without a television, computer, or smartphone than to have sin destroy your life.

Job gave us wisdom for our day: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?” (Job 31:1). How do you think Job would live in our culture today? He understood the wisdom of Proverbs: “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?” (6:27). Men, Job’s covenant forbids a second look. It means treating all women with dignity—looking at them respectfully. If their dress or demeanor is distracting, look them in the eyes and nowhere else, and get away as quickly as you can!

The mind also encompasses the tongue (see chap. 11 of this book), for as Jesus also said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Paul is more specific: “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving” (Eph. 5:3–4). There must be no sexual humor, urbane vulgarities, and coarseness, as so many Christians are so prone to engage in to prove they are cool and not “out of it.”

Boundaries

Men, put disciplined boundaries around your life—especially if you work with women. Refrain from verbal intimacy with women other than your spouse. Do not bare your heart to another woman or pour forth your troubles to her, whether in person or online. Intimacy is a great need in most people’s lives—and talking about personal matters, especially one’s problems, can fill another’s need for intimacy, awakening a desire for more. Many affairs begin in just this way.

On the practical level, do not touch. Do not treat women with the casual affection you extend to the females in your family. How many tragedies have begun with brotherly or fatherly touches, then sympathetic shoulders. You may even have to run the risk of being wrongly considered “distant” or “cold” by some women.

Whenever you dine or travel with a woman, add a third person. This may be awkward, but it will afford an opportunity to explain your rationale, which, more often than not, will incur respect rather than reproach. Many women business associates will even feel more comfortable dealing with you.

Never flirt—even in jest. Flirtation is intrinsically flattering. You may think you are being cute, but it often arouses unrequited desires in another.

Reality

Be real about your sexuality. Do not succumb to vain gnostic prattle about being a Spirit-filled Christian who would “never do such a thing!” I well remember a man who indignantly thundered that he was beyond such sin. He fell within months! Face the truth—King David fell, and so can you!

Divine Awareness

Lastly, there is the discipline of divine awareness. This is what sustained Joseph through the temptations of Potiphar’s wife. “How then can I do this great wickedness,” he said, “and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9)—and he fled. “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22).

Men, our culture oppresses us with its obsessions and pornotopian heat. Many in the church have wilted. The statistics tell it all. In order not to become part of those statistics, there has to be some disciplined sweat.

Are we men enough? Are we men of God? I pray we are!

Food for Thought

“The contemporary evangelical church, broadly considered, is ‘Corinthian’ to the core,” the author writes. “It is being stewed in the molten

juices of its own sensuality.” Do you agree or disagree? Concerning your own church? Concerning your own life?

“At this moment [of lust] God . . . loses all reality. . . . Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer said. Have you found this to be true in your battles with temptation? What is the most effective way to prevent moral lapses?

Is 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8 too narrow to consider as binding on Christian men today? Why or why not? If not, how can we put this passage to work so that we will be victorious in our fight for purity?

What does *God’s* holiness have to do with *our* holiness (see Lev. 19:2)?

Considering the prevalent immorality of our culture, how can we possibly hope to keep our thoughts and behavior pure?

Is the admonition to maintain “hedges” in our relationships with the women in our lives really necessary? Isn’t this a putdown of women? Of ourselves?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

List at least half a dozen specific, practical applications concerning sexual morality from David’s experience in 2 Samuel 11.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Counterfeit Gods (Timothy Keller)

The Enemy Within (Kris Lundgaard)

Finally Free (Heath Lambert)

Hide or Seek (John Freeman)

Holiness (J. C. Ryle)

Making All Things New (David Powlison)

Overcoming Sin and Temptation (John Owen)

Sex, Dating, and Relationships (Gerald Hiestand and Jay Thomas)

Sexual Detox (Tim Challies)

Sexual Sanity for Men (David White)

Tempted and Tried (Russell Moore)

Article

Samuel James, “How to Leave Porn Behind,” *desiringGod*, July 14, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-leave-porn-behind>.

Other Resources

Accountability software: www.covenanteyes.com and x3watch.com

Discipline of Marriage

I regularly have the best view at Christian weddings, as I stand about three feet from the joyous couple. Their skin glows with amber luminosity from the flickering candles behind me. I see everything: the moist eyes, the trembling hands, the surreptitious wink, their mutual earnestness of soul. I hear the words their parents said before them: “. . . for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health . . .” They are submitting to the larger logics of life, to the solidarity of the Christian community, to “otherness,” to life itself.

Sometimes in my enjoyment I let it all blur for a moment and imagine the ultimate wedding where Christ will officially take us to himself, and then I blink back to the living parable before me. How will the couple fare over the years? Will she reverence her husband? Will he love his beautiful bride as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her? Will he love her with an elevating, sanctifying love? Will he love her as he loves himself? I pray it will be so.

It was so in the life of Dr. J. Robertson McQuilkin, the beloved former president of Columbia Bible College (now Columbia International University) in South Carolina, and his wife, Muriel, who suffered the ravages of Alzheimer’s disease. In March 1990 Dr. McQuilkin announced his resignation in a letter with these words:

My dear wife, Muriel, has been in failing mental health for about eight years. So far I have been able to carry both her ever-growing

needs and my leadership responsibilities at CBC. But recently it has become apparent that Muriel is contented most of the time she is with me and almost none of the time I am away from her. It is not just “discontent.” She is filled with fear—even terror—that she has lost me and always goes in search of me when I leave home. Then she may be full of anger when she cannot get to me. So it is clear to me that she needs me now, full-time.

Perhaps it would help you to understand if I shared with you what I shared at the time of the announcement of my resignation in chapel. The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel “in sickness and in health . . . till death do us part.” So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continual distressing frustration. I do not *have* to care for her, I *get* to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.

The following month Barbara and I had a brief visit with the McQuilkins and witnessed Dr. McQuilkin’s gentle, loving way with his dear wife, who understood little of what was going on. The memory of our visit is one of lingering beauty.

Such beautiful Christlike love did not just happen! It came from the inner resolve of a young husband who had determined forty-two years before to live under the authority of God’s directives regarding how a godly man must love his wife—as it is spelled out in Ephesians 5. These are directives every Christian man ought to be familiar with, understand, and, I think, even commit to memory—as I myself have. They are the foundational discipline of marriage—the bases for holy matrimonial sweat.

To examine the godly man’s responsibility, we must fix in our minds the grand truth at the end of Ephesians 5:31, where Paul quotes Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and

hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” He then adds in Ephesians 5:32, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” There is an astounding unity in marriage! The assertion that men and women become “one flesh” indicates something of the psychospiritual depth of marriage—an exchange of soul.

Marriage *ideally* produces two people who are as much the same person as two people can be! Christians in marriage have the *same* Lord, the *same* family, the *same* children, the *same* future, and the *same* ultimate destiny—an astounding unity. An amazing bonding took place the moment I saw my newborn children and held them in my arms. They are from my flesh. I am close to my children, interwoven with them. Yet, I am not one flesh with them. I am one flesh only with my wife. This, in my opinion, is why old couples possessing extraordinarily different appearances yet often look so much alike—they are “one flesh.” There has been an exchange of soul—a mutual appropriation of each other’s lives.

This is, indeed, a mystery—which partially illustrates the even deeper marital union of Christ and the church. And this is why the biblical text often uses descriptive language when speaking of Christ and husbands and the church and wives at the same time. We must keep the mysterious nature of our union constantly before us if we are to understand the disciplines of marital love as they unfold—the disciplines of *sacrificial* love, of *sanctifying* love, and of *self-love*.

Sacrificial Love

The opening charge in Ephesians 5 is a clear call to radical, sacrificial love: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25). This call to marital love was a bare-knuckled swing at the domestic commitment (or lack thereof) among the men of the day—just as it is today. Taken seriously, the naked form of these words, “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” is staggering! And honestly received, the punch it delivers flattens many Christian men because they fall so short!

Death

The reason the punch hurts is because it is a naked call to *love with a willingness to sacrifice, even unto death*. Recognizing this, Mike

Mason, author of the classic book *The Mystery of Marriage*, says pointedly that marital love is like death—it wants all of us. I agree. If you do not understand this, you do not know what marital love is. It claims everything. Mason goes on to liken marital love to a shark: “And who has not been frightened almost to death by love’s dark shadow gliding swift and huge as an interstellar shark, like a swimming mountain, through the deepest waters of our being, through depths we never knew we had?”¹

The realization of what this call means may at first be frightening, but it is also beautiful, because a man who embraces such a love will experience the grace of death to self. Marriage is a call to die, and a man who does not die for his wife does not come close to the love to which he is called. Christian marriage vows are the inception of a lifelong practice of death, of *giving over not only all you have, but all you are*.

Is this a grim gallows call? Not at all! It is no more grim than dying to self and following Christ. In fact, those who lovingly die for their wives are those who know the most joy, have the most fulfilling marriages, and experience the most love. Christ’s call to Christian husbands is not a call to be doormats, but a call to die. As we shall see, this can mean a death to our rights, our time, or our perceived pleasures—all liberating deaths. This is a truly male thing, a masculine thing, for it takes a strong man to die.

Suffering

When Christ “gave himself up” for us, he not only died, he suffered. And his suffering was not only the cross, but it was and is suffering that comes from identification with his bride, the church. This is why the apostle Paul, then known as Saul, who was fanatically persecuting the church, suddenly heard Jesus cry, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:4). Christ suffers with his bride, and husbands ought to suffer with and for theirs.

Men, when you properly hitch your life to another, you are in for a wild ride with huge ups and downs. Just as when you really love God you will undergo difficulties foreign to an unloving heart, so it is

1. Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1985), 52.

in marriage. You will share her experienced injustices, cruelties, and disappointments. You will experience her upsets, insecurities, and despairs. But, of course, you will also know an index of joys beyond the range of the unloving. You will ride through some dark valleys, but you will also soar among the stars!

Intercession

On the evening Christ gave himself up for us, John 17 tells us, he prayed in succession for himself, for his twelve disciples, and for all of us who would later believe. When he finished praying for his future bride, he went to the cross. Then came his *death*, his *resurrection*, his *ascension*, and his *enthronement* at the right hand of the Father, where he constantly makes *intercession* for us. Thus, we understand that giving ourselves for our brides involves prayerful intercession. Men, do you pray for your wives with something more than “Bless good old Margaret in all she does”? If not, you are sinning against them and against God. Most Christian men who claim to love their wives never offer more than a perfunctory nod to their wives’ needs before God. Men, you ought to have a list of your wives’ needs, spoken and unspoken, that you passionately hold up to God out of love for them. Praying is the marital work of a Christian husband!

The bare-knuckle command is “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” Men, we are divinely called to *die* for our brides, to take on their *sufferings* as our own, and to make *intercession* for them.

Sanctifying Love

Marriage under the lordship of Christ is a mutually sanctifying relationship—it moves us toward holiness. Most of us, by the time we get married, are like a well-furnished home, and a lot of furniture needs to be tossed out to make room for the other person. Marriage helps empty some rooms. Genuine marital love reveals rooms full of selfishness. As these rooms are cleared, one finds other rooms of self-centeredness. Beyond these are autonomy and self-will. We need an ongoing house cleaning. Marriage certainly did that for me. I had

no idea how self-centered I was until I married! George Gilder, in his much-discussed book *Men and Marriage*, even argues that marriage is the one institution that tames the inveterate barbarianism of man.² Over the years a good marriage can change us for the better—almost beyond recognition. There is indeed a mutual sanctification in marriage.

But the emphasis in the Scriptures is on the responsibility of a husband's love for his wife. Paul writes that Christ gave himself for the church "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26–27). This is what Christ will do through our divine marriage to him, for at his return the washed and regenerated church will be presented to him in absolute perfection. This is the sealing of the romance of the ages.

Meanwhile, these divine nuptials are a parable of what ought to be the loving husband's elevating effect on his wife. He is to be a man of the Word who lives a godly life, praying and sacrificing for his wife. His authentic spirituality is meant to buoy her onward and upward toward the image of Christ. The man who sanctifies his wife understands that this is his divinely ordained responsibility.

Men (ignoring for the moment our wives' spiritual responsibility to us), do you realize it is your responsibility to seek your wives' sanctification? Even more, do you honestly accept it? Marriage will reveal something about your wife that you already know about yourself—that she is a sinner. Marriage reveals everything: her weaknesses, her worst inconsistencies, the things others never see. *Loving your spouse is not to love her as a saint, but as a sinner.* "If we love her for her saintliness, we do not love her at all,"³ says Mason. You see your wife as you see yourself, and you love her as yourself. You realize your mutual need, and you delve into God's Word to listen to it with your heart and try, by his grace, to live it out so that she will be encouraged by your life—and thus become an even more beautiful bride for Christ.

2. George Gilder, "Taming the Barbarians," in *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1986), 39–47.

3. Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, 163, 164.

This brings up some hard questions: Is my wife more like Christ because she is married to me? Or is she like Christ in spite of me? Has she shrunk from his likeness because of me? Do I sanctify her or hold her back? Is she a better woman because she is married to me? Is she a better friend? A better mother?

Men, our call is clear: sanctifying love.

Self-Love

Greek mythology tells of a beautiful youth who loved no one until the day he saw his own reflection in the water and fell in love with it. He was so lovesick, he finally wasted away and died, and was turned into a flower that bears his name—*Narcissus*.⁴ Actually, narcissistic self-love is not a pretty thing! We are repulsed by narcissism and carefully seek to avoid it.

But, incredibly, in Ephesians 5 we are called to a sublime self-love: “In the same way [as Christ loves the church] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body” (vv. 28–30). This loving of ourselves by loving our wives is based on the “one flesh” unity we have already talked about—the deep exchange of our souls in marriage that can even make us look alike. It is the love that Shakespeare’s Lorenzo celebrates when he says that Jessica will be placed in “my constant soul.”⁵ Our marital love is our constant soul!

To love our wives as our own bodies is a grand and great thing. It means granting them the same importance, the same value, “the same existential gravity that we take for granted in ourselves.”⁶ They become as real as we are to ourselves. *She is me*.

How do we love our wives as our own bodies? How do we care for them as we do for ourselves? The answer involves three incarnations.

4. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 722.

5. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, II, vi, 57. Lorenzo says, “Lord. Beshrew me but I love her heartily; For she is wise, if I can judge of her, and fair she is, if that mine eyes be true, And true she is, as she hath proved herself, And therefore, like herself, wise, fair, and true, Shall she be placed in my constant soul.”

6. Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage*, 36.

The first is a *physical* incarnation. Dr. Richard Selzer, in his book *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery*, tells of performing surgery to remove a tumor and of necessity severing a facial nerve, leaving a young woman's mouth permanently twisted in palsy. In Dr. Selzer's own words:

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to do well in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. Who are they, I ask myself, he and this wry-mouth I have made, who gaze at and touch each other so generously, greedily? The young woman speaks. "Will my mouth always be like this?" she asks. "Yes," I say, "it will. It is because the nerve was cut." She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles. "I like it," he says. "It is kind of cute." . . . Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I, so close, can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works.⁷

This is the way we must love. Her body is my body, her comfort my comfort, her adornment my adornment, her care my care.

A second way to love our wives as our own bodies is *emotional* incarnation. So many men make the emotional differences between men and women subject to degrading humor. They belittle the female disposition, as if male stoicism were superior. They realize the differences, but make no allowances for them and do not attempt to understand. No man can claim obedience to God and do this! It is a flat-sided masculinity that imagines that understanding another is a feminine trait. Actually, such understanding of the complementary natures God gave man and woman is the mark of a fully developed, mature man.

Then, of course, there must be *social* incarnation. Women have many social settings: the home, the office, the classroom. But I remember a profitable incarnation I experienced when my wife visited her sister in Connecticut for a week, leaving me in charge of our four small children. I fixed the meals, changed thousands and thousands of diapers, fixed hurts, settled quarrels, gave baths, cleaned up catastrophes, and cleaned them up again. I was at work *before* I got up and *after* I went to bed. The experience so marked me that in my mind I invented

7. Richard Selzer, *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), 45, 46.

a new kitchen, modeled after a car wash. The floors sloped to a large drain in the middle of the room. A hose hung on the wall, nozzle ready to spray things down after the meal. It was an incarnation I was not anxious to repeat again, but as my wife says, “It was *good* for you!”

Men, we are called to a divinely appointed self-love: to love our wives as our own bodies, to care for them as Christ does the church. Loving our wives’ bodies as our own demands a triple incarnation: physical, emotional, and social. We are to devote the same energy, time, and creativity to our wives as to ourselves. We are to cherish our constant souls. Envy the woman who is loved like this. Even more, envy the man who loves like this—for he is like Christ.

Men, what a challenge Ephesians 5 presents us—*sacrificial* love (love is like death), *sanctifying* love (love that elevates), and *self-love* (loving your wife as much as you love your own body). If this calls for anything, it calls for some holy sweat. As Walter Trobisch said, “Marriage is not an achievement which is finished. It is a dynamic process between two people, a relation which is constantly being changed, which grows or dies.”⁸

How to Answer the Call

Men, the all-encompassing call to love our wives as Christ loved the church demands specific disciplines.

Commitment

We must begin with the discipline of commitment. I have grown tougher through the years in my demands on couples who want me to perform their wedding ceremonies. I tell them that wedding vows are a volitional commitment to love despite how one feels. I explain that it is rubbish to think one can break one’s vows because one does not “feel” in love. I point out that the Scriptures call us to “put on love” (Col. 3:14)—and despite the canard about such love being hypocritical, it is never hypocrisy to put on a Christian grace. I tell them that if there is the tiniest thought in the backs of their minds that they can get out of the marriage if the other person is not all they expected, I will not perform the ceremony. The truth is, marriages that depend on being

8. Walter Trobisch, *The Complete Works of Walter Trobisch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), quoted in *Marriage Partnership*, Winter 1989, 17.

“in love” fall apart. Couples who look back to the wild promises they vowed in the marriage ceremony are the ones who make it. There is no substitute for *covenant plus commitment*.

Fidelity

When a man commits himself to love his wife “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,” he will ever be faithful to her. One thing the church can count on is the fidelity of the Bridegroom. And this is the one thing a wife whose husband loves like Christ can rest on. Jeremy Taylor, the great seventeenth-century preacher, in his sermon “The Marriage Ring or the Mysteriousness and Duties of Marriage,” gave this charge regarding fidelity:

Above all . . . let him [the groom] preserve towards her an inviolable faith, and an unspotted chastity, for this is the marriage ring, it ties two hearts by an eternal band; it is like the cherubim’s flaming sword set for the guard of paradise. . . . Chastity is the security of love, and preserves all the mysteriousness like the secrets of a temple. Under this lock is deposited security of families, the union of affections, the repairer of accidental breaches.⁹

Men, our wives must be able to rest in the fact of our fidelity. Everything about us—our eyes, our language, our schedules, our passion—must say to her, “I am, and will always be, faithful to you.”

Communication

Next is the discipline of communication. The readers of a popular women’s magazine were asked, “If you could change your husband, what would you change?”¹⁰ The overwhelming consensus was they would like them to communicate better. They indicated that even more, they would like their husbands to *listen*. Eugene Peterson remarks:

The stereotype is the husband buried in the morning newspaper at breakfast, preferring to read a news agency report of the latest scandal in a European government, the scores of yesterday’s ath-

9. William Alan Sadler Jr., ed., *Master Sermons through the Ages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 116.

10. Conversation with Harold Smith, editor of *Marriage Partnership*, February 19, 1991.

letic contests, and the opinions of a couple of columnists whom he will never meet rather than listen to the voice of the person who has just shared his bed, poured his coffee, and fried his eggs, even though listening to that live voice promises love and hope, emotional depth and intellectual exploration far in excess of what he can gather informationally from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Christian Science Monitor* put together.¹¹

Men, the discipline of communication demands that you set aside regular time to talk—and that you really do talk, and that you communicate more than facts, that you communicate feelings—that you learn to talk in metaphors and similes with phrases that begin, “I feel like . . .” And it means that you listen. The *Harvard Business Review* recommends that an executive should spend 65 percent of his time listening.¹² How much more so the wise husband.

Elevation

Next, I strongly recommend the discipline of elevation. Winston Churchill once attended a formal banquet in London, where the dignitaries were asked, “If you could not be who you are, who would you like to be?” Naturally, everyone was curious as to what Churchill, who was seated next to his beloved wife, Clementine, would say. After all, Churchill could not be expected to say Julius Caesar or Napoleon. When Churchill’s turn finally came, the old man, the last respondent to the question, rose and gave his answer: “If I could not be who I am, I would most like to be”—and here he paused to take his wife’s hand—“Lady Churchill’s second husband.”¹³ The old boy made some points that night. But he also said it for everyone who has a good marriage.

A commitment to building up your wife is of greatest importance. Men, if you think what your wife does is less important than what you do, you are wrong and you have big problems. Compliments on her kindness and her daily provisions should be commonplace, as should showing her respect by observing common courtesies.

11. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 62.

12. Howard Hendricks made this statement in a lecture delivered at College Church in Wheaton, IL, in June 1984.

13. Quoted in James Humes, *Churchill, Speaker of the Century* (Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day, Scarborough House, 1980), 291.

Deference

Along with this, the discipline of deference must be carefully practiced. Many men never forgo a planned pleasure for the sake of their wives. For some men, golf is synonymous with Dante's *Paradiso*, but the entrance to a department store is like the gates of Dante's hell, bearing the inscription "Abandon all hope all ye who enter here."¹⁴ But if you love your wife, there must be times when you forsake the heavenly greens because you value her interests and simply love her.

Time/Romance

Lastly, I must mention the discipline of time and romance. Years ago, in the Midwest, a farmer and his wife were lying in bed during a storm when the funnel of a tornado suddenly lifted the roof right off the house and sucked their bed away with them still in it. The wife began to cry, and the farmer called to her that it was no time to cry. She called back that she couldn't help it because she was so happy—it was the first time they had been out together in twenty years!

Researchers have found that one of the major factors in marital stability, happiness, and satisfaction is time spent together.¹⁵ Make sure you maintain this priority. Your calendar reveals what is important to you, so write her calendar into yours. Schedule weekly times together that do not just "happen." Be creative. Date! Surprise her. Be extravagant.

Men, when was the last time you opened the door for her; said "I love you"; complimented her; wrote her a loving note; sent her flowers; "dated" her; or gave her extra special attention? In her poem "The Spring and the Fall," Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote,

14. Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. John Ciardi (New York: New American Library, 1954), 42, quoting Canto III, which reads,

I am the way into the city of woe.
I am the way to a forsaken people.
I am the way into eternal sorrow.
Sacred justice moved my architect.
I was raised here by divine omnipotence,
Primordial love and ultimate intellect.
Only those elements time cannot wear
Were made before me, and beyond time I stand.
Abandon all hope all ye who enter here.

15. Sarah M. Flood and Katie R. Genadek, "Time for Each Other: Work and Family Constraints among Couples," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 78, no. 1 (February 1, 2016): 142–64.

'Tis not love's going hurts my days,
But that it went in little ways.

Many other “disciplines” could be named, most of which are implicit in what we have said—for example, tenderness, sensitivity, and patience—but the bottom line is that we must work at it. In the fire of new love, marriage seems as easy as falling off a log. Actually, it is as easy as *staying* on a log. It requires careful attention, developed skill, and work.

Men, are you working on the second most important relationship of your life (God is first)? Sweat any lately? No perspiration, no progress. No pain, no gain.

Let us bow to God's Word: “Act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:13–14). Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.

Food for Thought

Do you agree with Mike Mason's analogy between marital love and death? Why or why not? What does your love for your wife demand of you? Are you willing to pay the price?

Do you generally feel what your wife is feeling—her joys and sorrows, her mountain peaks and deep valleys? What can you do to let her know that you want to “connect” with her emotionally and spiritually?

The author writes, “Praying is the marital work of a Christian husband.” Do you agree? How often do you pray for your wife? With her? What can you do to make this more of a habit?

What are you doing currently to help your wife draw closer to Christ? List at least six specific things you will do within the next two weeks to help your wife grow spiritually.

What happens to a marriage if a husband doesn't love himself? What does it really mean to love oneself biblically? How will such an attitude show itself practically?

How do Colossians 3:14 and 1 Corinthians 16:13–14 apply to your marriage? Be specific.

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Read Ephesians 5:22–33, then write a few paragraphs on the spiritual meaning of Christian marriage. What do the wife’s submission and the husband’s love have to do with one another? What does the relationship of Christ and his church teach you about your marriage?

Resources for Further Growth

Books

As For Me and My House (Walter Wangerin Jr.)

Gospel-Centered Marriage (Tim Chester)

Hedges (Jerry Jenkins)

Marriage Matters (Winston T. Smith)

Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel (Ray Ortlund)

Married for God (Christopher Ash)

The Meaning of Marriage (Timothy Keller)

This Momentary Marriage (John Piper)

What Did You Expect? (Paul David Tripp)

When Sinners Say “I Do” (Dave Harvey)

Discipline of Fatherhood

I remember with photographic clarity when our first child was born—August 10, 1963, a blazing-hot Southern California night. It had been so hot that day that I had taken my round little wife to the ocean—Huntington Beach, to be exact—to cool off. There I hollowed out a place in the sand for her tummy, we stretched out under the sun while the cool breezes of the *Mar Pacifica* refreshed us, and we both unwittingly began to sunburn.

It was midafternoon when we headed back to the heat and smog of Los Angeles, so we rolled back the sunroof of our Volkswagen and foolishly baked some more. We soon looked like Maine lobsters.

After dinner, as we lay smarting on the hot sheets of our bed, labor began, and that is about all we remember of our sunburns. My wife was occupied with another kind of pain, and I was so excited I forgot about mine. That night brought one of the greatest events of our lives, for God gave us our firstborn, a beautiful little girl we named Holly. I remember everything, even the color of the hospital walls. It seems like only yesterday.

Another event has lodged in my mind with similar vividness. On July 23, 1986, twenty-three years later, in another hospital in far-off Illinois, my baby Holly gave birth to *her* firstborn, a beautiful little boy, Brian Emory, and his father held him with the same rapture.

Both experiences were profoundly supernatural, for I saw God's creation: blood, earth, water, wind, and fire. Though just a speck on

time's continuum, I felt a sacred solidarity with the past and the present. I also felt grace, the unhindered flow of God's goodness to me and my family.

Today, with twenty-six grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren (and promises of more to come), it is increasingly apparent that my most treasured possessions, next to life in Christ, are the members of my family. I share the universal reflex that if a fire occurred, after getting my family out, I would go back for the photographs, the scrapbooks, and the birthday cards and notes.

Someday, when all is gone, when I can no longer see, hear, or talk—indeed, when I may no longer know their names—the faces of my loved ones will be on my soul.

In my mid-seventies, I am finding increasing satisfaction in my family and in their families. All my children are serious Christians and want to make their lives count for Christ. I say this humbly, because parents often take too much blame for their children's problems and too much credit when they turn out well. I realize that my children are what they are by the grace of God, and that for me and them the road has not ended.

I have mutually fulfilling relationships with all my children. They are independent of me, but they desire my company and counsel. We have mutual respect. They call me, and I call them, and we all live for the holidays when we can be together.

I have shared all this because, though I have not been a perfect father, I have learned some things along the way that I must pass along, man to man, to those of you in the midst or at the beginning of fathering.

Men, the mere fact of fatherhood has endowed you with terrifying power in the lives of your sons and daughters, because they have an innate, God-given passion for you. Recently, in reading Lance Morrow's *The Chief: A Memoir of Fathers and Sons*, I came across a remarkable expression of this:

From time to time I have felt for my father a longing that was almost physical, something passionate, but prior to sex—something infantile, profound. It has bewildered me, even thrown me into

depression. It is mysterious to me exactly what it is I wanted from my father. I have seen this longing in other men—and see it now in my own sons, their longing for me. I think that I have glimpsed it once or twice in my father's feelings about his father. Perhaps it is some urge of Telemachus, the residual infant in the man still wistful for the father's heroic protection. One seeks to return not to the womb . . . but to a different thing, a father's sponsorship in the world. A boy wants the aura and armament of his father. It is a deep yearning, but sometimes a little sad—a common enough masculine trait that is also vaguely unmanly. What surprises me is how angry a man becomes sometimes in the grip of what is, in essence, an unrequited passion.¹

Our sons naturally want us! Perhaps, men, you have experienced something like this. You have just finished a run, and you are sitting on the porch sweating like a horse and smelling like one, and your son, or perhaps a little neighbor boy, sits down next to you, leans against you, and says, “You smell good.” This is the primal longing for one's father. And our daughters' hearts are naturally turned toward ours with parallel longings.

The terrifying fact is, we can either grace our children or damn them with unrequited wounds that never seem to heal. Our society is awash with millions of daughters pathetically seeking the affection their fathers never gave them—and some of these daughters are at the sunset of their lives. In the extreme, there are myriads of sons who were denied healthy same-sex relationships with their fathers and are now spending the rest of their lives in search of their sexual identity via perversion and immorality.² Recent studies show that one in three children do not live with their fathers.³

Men, as fathers you have such power! You will have this terrible power till you die, like it or not—in your attitude toward authority,

1. Lance Morrow, *The Chief: A Memoir of Fathers and Sons* (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 6–7.

2. “The Extent of Fatherlessness,” National Center for Fathering, <http://www.fathers.com/statistics-and-research/the-extent-of-fatherlessness/>.

3. “The Consequences of Fatherlessness,” National Center for Fathering, <http://www.fathers.com/statistics-and-research/the-consequences-of-fatherlessness/>. Children without fathers in the home are more likely to live in poverty, consume alcohol and drugs, have behavioral issues, commit suicide, have lower grades, drop out of high school, commit a crime, be sexually active, and have a teenage pregnancy.

in your attitude toward women, and in your regard for God and the church. What terrifying responsibilities! This is truly the power of life and death.

For these reasons we live in a time of great social crisis. Whole segments of our society are bereft of male leadership. At the other end of the scale, there are strong men who give their best leadership to the marketplace, but utterly fail at home. We are the men! And if God's purpose does not happen with the sons of the church, it will not happen.

Men, there are few places where sanctified sweat will show greater dividends than in fathering. If you are willing to work at it, you can be a good father. If you are willing to sweat, you will see abundant blessing.

Helpfully, God's Word provides us with an outline for a fatherly workout in one pungent sentence: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). This outline is easiest remembered as a "do not" and a "do." The "do not" is: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger"; the "do" is: "bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Fatherhood's "Do Nots"

The "do not" is perfectly clear, because it literally means "*do not provoke your children to anger*" so that they begin to seethe with resentment and irritation." The *New English Bible* captures the idea very well: "You fathers, again, must not goad your children to resentment." The directness and simplicity of this "do not" invites us to do some honest thinking about the ways we goad our children to exasperation.

Criticism

Near the top of most lists has to be criticism. Every year when our family decorates our Christmas tree and I place a tiny red-and-green glass-beaded wreath on the tree, I think of the little boy who gave it to me when I coached soccer. His sarcastic, demeaning father would run up and down the field belittling his boy with words like *chicken*

and *woman*. He was the only parent I ever told to be quiet or leave the field. I wonder sometimes how that boy, now a man, has fared.

Winston Churchill had such a father in Lord Randolph Churchill. He did not like Winston's looks, he did not like his voice, and he did not even like to be in the same room with his son. He never complimented him, only criticized him. Biographers excerpt young Winston's letters begging both parents for his father's attention: "I would rather have been apprenticed as a bricklayer's mate. . . . It would have been natural . . . and I should have got to know my father."⁴

Fathers who criticize their children often bring them to discouragement. The parallel version of this "do not" in Colossians 3:21 indicates that children embittered by nagging and deriding⁵ "lose heart" (NASB)—like a horse that has had its spirit broken. You can see a broken spirit in the way a horse moves, and you can see it in the eyes and posture of a disheartened child.

Criticism comes in many ways besides overt words. Some parents never praise their children on principle: "My praise will mean something when I give it," they say, but they never give it. Then there is faint, backhanded praise like that given to the boy who had just scored a soccer goal: "That was okay, son; now next week do better." Often it is not the words but the tone of voice or the distracted eyes that say it all.

Why are fathers critical? Perhaps that is the way their fathers treated them. Perhaps they are simply critical people who mask it well in public, but cannot restrain themselves in the heat of domestic relationships. To such fathers, God's Word comes like an arrow headed for the bull's-eye: do not exasperate your children with criticism.

Excessive Strictness

Some fathers exasperate their children by being overly strict and controlling. They need to remember that rearing children is like holding a wet bar of soap—too firm a grasp and it shoots from your hand, too loose a grip and it slides away. A gentle but firm hold keeps you in control.

4. Quoted in William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill; Visions of Glory: 1874–1932* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), 187–88.

5. Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 225.

We cannot begin to estimate the ravages of overstrictness on the evangelical Christian community over the years. I have had occasion in my ministry to bury people who lived virtually all of their seventy years in reaction to the harsh legalism of their upbringing. Others were not so tragic. They came to renounce legalism biblically and theologically, but still wrestled with it emotionally for the rest of their lives.

Why are some fathers overly strict? Many are trying to protect their children from an increasingly philistine culture—and smothering rules seem the best way to accomplish that. Others are simply controlling personalities who use rules, money, friendship, or clout to rule their children's lives. The Bible, read through their controlling grid, becomes a license to own and dominate. Still others wrongly understand their faith in terms of law rather than grace. Some men are overly strict because they are concerned about the opinions of others: "What will they think if my child goes to this place, wears this clothing, or is heard listening to that music?" Not a few preachers' kids have been catapulted into rebellion because their fathers squeezed their lives to fit their parishioners' expectations. What a massive sin against one's children!

Rather, we ought to begin our fatherhood by holding the tiny, helpless baby snugly, but as it grows, gradually and wisely loosening our grip. As conscientious fathers we have to say no to many things. Thus, we should try to say yes to as much as possible, and save our no's for the really important situations.

We must be biblical in regard to our no's and, as our children grow, be prepared to discuss the rules biblically and principially. We must learn to trust God with our children, realizing they must learn to make decisions for themselves.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children by being overly strict. Learn to hold their lives with God's pressure and to mold them with his love.

Irritability

We have all seen it—and perhaps done it! The father walks in the door after a pressured day, preoccupied, with brow furrowed. His three-year-old comes running to him, but Dad is busy unburdening

himself to his wife. “Just a moment, Jimmy.” Jimmy tugs at his father’s trousers, but gets no response. He tugs again! His father explodes, picks him up, and swats him hard for being “rude.” Only the Lord knows how many children “lose heart” because their fathers have “hard days.”

Life is sometimes like the cartoon that shows a boss who is grouchy toward a worker; his employee, in turn, comes home and is irritable with the children; his son then kicks the dog; the dog runs down the street and bites the first person he sees—the boss!

We fathers must never let our pressures drive us into this unhappy cycle. The costs are too high! As has been said,

Some say you treat your fellow man
on the level.
But when you are home with the wife and kids,
are you mean as the Devil?

Your kids know!

Inconsistency

Few things exasperate a child more than inconsistency. Pity the horse that has a rider who gives it mixed signals, digging his heels into its side and pulling the reins at the same time. Even more, pity the child who has the rules changed by a capricious father, and who is always exasperated because of the conflicting messages he receives.

Fathers, you may forgive yourself by saying, “I’m so busy. . . . Memory isn’t my thing. . . . I’m just a spontaneous person!” But your children will not buy it.

Be consistent. *Never, ever* make a promise to your children you do not keep! Do any unfulfilled promises come to mind? Horseback riding that never happened? Trips to the ice cream store or the ballpark? *You* may forget, but you have a little boy or girl who will remember it eighty years from now.

Favoritism

One of the most exasperating and damning sins a father can commit against his children is favoritism. I say this despite being the last one

who would suggest you should treat all your children alike. Some children need more discipline, while some need more independence. Some need more structure, but some need less. Some need more holding than others. Some need more encouragement. But no child should be favored over another.

Favoritism was the damning sin of Isaac, who favored Esau over Jacob. Ironically, it was also the damning sin of Jacob, who favored Joseph over his brothers. Like favoring father, like rejected son! How crushing, how disheartening to know that you are less favored—less loved.

Men, the great “do not” of fatherhood is “Do not provoke your children to anger,” and life tells us what the resulting “do nots” of this are:

- Do not be critical.
- Do not be excessively strict.
- Do not be irritable.
- Do not be inconsistent.
- Do not show favoritism.

God has created our children with their hearts turned toward ours. Our power is awesome! We must take God’s Word to heart.

Fatherhood’s “Do’s”

The comprehensive “do not” of fatherhood is followed by the explicit “do”—“but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”—which, when fully understood, require three “do’s”: *tenderness*, *discipline*, and *instruction*.

Tenderness

“Bring them up” means “to nourish or feed,” as in Ephesians 5:29, which uses the same Greek words to describe how a man “nourishes and cherishes” his own body. John Calvin translates “bring them up” as “let them be kindly cherished,” and goes on to emphasize that the overall idea is to speak to one’s children with gentleness and friendliness.⁶

6. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 213.

When I was a teenager, my best friend's father was a man's man. He had spent thirty-two years in the Coast Guard as a noncommissioned officer, a chief bosun's mate. He was a big man, and in his prime he had put on the gloves with Joe Louis. Officers greeted him first when he walked down the street. He could be rough and tumble. But do you know what he called his 265-pound son? "David dear." I was "Kent dear," and I did not mind at all. In fact, it made me feel great. He was not hung up on "Real men do not show affection." In fact, he still kisses his grown son—a man's man himself.

We are to be tender. Men are never manlier than when they are tender with their children—whether holding a baby in their arms, loving their grade-schooler, or hugging their teenagers or adult children.

Here, a statement from the wise Christian philosopher Elton Trueblood is to the point, extending the principle further. He says,

[A child] needs also to know that his father and his mother are lovers, quite and apart from their relationship to him. It is the father's responsibility to make the child know that he is deeply in love with the child's mother. There is no good reason why all evidence of affection should be hidden or carried on in secret. A child who grows up with the realization that his parents are lovers has a wonderful basis of stability.⁷

Tenderness—verbal and physical—comes naturally to a father living under God's Word. Men, how do we measure up?

Discipline

Next, there is "discipline." This is a strong word that means "training, even by punishment." Pilate used the same word when he said of Jesus, "I will therefore punish and release him" (Luke 23:16). Discipline certainly includes corporal punishment as needed. But it encompasses *everything* necessary to help "Train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6).

The tragedy is that so many men have left this to their children's mothers. Not only is this unfair to the mother, but it robs the child of

7. Elton Trueblood and Pauline Trueblood, *The Recovery of Family Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 94.

the security and self-esteem that come from being disciplined by the father.⁸ Men, do you leave the discipline of your sons and daughters to your wives? If so, that is a sad breach of domestic responsibility. You are not living under God's Word!

Instruction

Last, there is "instruction"—verbal instruction or warning. The word *instruction* literally means "to place before the mind." Often this means "to confront," and thus instruction is related to the previous topic, discipline. This is precisely where the high priest Eli was such an abysmal domestic failure in raising his sons. First Samuel 3:11–13 tells us:

Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them."

The Greek word for "restrain" in the Septuagint has the same root as "instruction" in Ephesians 6:4. Eli failed to *confront* his boys. He failed to *instruct* them about their sin. And because of this, they were destroyed.

Clear, forthright instruction is necessary for a proper upbringing. Men, if we are to own up to our responsibilities, we must be:

- Involved in verbally instructing our children
- Regularly leading them in family devotions and prayer

8. James Dobson, *Hide or Seek* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1974), 82–83, quotes Dr. Stanley Coopersmith, associate professor of psychology at the University of California, who surveyed 1,738 normal middle-class boys and their families, beginning in the preadolescent period and following them through to young manhood. After determining the boys with the best self-esteem, he then compared their homes and childhood influences with those boys having a lower sense of self-esteem. He found three important characteristics that distinguished them. The second was as follows: "The high-esteem group came from homes where parents had been significantly more strict in their approach to discipline. By contrast, the parents of the low-esteem group had created insecurity and dependence by their permissiveness. Furthermore, the most successful and independent young men during the latter period of the study were found to have come from homes that demanded the strictest accountability and responsibility. And as could have been predicted, the family ties remained the strongest . . . in the homes where discipline and self-control had been a way of life."

- Monitoring and being responsible along with our wives for the input that enters their impressionable minds
- Taking responsibility to help assure that church is a meaningful experience
- Above all, making sure that the open book of our lives—our example—demonstrates the reality of our instruction, for in watching us they will learn the most

Evangeline Booth, age eighty-one and then general of the Salvation Army, was asked when she had first wanted to be a part of the organization. “Very early,” she answered. “I saw my parents [founders of the Salvation Army] working for their people, bearing their burdens. Day and night. They did not have to say a word to me about Christianity.”⁹

The “do’s” of fathering—*tenderness*, *discipline*, and *instruction*—together demand one great thing, as a certain busy doctor came to realize. He would appear at meals, pay allowances, and give advice, often without really listening to the problems of his family before he spoke. Then, one afternoon, as he was preparing an article for a respected medical journal, his little son crept into the forbidden sanctuary of his father’s study. “Daddy,” he appealed. Without speaking, the doctor opened his desk drawer and handed the boy a box of candy. A few moments later the boy again said, “Daddy,” and his father absentmindedly handed him a pencil. “Daddy,” the boy persisted. The doctor responded to this with a grunt, indicating he knew the boy was there but did not want to be bothered. “Daddy!” the boy called out again.

Angered, the busy doctor swung around in his chair and said, “What on earth is so important that you insist on interrupting me? Can’t you see I’m busy? I have given you candy and a pencil. Now what do you want?”

“Daddy, I want to be with you!”

The “do’s” of fatherhood cannot be lived out by proxy. You need to participate in putting your little ones to bed and praying for and with them. You need to be at their plays, speeches, recitals, and sporting

9. Quoted in Dorothy Walsorth, “General of the Army: Evangeline Booth,” *Reader’s Digest*, August 1947, 37.

events. You need to schedule *regular time alone* with each of your children. You need to take the lead in planning terrific family vacations and in celebrating and cementing family solidarity.

Now I sometimes wistfully think, “Where did the time go between the two indelible memories of the birth of my daughter and the birth of her son?” To be honest, some of the years were long and hard. I thought we would never get through many of the stresses. But when I recall these great events in all their color, there seems to be no time between them. That is why, whenever I have occasion to hold a baby in my arms, I often encourage the parents to savor every moment and not to rush through the experience—the child will be grown up and gone in no time. The realization that we have only a brief time to raise our children should give us huge motivation to make the most of it and should make scriptural advice about fathering pulse with importance for us.

Men, time is the chrysalis of eternity—there is no other time but the present. I realize we all go through periods in our lives when we have little time for our families—this is part of the natural rhythm of life. But excessive busyness must not be by choice, as it so often is! We must beware of packing our schedules by saying yes to things that mean no to our families. *Now* is the time to take time. There is no other! Will you do it? Will I?

Men, we must evaluate our fatherhood. What does your heart tell you as you read the questions below? Are you weak or strong?

- Do you criticize your children or build them up?
- Are you overly strict or reasonably strict—gradually granting your child greater freedom?
- Are you impatient and irritable or patient and self-controlled when dealing with your children?
- Are you consistent in your expectations?
- Do you keep your promises?
- Do you show favoritism?
- Are you tender with both your sons and daughters?
- Do you share in the discipline?
- Are you spending time with your children, as a family and individually?

What awesome power we have! Our children all want the “aura and armament” of their fathers. Men, their hearts are turned to us! And our Lord wants our hearts to be turned to them. We hear this truth memorably stated by the angel Gabriel when he announced that part of John the Baptist’s mission in making a people ready for the Lord was “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children” (Luke 1:17). Now that Christ has come, this is a perpetual result of his saving work. When a man truly gives his heart to Christ, it is turned toward his children.

Men, submit to Christ and allow him to turn your hearts to your children. Ask the Holy Spirit for the power to practice the discipline of fatherhood. Sweat for your children’s souls.

Food for Thought

What did you expect or want from your father? Has this happened? Why or why not? What do your children expect or want from you? Is this happening? Why or why not?

Are you living out the “do not” and the “do” of Ephesians 6:4?

As a father, are you too strict or too lenient? What can you do, practically, to become more balanced in this area?

Do you ever make the same mistake as Isaac and Jacob (favoritism)? How can you stop doing this? What should take its place?

What does Proverbs 22:6 teach about parenting? Does this principle of Scripture still work in today’s world?

What error did the priest Eli make in relation to his sons? How are you doing in this area? How can you do better?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

List some of the attributes of your heavenly Father, as described in the Bible. Which of these should you emulate as an earthly father? List specific ways you should practice each of these in your life with your children. Then share your findings with your sons and daughters.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Faith That Lasts (Jon Nielson)

Gospel-Powered Parenting (William P. Farley)

The Masculine Mandate (Richard Phillips)

Parenting (Paul David Tripp)

Parenting by God's Promises (Joel Beeke)

Praying through the Bible for Your Kids (Nancy Guthrie)

The Shepherd Leader at Home (Timothy Z. Witmer)

Shepherding a Child's Heart (Tedd Tripp)

The Storm-Tossed Family (Russell Moore)

Discipline of Friendship

There has been an interesting development in suburban architecture. Long gone are the days when homes all had large front porches, with easy access to the front door, enabling one to become quickly acquainted with others in the neighborhood.

Today, architecture speaks more directly to our current values. The most prominent part of a house seems to be the two- or three-car garage. Inside are huge bathrooms with skylights and walk-in closets larger than the bedroom I grew up in. Modern architecture employs small living and dining rooms and now smaller kitchens as well, because entertaining is no longer a priority. Today's homes boast smaller yards and an increasing incidence of high fences.

The old adage that "a man's house is his castle" is being realized today. His castle's moat is his front lawn, the drawbridge is his driveway, and the portcullis is his automatic garage door, through which he passes with electronic heraldry. Once inside, he removes his armor and attends to house and hearth until daybreak, when he assumes his executive armament and, briefcase in hand, mounts his steed—perhaps a Lexus or Corvette—presses the button, and rides off to the wars.

Today's homes reflect our modern values of individualism, isolation, and privatization.

There is this cave
In the air behind my body

That nobody is going to touch:
 A cloister, a silence
 Closing around a blossom of fire.¹

It is no longer unusual to not know the families immediately surrounding one's own house! The average American will move at least eleven times in his life, even when his job does not demand it.² People move from house to house looking for the elusive "something." We lack roots, continuity, and community—all of which is to say that friendship, especially deep friendship, has fallen on hard times.

This is especially true for men. Alan Loy McGinnis, author of the best-selling *The Friendship Factor*, says that America's leading psychologists and therapists estimate that only 10 percent of all men ever have any real friends.³ A decadelong study of five thousand men and women by Michael McGill corroborates this. He reports:

To say that men have no intimate friends seems on the surface too harsh. . . . But the data indicates that it is not far from the truth. Even the most intimate of friendships (of which there are few) rarely approach the depth of disclosure a woman commonly has with many other women. . . . Men do not value friendship.⁴

Why is this?

We all know that men, by nature, are not as relational as women. Men's friendships typically center around activities, while women's revolve around sharing. Men do not reveal their feelings or weaknesses as readily as women. They gear themselves for the marketplace, and they typically understand friendships as acquaintances made along the way rather than as relationships. Also, men sometimes fear being suspected of deviant behavior if they have an obviously close friendship with another man. And, of course, there are some who suffer from the delusion, popularized by movies about heroic loners, that real men do not need other people.

1. James Wright, "The Jewel," in *Above the River: The Complete Poems* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press/Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1990), 122.

2. U.S. Census Bureau, "Calculating Migration Expectancy Using ACS Data," <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/migration/guidance/calculating-migration-expectancy.html>.

3. Alan Loy McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 11.

4. Quoted in Harold B. Smith, "Best Friend," *Marriage Partnership*, Summer 1988, 126.

Tragically, those who think this way rob themselves, their wives, their children, and the church because they will never be all God wants them to be.

Such thinking ignores the wisdom of both Scripture and life. Soon after Adam's creation, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). While this relates directly to the creation of Eve, it is also a primary ontological statement about the nature of man, who is, whether he admits it or not, a relational being. His growth and significance are worked out in relationships.

Christ is our example. His ministry was centered in deep friendships with the twelve, whom he repeatedly called "friends" (John 15:13–15), and there was also the inner circle of three with whom he formed an even deeper friendship and to whom he bared his heart.

Being a Christian is a relationship with the triune God through Christ and with his body, the church. God becomes our Father; we become eternal brothers and sisters. *Relationships!* The warning about "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some" (Heb. 10:25) was, and is, a call to relationships and friendships with other believers. Friendship is not optional.

Men, if you are married, your wife must be your most *intimate* friend, but to say "My wife is my best friend" can be a cop-out. You also need Christian male friends who have a same-sex understanding of the serpentine passages of your heart, who will not only offer counsel and pray for you, but will also hold you accountable to your commitments and responsibilities when necessary. We will now consider a prime example of this kind of friend.

A Great Friendship

If there ever was a man's man, it was Jonathan; and if there ever was a man who felt the need of a friend, it was Jonathan. The Philistines' domination of Israel in Jonathan's day was so complete that they allowed no blacksmiths in the land for fear they would make swords and spears for the Israelites. In fact, there were only two swords in the entire nation, those of King Saul and his son Jonathan.

All Israel was in a dark funk of depression and despair—all, that is, except Jonathan. Jonathan saw matters differently. He believed that if God willed it, Israel could be saved, even by a few. While others looked down, he looked up and saw a great and glorious God who could deliver him anytime he saw fit.

Armed with this conviction and his sword, Jonathan and his armor-bearer attacked a Philistine detachment alone. His sallying words say it all: “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few” (1 Sam. 14:6).

Assured that God would deliver the Philistines into his hand, Jonathan launched a horrifying single-handed attack. It was *mano a mano*, hand-to-hand, man-to-man. Blood ran to the dust and white bone gleamed in the sun as Jonathan sliced and hacked attacker after attacker, until twenty Philistines lay spread over a terrible half-acre. Blood-covered Jonathan was one tough *hombre*!

Jonathan’s heroics put some steel into his people, and a rebellion followed—and some good days for Israel. But with Saul’s subsequent sin and rejection, Israel fell to even darker days than before (1 Samuel 15–17), and Jonathan was more alone than ever. Even *his* great heart was affected as he too trembled before Goliath. There was no one of like mind, he thought—until he encountered David. He could not believe his ears as David called out to the giant:

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give you into our hand.” (1 Sam. 17:45–47)

Then David ran full speed at Goliath and nailed him right between the eyes! Blood-smeared David stood holding the great gory head,

talking calmly with Jonathan's father, Saul. At last Jonathan had found someone whose heart was in tune with his—a *friend*.

What followed was the flowering of a deep male friendship, one of the most celebrated friendships in all of literature. As such, it reveals the essential elements and wisdom for all genuine friendships.

Friendship's Mutuality

The initial element in Jonathan and David's great friendship was mutuality of soul. As the account so plainly states, "As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David" (1 Sam. 18:1). Jonathan saw that David viewed life from the same divine perspective (God is sovereign and does as he pleases, and all of life is to be lived for him) as he himself did. And when he saw this, his soul reflexively clung to David's. Here was a man whose heart beat with his!

This is the way it is with deep friendships. It is not that friends think alike on everything. Often it is quite the opposite. But they do share the same worldview and approach to life. And this is why a Christian friendship exceeds anything that exists between nonbelievers—such a friendship is founded on a supernatural mutuality of soul. The Holy Spirit makes two souls chorus the same cries:

- They assent to the same authority.
- They know the same God.
- They go the same way.
- They long for the same things.
- They dream mutual dreams.
- They yearn for the same experiences of holiness and worship.

Jonathan's soul bound itself to David's soul. You know when this happens, and it is wonderful.

Friendship's Love

Mutuality of soul is followed by love, as the next phrase indicates: "and Jonathan loved him [David] as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1). This is an amazing statement because of its immediacy. This love did not develop in a month or even in a day, but in a flash! It was because

David's sizzling soul met such a deep need in Jonathan's: "At last I have found someone who lives like me!" He really did love David as he loved himself, and in doing so was loving his neighbor as himself—and was thus fulfilling the law of God.

This love would pay great dividends because honest, unselfish love has irresistible drawing power. David would be drawn to the same love, as we shall see.

Friendship's Commitment

Jonathan's astonishing mutuality of soul with David and the immediacy of his love for him was followed by profound commitment: "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt" (1 Sam. 18:3–4).

What sublime spiritual theater—symbolism of a noble soul! Jonathan, the king's son, stands humbly in his undergarment, while the shepherd boy dons the prince's robe and armament. Jonathan's act was one of *honor*, *equality*, and *vulnerability*. To wear the robe of a king was an immense honor, as testified by Haman's fateful request to wear the Persian king's robe and parade through the streets (cf. Est. 6:6–9). Jonathan's symbolic divestiture formally abolished David's status as a shepherd and placed him side by side with Jonathan as an equal. His disrobing was a conscious display of vulnerability and real risk. This Shakespearean gesture meant "My life for your life"—and he meant every bit of it.

We may wonder, "Is such friendship really possible outside the sacred pages of Scripture? After all, these men were spiritual giants." But consider what happened when a twenty-year-old Anne Sullivan arrived in Tuscumbia, Alabama, to tutor the blind and deaf seven-year-old Helen Keller, who could only utter animal-like sounds and often fell into destructive rages. For weeks Anne tried to break through to the girl's consciousness, until the famous day of April 5, 1887—a day Helen described sixty years later—when the girl was holding a mug under the spout while Anne pumped water into it, using her other hand to repeatedly spell w-a-t-e-r, and Helen suddenly understood!

She later said, “Spark after spark of meaning flew from hand to hand and miraculously, affection was born.”⁵

Anne gave almost her entire life to Helen. By ten, Helen was writing to famous people in Europe—in French. She mastered five languages and displayed far greater gifts than her teacher. Still, Anne was devoted to Helen, sitting beside her famous pupil at Radcliffe, spelling the lecture into her hand. Anne’s devotion never changed. She was satisfied to be Helen’s friend and encourager—to make her a queen.

The deepest of friendships have in common this desire to make the other person royalty. Each works for and rejoices in the other’s elevation and achievements. There are no hooks in such friendships, no desire to manipulate or control, no jealousy or exclusiveness—simply a desire for the best for the other. Fyodor Dostoevsky had the idea when he wrote, “To love a person means to see him as God intended him to be.”

Do you have the great fortune to have such a deep friend? Men, are we kingmakers?

Friendship’s Loyalty

Jonathan maintained a fierce loyalty to David as their friendship grew. This is most remarkable, because after the first flush of dramatic commitment he was reminded by his father (no doubt more than once!), “For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die” (1 Sam. 20:31). Yet when Saul maligned David, we read that “Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, ‘Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you’” (19:4), and on one occasion even persuaded his father to make an oath not to harm David (an oath Saul did not keep).

Loyalty is indispensable to the survival of friendship. How many once-prosperous friendships have faded because of disloyal talk? Blaise Pascal put it pointedly: “I set this down as a fact, that if all

5. Quoted in McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor*, 60–61.

men knew what each other said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world.” You will never know a deep friendship unless there is mutual loyalty and trust.

Friendship’s Encouragement

Constant flight from Saul produced some down times for David. For example, when he delivered the town of Keilah from the Philistines, he learned that the citizens of the town were plotting to turn him over to Saul—and so off to Horesh in the desert he fled, disheartened and terribly discouraged. But Jonathan came to the rescue: “Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God” (1 Sam. 23:16). What a friend! “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17). Jonathan’s encouragement was more than “Everything is going to be okay.” Jonathan pointed David upward to the grand perspective that had first drawn him to the shepherd boy. This undoubtedly involved instruction, prayer, and mutual worship.

The apostle Paul experienced similar comfort from his friend Titus: “But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . . so that I rejoiced still more” (2 Cor. 7:6–7). This is the “Titus Touch”—the golden touch of an encouraging friend.

As we have catalogued the beautiful elements of Jonathan and David’s deep friendship—*mutuality, love, commitment, loyalty, and encouragement*—we have observed that they came largely from Jonathan. But their friendship did not remain one-sided. Repeated mutual commitments began to mark the friendship of these two remarkable men. The apex of their commitment was the mutual promise to care for one another’s families, should one be taken (1 Sam. 20:14–17)—“I’ll take care of yours, and you take care of mine.” They bound their lives and their children’s lives to one another. Later, when they reaffirmed their promises, “David [was] weeping the most” (vv. 41–42). It appears that Jonathan’s friendship had drawn David to unexpected heights of devotion.

Male friendship has reached heaven when men make such promises to each other. I treasure a sacred moment when my old childhood friend, married and with a family, met my wife and me on vacation in

the Colorado mountains and said, after a late-evening meal, “If anything happens to you, Kent, Judy and I will look out for Barbara and the children.” It was a sacredness I gladly reciprocated.

A Great Loss

David was destined to be king, and he and Jonathan planned to be side by side as David ruled. But that was not to be, for Jonathan and his brothers died with their father on Mount Gilboa at the hands of the Philistines. David was crushed with sorrow. In grief he wrote a lament, and commanded that all the men of Judah be taught it. The lament ends with these words:

How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan lies slain on your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was extraordinary,
surpassing the love of women.

How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished! (2 Sam. 1:25–27)

David would not have said that Jonathan’s love for him surpassed “the love of women” if he had had a good monogamous marriage! This is testimony to the poverty of his relationships with his wives, an inevitable result of the sin of multiplying wives (cf. Deut. 17:17). However, there is no hint of sensuality here, but simply a celebration of a deep friendship—Jonathan’s mutuality of soul, Jonathan’s love, Jonathan’s commitment, Jonathan’s loyalty, and Jonathan’s encouragement, elements David would never know in any other relationship.

David and Jonathan’s friendship shows us what a deep friendship can and ought to be. C. S. Lewis said, “Friendship . . . is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all others.”⁶ This is certainly what the friendship of David and Jonathan does for us. It reveals

6. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), 126.

the beauties that can be ours in deep male relationships grounded in God and sets the standard for all deep friendships.

Disciplines of Friendship

Today, few men have good friends, much less deep friendships. They suffer from what is commonly termed a “loneliness epidemic.”⁷ Individualism, autonomy, privatization, and isolation are culturally cachet, but deep, devoted, vulnerable friendship is not. This is a great tragedy for self, family, and the church, because it is in relationships that we develop into what God wants us to be. But deep friendships and friendships in general (close friendships, good friendships, and casual friendships) are there to be made if we value them as we ought—and if we practice some simple disciplines of friendship.

Prayer

We must pray specifically for God’s help in effecting inward changes that will expand our capacities for friendship. And we must pray for the opportunity to develop friendships. Such relational requests may not occur naturally to the minds of most men, but they are prayers that God delights to answer, as my own experience, and that of many other Christian men, amply testifies. Need some good friendships? Spiritual logic demands that prayer is the place to begin.

Friendliness

A wise old farmer was working beside the road when a family moving to a nearby town stopped and asked him if that town was “friendly.” The farmer said he could not really say. But the people pressed him for an answer, so he asked them what the town they came from was like. They answered that it was terrible—the people were rude and small-minded. The old farmer replied, “That is just how you will find this town.”

No matter what our disposition, we need to work at friendliness. We need to be *consciously cheerful*. We need to *ask questions*. We need to *place ourselves in situations where friendships happen*. If you are

7. Jena McGregor, “This Former Surgeon General Says There’s a ‘Loneliness Epidemic’ and Work Is Partly to Blame,” *The Washington Post*, October 4, 2017.

a regular church attender but do no more than attend morning worship, you are depriving yourself and the church of the friendship so desperately needed by all. Men, we must place ourselves in the ways of friendship: an adult Sunday school class, a home Bible study, a men's Bible study, a men's breakfast group, men's retreats, and, especially, service in some ministry of the church. Women are so much better at this than men. We must learn from them to take the initiative.

Work

Few truly valuable things in life just happen. Usually when they do, it is because we recognize their value and go for it. You can have just about anything you want if you work for it. If you want to make a million dollars badly enough, you can very likely do it. If you want to earn a PhD and are willing to pay the price, you can do it. We generally get what we set our sights on. It is the same with friendship. Those who have friends place importance on them. This is why women have more friends than men.

Affirmation

If we will work at affirming others, we will have friends. Mark Twain said, "I can live for two months on a compliment." He was right! I have a friend who sends me a note every two or three months that is meant to affirm me and encourage my steadfastness. Compliments have huge buoying power. Be liberal with honest affirmations, and you will have friends.

Listening

Even more, men, if you will work at being a good listener, you will develop friends. The epigram "Eloquence is with the audience" is not only true of public speaking but of general conversation. Listen well, and you will be pronounced a "brilliant" conversationalist! What's more, people will discover they are important to you, which is key to any friendship.

Acceptance

Life is filled with small rejections—sarcastic smiles, innuendos, awkward silences, club atmospheres—so that many walk through the day

with their guard up. If we discipline ourselves to be accepting, others will see the sparkle of our eyes, the tilt of our head, the ethos of our voice—and will know that acceptance is there. An open, accepting soul is like a well-lit home on a cold, dark night.

Hospitality

When we think of the scriptural command to practice hospitality, we reflexively imagine a feminine mandate: “This is something my wife should excel at, or my mother, or my daughter. Women, hear God’s Word!” And they do, much to their souls’ benefit. But the command is for both genders. Men, you ought to take the initiative in practicing hospitality (see 1 Pet. 4:9), whether you are single or married. If you do, you will not only begin to build friendships, but may even host some “angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2).

We must set ourselves against the cultural consensus and pursue and practice friendship if we are to be all God wants us to be. God’s Word demands a countercultural manliness that is capable of deep friendship.

We need to put some holy sweat into our relationships, resist the lure of our architecture, with its moats, drawbridges, and descending doors, and overcome the technology of autonomy—the isolating lure of digital screens.

Most of all, we must overcome our privatized hearts, for Christianity is a relationship with God *and his people*. God’s truth is most effectively learned and lived in relationships. Friendships hold the promise of grace!

Food for Thought

What can we learn about friendship from Christ’s statements about us being his friends (John 15:13–15)?

According to the author, “If you are married, your wife must be your most intimate friend.” Do you agree? How would such a friendship show itself (apart from sexuality), grow, and weather stresses?

What truths of Christian friendship are evident in the relationship between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 14–18)? List as many as you can.

Have you experienced the “Titus Touch” (2 Cor. 7:6–7)? In your own words, what is it? How can you become more like Titus? Why would some men choose not to?

What does prayer have to do with your friendships? God won’t force someone to be your friend, will he?

What do 1 Peter 4:9 and Hebrews 13:2 teach about friendship? How can you apply these Scripture passages to your life?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

List those whom you consider good or close friends. After each name, tell why you see that person as a friend. Then summarize what you are looking for in friends and why you value such relationships.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

The Company We Keep (Jonathan Holmes)

The Four Loves (C. S. Lewis)

Made for Friendship (Drew Hunter)

Relationships (Tim S. Lane)

Side by Side (Ed Welch)

Article

Billy Baker, “The Biggest Threat Facing Middle-Age Men Isn’t Smoking or Obesity: It’s Loneliness,” *The Boston Globe Magazine*, March 9, 2017, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2017/03/09/the-biggest-threat-facing-middle-age-men-isn-smoking-obesity-loneliness/k6saC9FnnHQCUBf5mJ8okL/story.html>.

PART 3



SOUL

Discipline of Mind

we have the mind of Christ”—a mind that is constantly renewed (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16; Rom. 12:2). No computer will ever be able to think God’s thoughts and no device will ever be able to know the heart of God or do his works. But the mystery that resides between our ears has this capacity. Indeed, it was created for this—to have the mind of Christ.

This cosmic potential of the believer’s mind introduces the great scandal of today’s church: *Christians without Christian minds*, that is, Christians who do not think Christianly—a tragic fact that is far more true of professing Christian men than women, as we shall see.

Some prophetic voices have been sounding the alarm for some time now, such as that of Charles Malik, former president of the United Nations General Assembly, who told the distinguished audience at the dedication of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College: “Believe me, my friends, the mind today is in profound trouble, perhaps more than ever before. How to order the mind on sound Christian principles, at the heart of where it is formed and informed, is one of the . . . greatest themes that can be considered.”³

Harry Blamires, in his much discussed book *The Christian Mind*, says that while Christians may worship and pray as Christians, they do not *think* as Christians: “The Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in Christian history.”⁴ Elsewhere, he sees today’s Christians as suffering from religious anorexia (*anorexia religiosa*), a loss of appetite for growth in Christ.⁵

The bottom line is that this grievous scandal comes from a declining willingness to properly program the amazing instruments God has given us. Christians leave their billions of brain cells unguarded—and undisciplined.

When we turn to God’s Word, we become aware that the biblical writers understood the problem in a less technical, though more personally beneficial, way. “Keep your heart with all vigilance,” says Proverbs, “for from it flow the springs of life” (4:23). “For as he

3. Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 32.

4. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978), 3–4.

5. Harry Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 9.

thinks within himself, so he is” (23:7 NASB). The Scriptures tell us rightly that input determines output—that our programming determines our production.

The Divine Program

In the New Testament, no one understood this better than the apostle Paul. In fact, in his letter to the Philippians, after alluding to guarding the heart, Paul prescribed his personal program in one sublime sentence: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8).

Each of Paul’s ingredients is explicitly positive. The true, the noble, the right, the pure, the lovely, and the admirable all defy negative exposition. Each ingredient was, and is, *a matter of personal choice*—and our choices make all the difference in the world. We all can *choose* a thought program that will produce a Christian mind.

I have great sympathy for those whose past has been a series of bad choices. I understand that if over the years one has chosen the impure, the illusory, and the negative, it is very difficult to change. But as a biblical thinker I give no quarter to myself or anyone else who rationalizes his present choices by the past. Brothers, *as Christians we are free to have a Christian mind*. It is within our reach, and developing it is our duty.

As we consider how Paul’s program should affect our minds, the sheer weight of its positives demands a determined rejection of negative thinking/input: “Finally brothers, whatever is untrue, whatever is dishonorable, whatever is unjust, whatever is impure, whatever is unlovely, whatever is uncommendable, if there is anything inferior, if there is anything unworthy of praise, *do not* think about these things.” It was not that Paul was a naive Pollyanna. He knew the dark side of human experience. Romans 1 proves that. But he chose not to make such input a part of his mental programming.

So we must lay down as fundamental to our Christianity this truth: *a Christian mind demands conscious negation; a Christian mind is impossible without the discipline of refusal*.

Though this story took place almost three decades ago, its relevance and poignancy has only intensified with time. Charles Colson tells of sitting at dinner with a president of one of the three major television networks. Colson felt he had a tremendous opportunity to influence the man, so he told him how millions of Christians were offended by the networks' programming. Knowing that TV executives have an intense interest in profit, Colson suggested that it would be good business to air wholesome family entertainment. "After all," added Colson, "there are fifty million born-again Christians out there." The gauntlet was down, and as Colson tells it:

He looked at me quizzically. I assured him that was Gallup's latest figure.

"What you are suggesting, Mr. Colson, is that we run more programs like, say, *Chariots of Fire*?"

"Yes!" I exclaimed. "That's a great movie with a marvelous Christian message."

"Well," he said, "CBS ran it as a prime-time movie just a few months ago. Are you aware of the ratings?"

All at once I knew I was in trouble.

He then explained: That night NBC showed *On Golden Pond*; it was #1 with 25.2 percent of all TV sets in America tuned in. Close behind was *My Mother's Secret Life*, a show about a mother hiding her past as a prostitute. It was #2 with 25.1 percent.

And a distant third—a big money loser—was CBS with *Chariots of Fire*—11.8 percent. In fact, of the sixty-five shows rated that week, "Dallas" was #1, *Chariots of Fire*, #57.

"So," my companion concluded, "where are your fifty million born-again Christians, Mr. Colson?"

Good question. Where are we?

If even half of Gallup's fifty million born-again Christians had watched the show with the Christian message, *Chariots of Fire* would have topped the ratings. But the disturbing truth, as studies by the secular networks as well as the Christian Broadcasting Network show, is that the viewing habits of Christians are no different than those of non-Christians!

Since TV is a business, it gives its customers—the public—what they want. It is but a mirror image of us.⁶

The truth is the Christian community is filling its mind with the same content as the world around, but at an even faster rate. According to a Barna Group survey, those who have attended church in the last week watch an average of 30 minutes more TV per day than those who claim to be atheist or agnostic!⁷ The same study found that Christians and non-Christians watch essentially the same shows. How can Christians have the mind of Christ when their viewing habits are virtually indistinguishable from the world?

Renowned media expert Neil Postman of New York University said that between the ages of six and eighteen, the average child spends some fifteen thousand to sixteen thousand hours in front of a TV, whereas he spends only thirteen thousand hours in school.⁸ Postman said that during the first twenty years of an American child's life, he will see some one million commercials, at the rate of about a thousand per week!⁹

As to television's effects, they are infamous:

- Shortened attention spans
- Diminution of linguistic powers
- Reduced capacity for abstraction

To attract and hold its audience, the entertainment industry understands that parading the taboos of culture—adultery, promiscuity, homosexuality, incest, violence, and sadism—will do the job.¹⁰ As a result depictions of the lowest of activities have become commonplace, and

6. Charles Colson, *Who Speaks for God?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985), 129–30.

7. "What Americans Are Watching in 2014," Barna Group, May 20, 2014, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-americans-are-watching-in-2014>: "Practicing Christians tend to watch more television than non-Christians. Practicing Catholics watch an average of 3.5 hours per day and practicing Protestants watch an average of 3.1 hours. By contrast, adherents to faiths other than Christianity watch 2.6 hours of TV per day and those of no faith, which includes self-identified atheists and agnostics, watch 2.7 hours. Interestingly, church attendance seems to make little difference in the number of viewing hours. Those who attended church within the past week, those who attended within the past month and those who have not attended at all within the past six months all watch an average of 3.2 hours per day."

8. Neil Postman, "TV's 'Disastrous' Impact on Children," *U.S. News and World Report*, January 19, 1981, 43.

9. Postman, "TV's 'Disastrous' Impact," 44.

10. Postman, "TV's 'Disastrous' Impact," 45.

even morally cachet. What is permitted under ratings deemed “safe” for children has devolved to the point that cartoons are now introducing characters with aberrant views of human sexuality and marriage.¹¹

There is a distinct connection between these things and the background of TV executives as compared with the viewing public. As of 1983, only 7 percent attended church regularly, as compared to 55 percent of the viewing public; 44 percent had no religious affiliation, as compared to only 10 percent of the viewers having no such affiliation.¹² And it has not improved. To deny there is a conscious assault on the Christian mind and its values is like believing the earth is flat.

So much for television. But there is much more. In our digital world, media consumption is the true metric. The average American consumes over ten and a half hours of media *per day*.¹³ This includes five hours of TV (live and recorded), two hours of radio, and three hours of internet and mobile device usage. We live in a cyber haze from the moment our eyes open in the morning until they close again at night.

There was a time when many thought social media to be a fad because it was the domain of the young. Now, after a decade, nearly 70 percent of American adults are “on Facebook” (the most popular of the social media platforms).¹⁴ And of the 70 percent, over three quarters access it every day.¹⁵

11. Nicole Puglise, “From Nickelodeon to Disney: Children’s TV Leads the Way for LGBT Characters,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2016/jul/19/childrens-television-lgbt-characters-nickelodeon-loud-house>. While there have been allusions to homosexuality in children’s shows for decades, the current cultural climate has emboldened show creators to drop the pretense and make their characters’ homosexuality explicit. The TV rating system developed by the industry allows creators of shows to set the ratings for their own productions. In a culture where homosexuality is celebrated, they do not feel the need to include a warning for what is commonly accepted. Parents can learn the content of a show only through diligent research and by viewing the show themselves, not from an unstandardized system with no third-party oversight.

12. George Barna and William Paul McKay, *Vital Signs: Emerging Social Trends and the Future of American Christianity* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 56, who reference Linda Lichter, S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, “Hollywood and America: The Odd Couple,” *Public Opinion*, January 1983, 54–58.

13. Jason Lynch, “U.S. Adults Consume an Entire Hour More of Media Per Day Than They Did Just Last Year,” *Adweek*, June 27, 2016, <http://www.adweek.com/tv-video/us-adults-consume-entire-hour-more-media-day-they-did-just-last-year-172218/>. Media consumption is commonly defined as all forms of media used by consumers, such as radios, TVs, mobile devices, computers, DVD and Blu-ray players, game consoles, and other devices.

14. “Social Media Fact Sheet,” Pew Research Center, February 5, 2018, <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/>.

15. “Social Media Fact Sheet.”

There are some good reasons to use social media, especially to connect with family and friends. And many Christians use the various social media options as tools for ministry. However, as with other forms of media, we must be vigilant as to what we allow to shape our minds and worldviews. Studies are now showing negative effects of excessive use of social media, not the least of which is depression.¹⁶

I am aware of the wise warnings against using words such as *all*, *every*, and *always* in what I say. Absolutizing one's pronouncements is dangerous. But I'm going to do it anyway. Here it is: *It is impossible for any Christian who spends the bulk of his time, month after month, week upon week, day in and day out, consuming such media to have a Christian mind.* This is *always* true of *all* Christians in *every* situation! A biblical mental program cannot coexist with worldly programming.

If we are to have Christian minds, there are things we must put out of our minds—and this extends beyond TV to what we read, listen to, and laugh at.

My advice? Stop watching television. I mean that sincerely! Not watching TV will liberate so much time in your life it will be difficult for you to escape becoming a deeper person and a better Christian. Even if you play poker with your friends, you will be better off, because you will be relating to human beings!

I am not suggesting a new legalism that forbids digital media. (There are many worthwhile things to view; moreover, while Christianity is by nature countercultural, it is not anticultural.) But I am calling for Christian men to take control of their minds—what comes in and what goes out. If you cannot control what you watch and read, perhaps it needs to go. “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell,” says Jesus (Matt. 5:29). My wife and I chose to raise our children without a television for this very reason, and we have no regrets. What we did is not for everyone, but it may be for you.

The psalmist gives sage advice for those living in the media age: “I will ponder the way that is blameless. . . . I will walk with integrity of

16. Liu yi Lin et al., “Association Between Social Media Use and Depression Among U.S. Young Adults,” *Depression and Anxiety* 33, no. 4 (April 1, 2016): 323–31.

heart within my house; I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless” (Ps. 101:2–3). We need to allow Christ to be Lord of our prime time.

Some of you need to schedule a transparent conversation with your spouse and prayerfully seek God’s will regarding this. And you single men, who have so much trouble with your minds, need to likewise seek God’s will—and some mature older Christian men to hold you accountable.

Intentional Programming

Returning to Philippians 4:8, we see that Paul recommends that we focus our minds on truth, nobility, rightness, purity, loveliness, admirability, excellence, and praiseworthiness, and ends with this loaded charge: “*Think* about these things.” The word he uses is *logidzamai*, from which we get the mathematical computer-like word *logarithm*. It means a “deliberate and prolonged contemplation as if one is weighing a mathematical problem.”¹⁷ The way I handle my mail gives an example. Frankly, most of it gets tossed. I read the return address to see if it is an ad, perhaps open it, scan a few lines—and away it goes. But if it is an outdoor catalog, say the Orvis catalog, it gets deliberate and prolonged contemplation—especially the Superfine graphite fly rods. We are to think about the wonderful elements God wants us to put into the astonishing minds he has given us. God calls us in his Word to a massive, positive discipline of the mind.

Scripture

This can happen only through a profound exposure to and continual immersion in God’s Word, accompanied by the illumination of the Holy Spirit—an exposure that is within the reach of all literate and semiliterate Christians.

Lt. Gen. William K. Harrison was the most decorated soldier in the 30th Infantry Division, rated by Gen. Dwight Eisenhower as the number one infantry division in World War II. Harrison was the first

17. A. T. Robertson, *Paul’s Joy in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 242.

American to enter Belgium, which he did at the head of the Allied forces. He received every decoration for valor except the Congressional Medal of Honor—the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart (he was one of the few generals to be wounded in action). When the Korean War began, he served as chief of staff in the United Nations Command—and because of his character and self-control was ultimately President Eisenhower’s choice to head the long and tedious negotiations to end the war.

Harrison was a soldier’s soldier who led a busy, ultrakinetic life, but he was also an amazing man of the Word. When he was a twenty-year-old West Point Cadet, he began reading the Old Testament through once a year and the New Testament four times. Harrison did this until the end of his life. Even in the thick of war he maintained his commitment by catching up during the two- and three-day respites for replacement and refitting that followed battles. Thus, when the war ended, he was right on schedule.

When, at the age of ninety, his failing eyesight no longer permitted this discipline, he had read the Old Testament seventy times and the New Testament 280 times! No wonder his godliness and wisdom were proverbial, and that the Lord used him for eighteen fruitful years to lead Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF).¹⁸

Harrison’s story tells us two things. First, it is possible, even for the busiest of us, to systematically feed on God’s Word. No one could be busier or lead a more demanding life than Harrison.

Second, his life remains a demonstration of a mind programmed with God’s Word. His closest associates said that every area of his life (domestic, spiritual, and professional), and his responses to each of the great problems he faced, were informed by the Scriptures. People marveled at his knowledge of the Bible and his ability to bring its light to every area of life.

He lived out the experience of the psalmist:

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day.

18. Personal correspondence with retired Air Force Col. William Waldrop, February 1991.

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts. (Ps. 119:97–100)

You must remember this: you can never have a Christian mind without reading or listening to the Scriptures regularly because *you cannot be profoundly influenced by that which you do not know*. If you are filled with God’s Word, your life can then be informed and directed by God—your domestic relationships, your child-rearing, your career, your ethical decisions, and your interior moral life. The way to a Christian mind is through God’s Word!

Again, we must be careful not to create a Bible-reading legalism, insisting that good Christians must read the Bible through once a year. The Bible nowhere demands this. Some simply cannot read well or fast enough, and speed-reading is not the answer. As Lucy told Charlie Brown in a *Peanuts* comic strip: “I just completed a course in speed-reading and last night I read *War and Peace* in one hour! . . . It was about Russia.”

Most people, however, will find that reading the Scriptures through once a year is the best way because it requires only five pages a day and offers a reachable annual goal. Believers, whatever your ability, you must regularly read and study God’s Word. If you refuse, you are in effect “editing God” and will never have a fully Christian mind.

There have never been more helpful options than now for those who struggle to read or find reading burdensome. There are many excellent audio recordings of the Bible, done by gifted professionals. Most options are free and can be accessed through phone apps and websites such as those of the *English Standard Version* (ESV) and *YouVersion*. These apps also have multiple options for Bible reading plans. You can find information for these in the Resources for Further Growth section at the end of this chapter. I would encourage you to avail yourself immediately of these unparalleled opportunities.

Christian Literature

Along with reading the Word, we ought to be reading good books. The brilliant Jewish radio talk show host Dennis Prager, a man who makes sure he is well-informed, said in an interview in *The Door*:

One thing I noticed about Evangelicals is that they do not read. They do not read the Bible, they do not read the great Christian thinkers, they have never heard of Aquinas. If they're Presbyterian, they've never read the founders of Presbyterianism. I do not understand that. As a Jew, that's confusing to me. The commandment of study is so deep in Judaism that we immerse ourselves in study. God gave us a brain, aren't we to use it in his service? When I walk into an Evangelical Christian's home and see a total of 30 books, most of them best-sellers, I do not understand. I have bookcases of Christian books, and I am a Jew. Why do I have more Christian books than 98 percent of the Christians in America? That is so bizarre to me.¹⁹

It is bizarre—especially when a commitment to Christ is a commitment to believe in things that go far beyond the surface of life. Sadly, the bulk of the nonreading Christian public is men, who buy only 41 percent of all nonfiction Christian books.²⁰ And as we saw in chapter 1, men are more likely than women to buy Bibles, but they are less likely to read them.

Men, to deny ourselves the wealth of the accumulated wisdom of the saints of the centuries is to consciously embrace spiritual anorexia. Great Christian writing will magnify, dramatize, and illuminate life-giving wonders for us. Others have walked the paths we so want to tread. They have chronicled the pitfalls and posted warnings along the way. They have also given us descriptions of spiritual delights that will draw us onward and upward.

In preparation for speaking and writing about the subject of the mind, I mailed a “Personal Reading Survey” to a number of

19. Dennis Prager, “A Civilization That Believes in Nothing,” *The Door*, November/December 1990, 15.

20. “Onward and Upward: Christian Book Titles See Sales Rise Higher and Higher,” Nielsen, August 6, 2015, <http://es-mx.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/onward-and-upward-christian-book-titles-see-sales-rise-higher.html>.

Christian leaders, including J. I. Packer, James Dobson, Mark Dever, Carl F. H. Henry, Kevin DeYoung, Tim Challies, and Philip G. Ryken, and I received numerous responses. The survey asked four questions:

1. What are the five books, secular or sacred, that have influenced you the most?
2. Of the spiritual/sacred books that have influenced you, which is your favorite?
3. What is your favorite novel?
4. What is your favorite biography?

The devotional/theological books mentioned most were John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, Packer's *Knowing God*, and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The favorite novels were Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (which was, for example, the favorite of Colson, Wayne Martindale, Harold Myra, and Packer), Lewis's *The Great Divorce*, and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. The most frequently mentioned biographies were Elisabeth Elliot's *Shadow of the Almighty*, William Manchester's *The Last Lion*, and Arnold Dallimore's *George Whitefield*. These titles comprise a superb list from which to select if you have not done some serious Christian reading. (All the survey responses can be found in the Resources section of this book: see Section C, Personal Reading Survey.)

Also, today many audiobooks are available (great for listening as you drive to work or when you are traveling, working out, etc.). On popular websites such as Audible, you can find such great books as *Knowing God* by Packer, *The Screwtape Letters* by Lewis, *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Pilgrim's Progress* by Bunyan, *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Homer's *Odyssey*, *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by Lewis, *War and Peace* by Tolstoy, and many others.

Men, you need to fill your mind with good stuff. I am not suggesting a manic spree (the conservative writer and commentator George Will, for example, is able to read two hefty books a week). But many

of you would do well to commit to reading two or three good books this next year.

What amazing instruments reside in the three or four pounds between our ears, instruments with greater capacity than a thousand busy New York City switchboards. The mind is greater than all the computers put together, for it can possess the *mind of Christ* and think God's thoughts after him, wear his heart, and do his works. What an eternal tragedy it is, then, to have this mind and have it redeemed, yet not have a Christian mind.

We must protect our minds. We must refuse to allow our culture's media to write our program. We must say no to the wastelands that invade our homes.

And we must make a conscious effort to submit to the Divine Programmer through reading his Word. There has to be some holy sweat: "Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:7–8). Prayerfully commit yourself to reading and studying God's Word.

Further, read the great works of those who have gone before you. Prayerfully make your commitments now.

Food for Thought

What does a comparison of Harry Blamires's statement ("The Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift with a degree of weakness and nervelessness unmatched in Christian history") and Proverbs 4:23 tell you? Do the things we think about really matter?

What does Philipians 4:8 say about the thought life? Are we supposed to take a Pollyanna approach and deny the stresses and strains of life? If not, then what is this passage teaching?

What do Matthew 5:29 and Psalm 101:2–3 tell us about a disciplined mind? Is it really possible to live out these verses day by day? How?

What can the Word of God do to help us in this area (see Ps. 119:97–100)? Are you doing what these verses prescribe? Why or why not?

Have you ever listened to or read the Bible through in a year (or even two years or three)? Will you covenant with God to do this now,

in order to become more familiar with the whole of Scripture and to better hear God's voice to you through his Word?

Name at least three or four Christian books that have made a major impact on your life. Then list at least two Christian books you have been meaning to read. By what date will you read these books?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

In what ways do you know you need greater discipline of mind? What are your greatest struggles in this area? Sexual lust? Self-pity? Dwelling on past pain? Pride? Worry? Something else? What can you do, practically and spiritually, to experience growth toward wholeness in these areas?

Resources for Further Growth

Books

The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment (Tim Challies)

Habits of the Mind (James W. Sire)

How to Think (Alan Jacobs)

Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books (Tony Reinke)

Renewing Your Mind in a Mindless World (James Montgomery Boice)

Think (John Piper)

Other Resources

Bible Reading Plans

Robert Murray M'Cheyne's Bible Reading Calendar, <https://www.mcheyne.info/calendar.pdf> (created by a Scottish minister in the nineteenth century, this Bible reading plan has helped many Christians for many years).

Other plans, <https://www.esv.org/resources/reading-plans/>.

Online Bibles

ESV.org

YouVersion.com

Bible Apps

ESV

Olive Tree

YouVersion

Fighter Verses

Bible Memory Verses

Remember Me (Bible Verses)

Online Audio Bibles

ESV.org

Audible.com

Online Sermon Collections

Preaching the Word (preachingtheword.com—1,000+ sermons by R. Kent Hughes)

The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org—40,000+ sermons)

Grace to You (gty.org—all the sermons of John MacArthur)

Proclamation Trust (proctrust.org.uk—sermons of eminent British, Australian, and American expositors)

Discipline of Devotion

As my personal understanding of the interior life has developed, I have learned that apart from the well-known scriptural calls to prayer, there are two great human reasons we ought to pray.

The first is what prayer does to our *character*. Prayer is like a time exposure to God. Our souls function like photographic plates, and Christ's shining image is the light. The more we expose our lives to the white-hot sun of his righteous life (for, say, five, ten, fifteen, or thirty minutes, or an hour a day), the more his image will be burned into our character—his love, his compassion, his truth, his integrity, his humility. As we have seen, this was true of Lt. Gen. William K. Harrison, who maintained a disciplined devotional life for over seventy years. People say his presence brought a distinct sense of Christ.

The second, corresponding reason is that prayer bends our *wills* to God's will. E. Stanley Jones, the world-renowned missionary and man of prayer, explained it like this:

If I throw out a boathook from the boat and catch hold of the shore and pull, do I pull the shore to me, or do I pull myself to the shore? Prayer is not pulling God to my will, but the aligning of my will to the will of God.¹

1. E. Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 383.

What tantalizing personal benefits are offered by time spent in the presence of God in prayer! Herein lies the spiritual desolation of our day. As Dallas Willard said in *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, “The ‘open secret’ of many ‘Bible-believing’ churches is that a vanishing small percentage of those talking about prayer . . . are actually doing what they are talking about.”² This is especially true among men, to our detriment and shame. As research has shown, men are considerably less likely to pray than women.³

My experience of talking with professional clergy confirms this, because many candidly admit that their prayer lives are undisciplined and even minimal. Sometimes I have heard what amounts to an attempt to find dismal comfort in mutual confessions of failure: “You are sort of okay, and I guess I am too.”

Why do so many men fail in personal devotions and prayer? It is partly for the same reason they attend church less and read less: they are not as spiritually sensitive and open as women. Also, men tend to be dominated by the time-crunching production ethic of the marketplace, which makes them feel galaxies away from meditation and prayer. But most fail because they simply do not know how to go about cultivating the disciplines of the interior spiritual life.

This chapter’s teaching on the devotional life, and the following chapter’s teaching on prayer, will, if taken to heart, help you develop a fruitful interior life.

As we begin, there are some necessary caveats. First, one’s prayer and devotional life cannot be reduced to a few simple rules. These areas of spiritual experience are far too dynamic and personal for simplistic reduction.

We must also be cautious against imagining, based on the outline we are using (*meditation, confession, adoration, submission, petition*), that there is a prescribed order for devotion, for there is not and never has been. Life’s rhythms sometimes demand that we launch directly, for example, into petition, crying, “Lord, help me!” Other times will be spent almost entirely in confession, meditation, or adoration.

2. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 186.

3. “Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, May 11, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>. According to this study, “Sixty-four percent of women pray at least daily, but only 46 percent of men.”

Meditation

As we discussed in the preceding chapter, reading God's Word is essential to developing a Christian mind. All Christians should be systematically reading through the Bible, once a year if possible, so that our minds are being perpetually programmed by the data of Scripture.

This understood, there is yet another step: *meditation*—which involves personalizing and internalizing a segment of the Word.

Listening

Meditation begins with the devotional exercise of listening to the Word. Eugene Peterson points out that Psalm 40:6 contains a brilliant metaphor in the original Hebrew text that graphically teaches the necessity of listening. It literally says, "Ears you have dug for me."⁴ Much to our loss, no English translation preserves the metaphor, preferring to variously render it with phrases like the RSV's "Thou hast given me an open ear." Nevertheless, the Hebrew verb retains the metaphorical nugget "dug," which suggests, apart from God's work, a human head without any ears—"A blockhead. Eyes, nose and mouth, but no ears."⁵

This remarkable metaphor, "Ears you have dug for me," occurs in the context of a busy religious performance that is deaf to the voice of God: "In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted. . . . Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required." The problem was that the psalmist's religious colleagues had read about how to do the rituals of sacrifice, but they had missed the message. God had spoken, but they had not heard.

So what does God do? He takes a pick and shovel, and mines through the sides of the "cranial granite," making openings through which his Word can pass to the mind and heart. The result is *hearing*, and the hearer responds, "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart' (Ps. 46:7–8). The words of Scripture are not merely to be read but to be *heard*. They are meant to go to the heart!

4. Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 70.

5. Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 70.

The importance of having our ears dug open comes to us from the lips of Jesus: “He who has an ear, let him hear . . .” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). We need to read God’s Word, but we must also pray that he will blast through our granite-block heads so that we truly hear his Word.

Muttering

Psalms 1 opens with a blessing on the man who “meditates day and night” on the law (v. 2). The word the psalmist uses for “meditates” literally means “to *mutter*”⁶; Augustine translated verse 2 with the catchy phrase “on his law he *chatters* day and night.”⁷ From this we understand that biblical meditation requires the use of both mind and mouth.

Personally applied, this tells us that along with our systematic reading of the Bible, we ought to select especially meaningful passages to reverently mutter over. Sometimes it might be a single verse—Philippians 3:10, for example, the four emphases of which I like to murmur in the NASB:

. . . that I may know him
and the power of His resurrection
and the fellowship of His sufferings,
being conformed to His death.

Slowly and prayerfully turning over Scripture in this manner engages the eyes, the ears, and the mouth, and drills through the granite to the heart—maximizing internalization and devotion.

Larger segments, especially classic texts, are tailor-made for meditation. The Ten Commandments, with the first four *Godward* commands and the six *manward* injunctions following, should be regularly murmured in reverent self-examination (cf. Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:1–22). There are eight Beatitudes that consecutively consider poverty of spirit, mourning over sin, gentleness, spiritual hunger, mercy, purity, peacemaking, and persecution (Matt. 5:3–12). The Lord’s Prayer begins with the foundational awareness “Our Father in heaven,” then

6. Edmund P. Clowney, *CM* Christian Meditation* (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1978), 13.

7. Quoted in C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1884), 6.

presents three *upward* petitions and three *horizontal* petitions—a perfect pattern for prayer and meditation (Matt. 6:9–13). There are endless possibilities, including the so-called *kenosis* passage, Philippians 2:5–11, which begins, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus . . .” Other food for meditation includes Jesus’s parables, the Psalms, and the epigrams of James. Both practical and esoteric passages can provide divine substance for reverent soul chatter.

The effects of meditation are supernal, bringing:

- *Revival*—“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul” (Ps. 19:7).
- *Wisdom*—“The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7); “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me” (119:97–98).
- *Increases in our faith*—“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).

We may be challenged, convicted, and exhilarated with the call to meditation. The question is, How is this to be done? The Scriptures say it should be continual, telling us we ought to meditate “day and night” (Ps. 1:2; cf. 119:97), and even while we lie awake at night (63:6; 119:148). Ideally, we are to make meditation part of our regular devotion, giving hidden time to reverently muttering God’s Word. But even our busy schedules can be punctuated with scriptural meditation—in the car, during our lunch break, or while waiting for a bus. Select a choice text and write it on a card (or put it in your smart-phone). Pull it out in those spare moments. Murmur it. Memorize it. Pray it. Say it. Share it.

The discipline of meditation is a must. Moses told Israel as he finished the “Song of Moses”: “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today. . . . For it is no empty word for you, but *your very life*” (Deut. 32:46–47).

Confession

There can be no ongoing devotion without confession, which can take place anytime. Ideally it ought to take place whenever we sin. But all

too often we are too proud and emotionally charged to acknowledge our sin at the time we commit it—for example, when we lose our temper in an argument. But devotion is impossible if we are overloaded with guilt.

Spontaneous Confession

If we have put off admitting our sins to God, confession may need to come first in our devotional time. There is also the probability that during scriptural meditation, or even during adoration, further hidden sins will come to light. So our moments of devotion may be filled with repeated confession. It is instructive to notice that Psalm 139, which systematically contemplates God's omnipotence and omniscience, ends with a prayer for divine investigation of the psalmist's soul:

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
 Try me and know my thoughts!
 And see if there be any grievous way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps. 139:23–24)

Likewise, as Isaiah was worshiping, he cried out in confession, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5).

Systematic Confession

While understanding that confession should happen spontaneously, our discipline of devotion ought to involve systematic confession as well. First, we must confess what we are, the ontological reality that we truly are *sinners*. Romans 3:9–20 is the text I have found most helpful on this point, for it repeatedly affirms that we are sinners—that, in fact, our entire being is tainted with evil. It is most important that we regularly make this confession because, as regenerated men who are making some progress in spiritual growth, it is sinfully natural to falsely suppose we are rising above our condition—a delusion that testifies to our very depravity.

Second, we must confess our specific *sins*. I suggest making a list of our sins, for the act of writing them out helps materialize this personal

reality for us. C. S. Lewis said, “We must lay before him what is in us, not what ought to be within us.”⁸ This done, we should confess each sin by its ugly name, and then thank God for his forgiveness through the blood of his Son.

The importance of confession for the devotional life cannot be overstated. “If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Ps. 66:18; cf. Prov. 28:13). Unconfessed sin makes the heavens seem like brass. But confession not only opens the heavens, it also enhances our intimacy with God, as François Fenelon urged:

Tell [God] all that is in your heart, as one unloads one’s heart to a dear friend. . . . People who have no secrets from each other never want subjects of conversation; they do not . . . weigh their words, because there is nothing to be kept back. Neither do they seek for something to say; they talk together out of the abundance of their heart—without consideration, just what they think. . . . Blessed are they who attain to such familiar, unreserved intercourse with God!⁹

Adoration

The disciplines of devotion should culminate in sublime adoration and worship. This begins with a proper sense of awe in the presence of the God we know and serve.

Reverence

Reverence must always characterize our approach to God and is especially needed today in our flip-the-channel evangelical culture. Most Christians could use some of the terror that came to Martin Luther—“the horror of Infinitude”¹⁰ that smote him at the altar—for our access to the awesome God of heaven is real!

Along with proper reverence, there must be concentration. Our minds must be fully engaged. Luther said, “To let your face blabber

8. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World), 22.

9. François Fenelon, Letter LXXXVII, “To the Vidame D’Amiens: On Prayer and Meditation,” May 31, 1707, in *Spiritual Letters of Archbishop Fenelon* (London: Rivingtons, 1877), 205–6. See also Letter XXIV, “To One Who Had Recently Turned to God.”

10. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1950), 41.

one thing while your heart dwells on another is just tempting God. . . . Any and every thing, if it is to be well done, demands the entire man, all his mind and faculties.”¹¹ This is why we must give the best time of our day to devotion, when we are the freshest.

Reverence and concentration must be linked with a humble spirit that has worship as its conscious goal—to *lift God up as worthy and to ascribe great worth to him*. “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11; cf. 5:9–13).

Contemplation

At the very heart of adoration is contemplation. Numerous psalms call us to contemplate God as seen in his creation. They never suggest that God is in his creation, but that his excellencies can be seen in his created works. Psalm 29, for example, ascribes glory to God through the visual medium of a great thunderstorm. Psalm 19 begins with these majestic words: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge” (vv. 1–2). Listen to God speak through his macrocosm, says the psalmist! In contrast, Psalm 139 celebrates God’s omniscience (vv. 1–6), omnipresence (vv. 7–12), and omnipotence (vv. 13–16) in the microcosm of the human mind and body.

Nature radiates and breathes the glory of God. The very trees do this if we take time to notice. Perhaps you have *really looked* and had an experience like that of Annie Dillard, seeing your backyard tree for what it is: full of lights, “each cell buzzing with flame,” such that you were “knocked breathless” and your heart went up in wonder to God.¹²

I remember fishing in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, at the mouth of the Sea of Cortez on a cloudless, windless day, the perfect sunlight dancing rhythmically on the water in platinum and blue. I recall gliding into an emerald cove surrounded by a cactus desert, donning a snorkel, and slipping over the side into a world of green, turquoise, yellow, and pink—another world of a slower, gentler rhythm. I also remember the sunset, with

11. Quoted in H. G. Haile, *Luther, An Experiment in Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 56.

12. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Bantam, 1978), 35.

its Pacific fire, as we sat on the sand gazing at the summer stars. I was indeed seeing God through his handiwork. That same day I marveled at his animate creation: the ever-present gulls in flight, a seemingly endless sea of yellowfin tuna and porpoise I could not see across, a striped marlin walking on its tail and crashing back into the water like a fallen horse.

Then there is the microcosm: a newborn baby, eyes and mouth wide open, arms reaching for life—the apex of God’s creation. The baby’s mind is an amazing computer, recording virtually everything it experiences. Its eyes pass on incredible amounts of data—first through the cornea, then through the focusing lens, where the image strikes the retina and stimulates 125 million nerve endings simultaneously. This data is processed by millions of microswitches and funneled down the optic nerve, which contains one million separate insulated fibers (so there are no short circuits). When the information reaches the brain, an equally complex process begins—all of which takes place in a millisecond! Likewise, the infant’s ears are so tuned to the vibrating around her that one day she will make music. What a God we have!

Take not, oh Lord, our literal sense. Lord, in Thy great
Unbroken speech our limping metaphor translate.¹³

Through the Scriptures, theologians have discerned about twenty attributes of God (though the number is disputed), and contemplation of the attributes has been a time-honored avenue to adoration. Spending twenty consecutive days with a book like A. W. Tozer’s *The Knowledge of the Holy*, which devotes three pages to each attribute—God’s self-existence, eternity, infinitude, omnipresence, grace, and holiness, to name a few—can lift one’s soul up to glory.¹⁴

Lastly, contemplation and meditation join hands in contemplating God through his mighty acts as described in Scripture. Take the transfiguration, for example. Read of it in Matthew 17 and Mark 9, and visualize what happened. See it from the disciples’ perspective: Jesus is framed by a thousand summer stars, and his clothing has become a glowing white. Overhead are the Bear and the Pleiades, and Jesus

13. C. S. Lewis, “Footnote to All Prayers,” in *Poems* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 129.

14. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 128.

is shining like a star himself! Or see the transfiguration from Jesus's perspective: his glory illuminating the faces of his awestruck inner ring of disciples—his very image dancing in their wide eyes. See it. Touch it. Smell it. Taste it. Participate in the story, and fall down with Peter, James, and John in worship.

This can also be done with such events as the incarnation, Jesus's death, and the resurrection, or with the great saving acts of God in the Old Testament—perhaps the Israelites' march through the parted Red Sea or the revival preaching of Jonah after being delivered from the belly of the great fish. There is much marvelous fuel for reverent meditation from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22.

Worship

The height of devotion is reached when reverence and contemplation produce passionate worship, which in turn breaks forth in thanksgiving and praise in word and song. Jonathan Edwards described his experience like this:

I had vehement longings of soul after God and Christ, and after more holiness, wherewith my heart seemed to be full, and ready to break. . . . I spent most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner, at such times, to sing forth my contemplations. . . . Prayer seemed to be natural to me, as the breath by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.¹⁵

As we worship, we can *pray*, *read*, or *sing* God's Word back to him. The Psalms are perfect for this because they are a worship manual. For example, Psalms 146–150, the last five psalms, begin and end with "Praise the LORD!" And Psalm 150 says "praise him" in every sentence.¹⁶ (The Resources section of this book lists numerous psalms that are great for one's worship of the Lord: See Section G, "Praise Psalms Especially Appropriate for Personal Worship.")

15. Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," quoted in *Jonathan Edwards*, eds. C. H. Faust and T. H. Johnson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), 61.

16. Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 35–36.

There are some fabulous New Testament hymns as well—for example, those in Luke, beginning with Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55). There are also the Christological hymn of Colossians 1:15–18; the incarnational hymns in John 1 and Philippians 2; and the heavenly hymns of Revelation 4 and 5.

And, of course, there is the music of the church. Johann Sebastian Bach’s music is universally regarded as Christian meditation transposed into musical form. The hymns and spiritual songs of the church are the richest sources of poetic praise set to music, with words by the likes of Bernard of Clairvaux, Paul Gerhardt, Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, George Herbert, and John Donne. In addition, we could mention the beautiful Scripture songs that have risen in our day—so many conveniently in the first person. (The Resources section of this book lists numerous hymns and spiritual songs that lend themselves to the devotional life: see Section E, “Hymns for Personal Adoration and Praise,” and Section F, “Choruses and Scripture Songs for Personal Adoration and Praise.”)

Our private devotion ought to rise in lyrical extemporaneous praise from our heart’s adoration: “Lord, I love you, and I thank you for _____. Lord, glorify your name through me. . . .” We must prayerfully read and sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs back to him.

May the mind of Christ my Savior
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.¹⁷

We taste Thee, O Thou Living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still,
We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead,
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.¹⁸

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.¹⁹

17. From the hymn “May the Mind of Christ My Savior” by Kate B. Williamson, 1925.

18. From the hymn “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” by Bernard of Clairvaux, 1150.

19. From the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” by Isaac Watts, 1707, 1709.

Obviously the possibilities of praise are endless and exponential—a truth we will live out for all eternity.

Submission

Does adoration lead to anything else? Yes: to the presentation of our bodies—our entire lives—in an ultimate act of worship. This is how Isaiah capped his great experience with God: “Here I am! Send me” (Isa. 6:8). Similarly, after the great apostle Paul sings in worshipful doxology—“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Rom. 11:36)—he immediately calls us to submission: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (12:1).

Thomas à Kempis made this the first part of his daily worship, using the prayer of submission: “As thou wilt; what thou wilt; when thou wilt.”²⁰

Our devotion must culminate in a conscious yielding of every part of our personality, every ambition, every relationship, and every hope to him. This done, we have reached the apex of personal devotion.

As I cautioned when we began, personal devotion cannot and must not be reduced to a few principles, such as *meditation*, *confession*, *adoration*, *submission*, and *petition* (which we will cover in the next chapter). Neither can it be put in a logical straitjacket. Sometimes we may be called to confession and submission only. Other times, adoration may occupy an extended time, or our devotions will properly be confined to petition only. There will be times when *all* of it takes place in twenty minutes.

But one thing is certain—it will not happen without discipline. The reason many men never have an effective devotional life is that they never plan for it. They do not know what it is because they have never taken the time to find out. They do not pray because they do not set aside the time. Their character never rises to that of Christ’s because they do not expose their lives to his pure light. Their wills stay crooked because they do not tie into him.

20. Quoted in Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 106.

The question for prayerless men is a very masculine one: Are we man enough to meditate? To confess? To adore? To submit? To sweat and endure?

Food for Thought

How much time do you generally spend in conversation with God? In your view (without using evangelical clichés), why is prayer an important part of the Christian walk?

What does the word *meditation* suggest to you? Why should you meditate on the Lord and his Word and will (compare Ps. 1:2; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)?

What does devotion have to do with confession, and vice versa? Check out Psalms 139:23–24 and 66:18 in this regard.

In what ways do you identify with Isaiah’s confession in Isaiah 6:5? When you are aware that God knows all about the things you think, do, and say, do you feel “ruined”? Why or why not?

Are you usually in too much of a hurry to “see” God or hear his voice? What can you do to make more time for him?

Do you find it difficult to make time to meditate, to confess, to worship, to consciously surrender to God? What barriers or distractions keep you from doing these things?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

What facets of true worship do you find in the following assorted Bible passages: Psalms 146–150; Luke 1:46–55; Revelation 4–5; Isaiah 6:8; Romans 12:1? What can you do to experience these aspects of worship?

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Habits of Grace (David Mathis)

New Morning Mercies (Paul David Tripp)

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life (Donald Whitney)

You Are What You Love (James K. A. Smith)

Discipline of Prayer

E. M. Bounds said, “When the angel of devotion has gone, the angel of prayer has lost its wings and it becomes a deformed and loveless thing.”¹ Our previous study was about our devotional wings (*meditation, confession, adoration, and submission*). Now, wings formed and stretched in flight, we come to *petition*, the offering of our requests to God. It is my hope that this study will instruct and motivate us to a soaring life of petitionary prayer that will call down God’s power upon our lives and the church.

The scriptural setting for the classic text on petitionary prayer could scarcely be more dramatic—it is a soldier preparing for battle. His heart pounds *ka-thump, ka-thump* under his metal breastplate. As he steadies himself, he hitches up his armor belt and scuffs at the earth with his studded boots like a football player, testing his traction. He repeatedly draws his great shield across his body in anticipation of the fiery barrages to come. Reflexively he reaches up and repositions his helmet. He gingerly tests the edge of his sword and slips it back into his scabbard.

The enemy approaches. Swords ring in chilling symphony as they are drawn. The warriors stand motionless, breathing in dreadful spasms.

And then the believing soldier does the most astounding thing. He falls to his knees in deep, profound petitionary prayer—for he has

1. E. M. Bounds, *The Essentials of Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 93.

obeyed his divine instructions to take up what John Bunyan referred to as “All-Prayer.”² The Holy Scriptures themselves portray this weapon: “[Pray] at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Eph. 6:18).

We are charged with five elements necessary to fully experience the power of petitionary prayer.

In-Spirited Prayer

“[Pray] . . . in the Spirit,” begins Paul, giving us the first element of petition—in-Spirited or Spirit-directed prayer. How does *prayer in the Spirit* occur? Romans 8:26–27 eloquently tells us:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

The indwelling Holy Spirit, through his superior intimate knowledge, both prays for us and joins us in our praying, infusing his prayers into ours so that we pray “in the Spirit.” Jude 20 challenges us to cultivate and experience this wonderful Spirit-wrought phenomenon: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit . . .” Praying in the Spirit is the will of God, and what God wills he empowers as we let him.

Two supernatural things happen here. First, the Holy Spirit tells us what we ought to pray for. Apart from the Spirit’s assistance, our prayers are limited by our own reason and intuition. But with the Holy Spirit’s help they become informed by heaven. As we seek the Spirit’s help, he will speak to us through his Word, which conveys his mind regarding every matter of principle. Thus, in Spirit-directed prayer

2. John Bunyan wrote, “About the midst of this valley I perceived the mouth of hell to be, and it stood also hard by the wayside. Now thought Christian, what shall I do? And ever and anon the flame and smoke would come out in such abundance, with sparks and hideous noises (things that cared not for Christian’s sword, as did Apollyon before), that he was forced to put up his sword, and betake himself to another weapon, called ‘All-Prayer.’” *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (Philadelphia: Universal Book and Bible House, 1935), 66.

we will think God's thoughts after him. His desires will become our desires, his motives our motives, his ends our ends.

Further, as the Spirit shows our hearts which matters to pray for, he gives us the absolute conviction they are God's will. J. Oswald Sanders, former director of Overseas Missionary Fellowship (formerly China Inland Mission), says in this regard:

The very fact that God lays a burden of prayer on our hearts and keeps us praying is *prima facie* evidence that He purposes to grant the answer. When asked if he really believed that two men for whose salvation he had prayed for over fifty years would be converted, George Muller of Bristol replied, "Do you think God would have kept me praying all these years if He did not intend to save them?" Both men were converted, one shortly before, the other after Muller's death.³

Such confident direction in one's prayer life is not unusual. I had a similar conviction regarding my brother, who came to Christ after I had been praying for him for thirty years! When God's people truly pray in the Spirit, they receive similar direction and conviction, not only about people, but about events, projects, and even whole nations.

The second benefit of praying in the Spirit is that it supplies the energizing of the Holy Spirit for prayer, infusing tired, even infirm, bodies and elevating the depressed to pray with power and conviction for God's work.

Men, learn to pray in the Spirit! To help myself do this, I have written "Pray in the Spirit" at the top of my prayer list as a constant reminder to patiently wait on the Lord, asking the Spirit to give me prayers. My list contains numerous long-standing petitions for which I regularly pray, but I also want to be consciously open to the Spirit, so that as he wishes, he will regularly invade my list with his direction and energy.

Says Bunyan:

Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the

3. J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 83.

Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or according to his word, for the good of the church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God.⁴

Let us learn to pray in-Spirited prayer using the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Continual Prayer

The next ingredient of petitionary prayer is that it is continuous—"at all times." This characterized the practice of the apostolic church, as Acts 1:14 indicates: "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (cf. 2:42). Paul told the Thessalonians to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17), and he recommended that the Philippians "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

Is continual prayer possible? Yes and no. It is, of course, impossible to carry on a running dialogue while we are working or at other times, but what Paul is calling for is not so much the articulation of words as the *posture of the heart*.

Thomas Kelly explains in his *Testament of Devotion*:

There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we can be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship, and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings.⁵

The irrepressible medieval monk Brother Lawrence recorded his experience of continual prayer in the classic *The Practice of the Presence of God*:

The time of business does not differ with me from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several

4. John Bunyan, "A Discourse Touching Prayer," 1663, in *The Practical Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 6 (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co., 1842), 210.

5. Thomas Kelly, *Testament of Devotion* (New York: Harper, 1941), 35.

persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were on my knees.⁶

This was also John Wesley's experience, as he modestly explained in the third person:

His heart is ever lifted up to God at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon him, and everywhere "seeing him that is invisible."⁷

Thus, we see that a life of continual prayer is not only possible, but some actually live it out. Paul challenges us to understand that this life is not meant just for some or for a spiritual elite, but for all of us. Continual prayer is God's will for every Christian, no exceptions. I can do it; you can do it. Businesspeople, students, young parents—all can do it. We are to have a perpetual inner dialogue with God. We must always be looking up, even when driving to work or mowing the lawn.

Varied Prayer

The third aspect of the prayer life is that it is varied—"with all prayer and supplication." Later Paul would similarly write to Timothy, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Tim. 2:1). Varied prayer grows out of what we have just seen about continual prayer, because if we pray continually, the various situations we encounter will demand a variety of prayers. Think of the variety appropriate to life's situations—prayer for strength to resist temptation, for wisdom, for power, for self-restraint, for protection of others, for growth, for conviction.

Floyd Pierson, a retired Africa Inland Mission worker, was a man who literally prayed "at all times, with all prayer and supplication."

6. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New York: Revell, 1958), 30–31
7. John Wesley, *Works*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1959), 343.

So habitual was this that in his seventies, when he went to take a driver's test, he said to the examiner, "I always pray before I drive—let's bow our heads together." The official likely wondered what kind of a ride he was in for! We can imagine him checking his seat belt and setting his perspiring hand on the door handle. Pierson passed!

Apart from the humor, there is something quite beautiful here—the unaffected witness of a vibrant inner spiritual reality that bubbles up with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Persistent Prayer

The fourth aspect of effective prayer is persistence—"To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication . . ."

Exodus 17 describes aged Moses standing atop a hill, arms lifted up to heaven, interceding for Israel, which was engaged in a pitched battle with the Amalekites below. As long as his arms were extended upward, Israel prevailed, but when in weariness they began to fall, the Amalekites dominated. Poor Moses was in agony as gravity drew his hands toward destruction. But then came Aaron and Hur, who placed a stone under Moses and, standing on either side, held his hands up to God until sunset and victory came (vv. 10–13).

That story graphically emphasizes that there is a mysterious efficacy to persistent prayer. This is not to suggest that God regards prayer as a meritorious work—so that when there are enough prayers, he answers. Rather, he sovereignly chooses to encourage persistence in prayer and to answer it to his everlasting glory.

In one of his prayer parables, the Lord dramatized what he wants from all believers:

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" (Luke 18:1–5)

The cultivation of persistence was a recurring motif in Jesus's teaching on prayer. In Gethsemane Jesus challenged his disciples when they failed to persevere by saying, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38).

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus enjoined his followers to prayerful tenacity: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7). The language is unusually compelling because the three verbs ("ask . . . seek . . . knock . . .") indicate an ascending intensity. "Ask" implies requesting assistance for a conscious need. It also suggests humility, for the Greek word here was commonly used by one approaching a superior. "Seek" involves asking, but adds action. The idea is not just to express need, but to get up and look around for help. "Knock" includes asking, plus seeking, plus persevering—for example, one who keeps pounding on a closed door. The stacking of these verbs is powerful, and the fact that they are present imperatives gives them even more punch. Jesus's words actually read: "Keep on asking, and it will be given to you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you."

Such tenacity is exactly what Paul has in mind in his call to petitionary prayer when he says to "keep alert with all perseverance . . ."

Men, do we pray with scriptural persistence for our families? For the church? Are there individuals, groups, causes, and souls for which we hold up our hands in prayer? There ought to be, for God answers persistent prayer.

Intercessory Prayer

The fifth aspect of asking prayer is that it is *intercessory*—it is prayer "for all the saints." There are many worthy petitions to make, but "saints"—believers in Jesus Christ—are to have a large place in our prayers.

Notice that this call to pray "for all the saints" occasions Paul's request for prayer for himself: "and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:19–20). Paul knew what others' prayers could do for him.

Petitionary prayers for others bring grace to their lives. Few people know that the stupendous achievement of William Carey in India was fueled by his bedridden sister, who prayed for him for over fifty years.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson beautifully gave verse to Paul's wisdom, writing:

If thou shouldst never see my face again,
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what are men better than sheep or goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.⁸

How beautiful is the fivefold anatomy of petitionary prayer: *in-Spirited*—prayer “in the Spirit”; *continual*—prayer “at all times”; *varied*—“all prayer and supplication”; *persistent*—“keep alert with all perseverance”; and *intercessory*—“for all the saints.” Certainly we are challenged and motivated! But the question is, how are we to pray in this way? Here we must turn to very practical advice.

The Practice of Petitionary Prayer

The Prayer List

Essential to our effective petitionary prayer is a prayer list. I say this first because of my own repeated experiences. For example, I may be praying for my mother, and as I pray for her, I see our old family home at 747 Edmaru Avenue. In front is parked my gray-primered 1941 Ford. It has racing slicks on the back, a hopped-up '48 Merc engine, and on the side, custom pinstriping that reads, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” Suddenly I am seventeen, wearing my blue suede leather jacket, sitting behind my gold steering wheel, and heading down Beach

8. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Passing of Arthur,” in *Idylls of the King* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1878), 402.

Boulevard to Huntington Beach. I can smell the ocean and cocoa butter. So much for my “prayers for Mother”!

This is why I need a prayer list. To be sure, even using a list, my mind still wanders. But when it does, I always have my list to bring me back. And when I am especially prone to distraction, I can place my index finger on my mother’s name and pray with my eyes wide open—moving from name to name in this way.

Every Christian man should have a prayer list that includes, among other things, the names of his family members and, if he is married, his spouse and children. Moreover, the list ought to be detailed, featuring personal items under the names of those closest to him. I have found that small “Post-its” placed under headings help keep my list updated.

My daily prayer list carries the following headings, each with several details under it: FAMILY, STAFF, SECRETARIES AND CUSTODIANS, ILL, GRIEVING, IMPORTANT EVENTS, PRESENT PROBLEMS, MINISTRIES, WEEKLY WORSHIP, NEW BELIEVERS, MISSIONS LIST.

In addition to my daily list, I have four other lists that I try to go through once a week.

List 1 has: ONGOING ILL, PERSONAL REQUESTS FROM OTHERS, EVANGELISM, SPIRITUAL WARFARE.

List 2 has: WORLD, USA, PERSONAL LIFE, NEEDED PERSONAL QUALITIES.

List 3 has: CHRISTIAN LEADERS, PASTORS, UPCOMING MINISTRIES AND VISION.

List 4 has: GOVERNMENT LEADERS (federal, state, and local).

Quite frankly, I could not get on at all without a prayer list, not only because it tames my wandering mind, but also because it insures that I will not neglect things that are important to me, including the many requests for personal prayer that I receive. Without a prayer list, my promises to “pray for you” would be totally empty. In addition, a prayer list is perfect for keeping track of answers to prayer.

If you do not have a prayer list, start small. Simply list the relationships and matters most important to you on a 3 × 5 card, add a few specifics under the names, and put it in your wallet for daily

reference. You can even use digital lists on your smartphone. Or you can use a dedicated app such as PrayerMate, which allows you to create digital prayer cards and set how often you want to rotate them. I guarantee that if you use a prayer list, it will greatly enhance your prayer life.

“Quiet” Time

Next you need some quiet. I am well aware that *quiet* is a relative term in today’s world, where there is virtually no silence. Many of us never experience silence during our waking hours. We wake up to a screeching alarm, shave to the news, drive through noisy traffic, enter a loud, busy office, return home while listening to a podcast, “relax” in front of the TV, and drift off to sleep as the house pulsates with the *thump, thump* of the neighbor’s Dolby sound system.

What is more, the occasional silence we do encounter can be distracting because it heightens other distracting noises. Trappist monk Thomas Merton tells how, in the deep quietness of a monastery, a cough repeated at predictable intervals can destroy every possibility of collected thought.⁹ Silence is sometimes louder than the noise you are trying to ignore! So you need to choose the situation that works best for you. It may be dominated by road noise, but if that is the atmosphere you need to concentrate, use it.

Place

Along with this you must find a place where you will not be disturbed. Early in my ministry, my office was in a twenty-five-foot trailer. My part-time secretary was on the other side of a thin plywood partition. I could hear everything! If that was not enough, the whole trailer shook when the door opened.

My solutions were many, and all off the premises—the beautiful and always open and empty sanctuary of an old neighboring church, the park, the wonderful anonymity of my car parked at a busy shopping center. Even today, though I now have a quiet office, I often go to similar places for my devotions.

9. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 216.

Time

I also try to give my best time to prayer—which for me is never the time just before going to bed. One’s last waking moments should never be given to powerful intercessory prayer (except, perhaps, for students who have a final exam in the morning).

Here Jesus’s habit is instructive: “And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). The early bird gets the prime time. The real question for you is, When is your best time? For some it may be at lunch or before dinner.

Posture

A certain man could not find the right posture for prayer. He tried praying on his knees, but that was not comfortable; besides, it wrinkled his slacks. He tried praying standing, but soon his legs got tired. He tried praying seated, but that did not seem reverent. Then one day as he was walking through a field, he fell headfirst into an open well. And did he ever pray!

Seriously, one’s prayer posture can make a difference. While the Scriptures mention numerous postures for prayer, none is prescribed. What is important is that your posture should enhance reverent attention. Sometimes I kneel, sometimes I walk about the room, and often I sit at my desk with list in hand. There are times when I lift my hands, and other times I am on my face. Heart attitude is the key factor.

Preparation

As to preparation for prayer, honest practicality is of greatest importance. Sometimes a man needs a shower and a shave. If you are into coffee like I am, a good cup of coffee is a divine cordial. Again, it is not the physical details that are of prime importance but the condition and stance of the heart. Whatever helps you focus on the Lord, use it.

Length

Often the best prayers are short and passionate. Martin Luther said, “Look to it that you do not try to do all of it, do not try to do too much,

lest your spirit grow weary. Besides, a good prayer mustn't be too long. Do not draw it out. Prayer ought to be frequent and fervent."¹⁰ A legalistic commitment to duration can kill one's prayer life.

The Discipline of Petitionary Prayer

The elements of the practice of prayer—the *list*, the *quiet*, the *place*, the *time*, the *posture*, the *preparation*, and the *length*—all suggest one thing: *discipline*.

Work

Candidly, prayer is work, not a sport. It is not something that you do if you like it, something you devote your spare time to, or something you do only if you are good at it.¹¹ Prayer is the proper work of the soul that loves Christ (Eph. 6:18):

praying
at *all* times in the Spirit,
with *all* prayer and supplication.
To that end, keep alert with *all* perseverance,
making supplication for *all* the saints.

This is a call to work!

We must never wait until we *feel* like praying—otherwise we may never pray, unless, perhaps, we fall headfirst into an open well. The context of Paul's charge in Ephesians 6 is spiritual warfare—and that is what prayer is! Christian men face the world and fall on their knees. *Work* and *war*—these are the words we must keep before us if we are to become men of prayer.

Measured Work

This understood, we must also understand that we must not overcommit ourselves, especially if we are just beginning. The tendency, when

10. Quoted in H. G. Haile, *Luther, An Experiment in Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 56.

11. Elisabeth Elliot writes, "People who ski, I suppose, are people who happen to like skiing, who have time for skiing, who can afford to ski, and who are good at skiing. Recently I found that I often treat prayer as though it were a sport like skiing—something you do if you can afford the trouble, something you do if you are good at it." *Notes on Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Good News, 1982).

truly challenged, is to say, “I’m committing myself to two hours of daily prayer, I am going to read the Bible through twice this year, and I’m going to practice every day the disciplines of devotion (meditation, confession, adoration, submission) and the discipline of petition. I’m going to have a prayer list that is second to none.” That will last about three days—maybe!

It’s better to commit to a total of fifteen minutes and maintain it—with perhaps five minutes of Bible reading, five minutes of meditation, and five minutes of disciplined prayer. A regular time of devotion and prayer will become a habit, and the habit of prayer will give wings to your spiritual life.

In this respect, Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter once shared a page from his own pastoral diary with a group of pastors who had inquired about the discipline of prayer. He began by telling how in 1928 he entered the ministry determined he would be the “most Methodist-Baptist” of pastors, a real man of prayer. However, it was not long before his increasing pastoral responsibilities, administrative duties, and the subtle subterfuges of pastoral life began to crowd prayer out. Moreover, he began to get used to it, making excuses for himself.

Then one morning it all came to a head as he stood over his work-strewn desk and looked at his watch. The voice of the Spirit was calling him to pray. At the same time another velvety little voice was telling him to be practical and get his letters answered, and that he ought to face up to the fact that he was not one of the “spiritual sort”—only a few people could be like that. “That last remark,” says Baxter, “hurt like a dagger blade. I could not bear to think it was true.” He was horrified by his ability to rationalize away the very ground of his ministerial vitality and power.

That morning Baxter took a good look into his heart and found that there was a part of him that did not want to pray and a part that did. The part that did not was his emotions; the part that did was his intellect and will. This analysis paved the way to victory. In Baxter’s own inimitable words:

As never before, my will and I stood face to face. I asked my will the straight question, “Will, are you ready for an hour of prayer?”

Will answered, "Here I am, and I'm quite ready, if you are." So Will and I linked arms and turned to go for our time of prayer. At once all the emotions began pulling the other way and protesting, "We are not coming." I saw Will stagger just a bit, so I asked, "Can you stick it out, Will?" and Will replied, "Yes, if you can." So Will went, and we got down to prayer, dragging those wriggling, obstreperous emotions with us. It was a struggle all the way through. At one point, when Will and I were in the middle of an earnest intercession, I suddenly found one of those traitorous emotions had snared my imagination and had run off to the golf course; and it was all I could do to drag the wicked rascal back. A bit later I found another of the emotions had sneaked away with some off-guard thoughts and was in the pulpit, two days ahead of schedule, preaching a sermon that I had not yet finished preparing!

At the end of that hour, if you had asked me, "Have you had a 'good time'?" I would have had to reply, "No, it has been a wearying wrestle with contrary emotions and a truant imagination from beginning to end." What is more, that battle with the emotions continued for between two and three weeks, and if you had asked me at the end of that period, "Have you had a 'good time' in your daily praying?" I would have had to confess, "No, at times it has seemed as though the heavens were brass, and God too distant to hear, and the Lord Jesus strangely aloof, and prayer accomplishing nothing."

Yet something *was* happening. For one thing, Will and I really taught the emotions that we were completely independent of them. Also, one morning, about two weeks after the contest began, just when Will and I were going for another time of prayer, I overheard one of the emotions whisper to the other, "Come on, you guys, it is no use wasting any more time resisting; they'll go just the same." That morning, for the first time, even though the emotions were still suddenly uncooperative, they were at least quiescent, which allowed Will and me to get on with prayer undistractedly.

Then, another couple of weeks later, what do you think happened? During one of our prayer times, when Will and I were no more thinking of the emotions than of the man in the moon, one of the most vigorous of the emotions unexpectedly sprang up

and shouted, “Hallelujah!” at which all the other emotions exclaimed, “Amen!” And for the first time the whole of my being—intellect, will, and emotions—was united in one coordinated prayer-operation.¹²

Food for Thought

Why is the image of warfare an appropriate one for a consideration of the discipline of prayer (see Eph. 6:18)? Apply this to your own victories and defeats regarding prayer.

What do Romans 8:26–27 and Jude 20 say to you about the Holy Spirit and prayer? Why are the truths here important to you personally?

Review the picture of prayer portrayed in the story of Moses in Exodus 17. Practically speaking, what are some things we can do to help others persist in prayer? Be as specific as you can.

What does Paul ask prayer for in Ephesians 6:19–20? Do you want other Christians to pray for you in this area? Why or why not? What does action on your part have to do with prayer along these lines?

Do you find it difficult to find enough time and a quiet place away from interruptions for your prayer times? Why? Is it because your life is too busy, or are there conflicting loyalties you prefer to ignore?

What can you do practically to pray more frequently and to be better prepared for prayer times when they come?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Make a list of those individuals for whom you want to pray regularly, then establish a time when you will pray for several people on the list often (at least three times a week). And when you pray, ask for specific answers so that you will see them as they arrive.

12. Excerpted from personal correspondence with J. Sidlow Baxter, September 8, 1987.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

The Book of Common Prayer

Enjoy Your Prayer Life (Michael Reeves)

The Essentials of Prayer (E. M. Bounds)

The Hidden Life of Prayer (David McIntyre)

Prayer (Timothy Keller)

The Prayer of Our Lord (Philip Graham Ryken)

Praying the Bible (Donald Whitney)

A Praying Life (Paul Miller)

The Valley of Vision (Various)

Other Resources

The PrayerMate app (<http://www.geero.net/prayermate>) allows you to create digital prayer cards and set how often you want to rotate them. Christian blogger Tim Challies writes that PrayerMate “has made all the difference” in his prayer life. See “How an App Revitalized My Prayer Life,” September 19, 2016, www.challies.com/resources/how-an-app-revitalized-my-prayer-life/.

Discipline of Worship

The feature article of the October 1978 issue of *Harper's Magazine*, entitled "Trendier Than Thou," reported that Kilmer Myers, then Episcopal bishop of California, had welcomed San Francisco Bay Area transcendentalists to the Gothic splendor of Grace Cathedral for nature festivals and pagan ceremonies. The article went on to report:

During one nature ceremony in the cathedral, a decidedly ecumenical audience watched reverently as the poet Allen Ginsberg, wearing a deer mask, joined others similarly garbed to ordain Senators Alan Cranston and John Tunney as godfathers of animals (Cranston of the Tule elk and Tunney of the California brown bear) . . . while movie projectors simultaneously cast images of buffalo herds and other endangered species on the walls and ceilings, to the accompaniment of rock music.¹

As we would expect, many Episcopal priests protested what they rightly termed "a profane employment of their sacred house of worship." Regardless, Bishop Myers wholeheartedly participated in the druidic ceremonies, offering prayers for a "renaissance of reverence for life in America."² To borrow the title of T. S. Eliot's book, there has

1. Paul Seabury, "Trendier Than Thou: The Many Temptations of the Episcopal Church," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1978, 39–52.

2. Seabury, "Trendier Than Thou."

been a “Murder in the Cathedral”—in this case, the reverent worship of God in spirit and truth.

To some, troubles for the great religious traditions may seem far removed. But the truth is, similar troubles are common in the more independent, evangelical traditions. A friend of mine one Sunday morning visited a church where, to his amazement, the worship prelude was the theme from the 1973 movie *The Sting*, entitled (significantly, I think) “The Entertainer.” The congregation was preparing for divine worship while cinematic images, not of buffalo herds, but of Paul Newman and Robert Redford in 1920s garb, hovered in their consciousness! And that was just the prelude, for what followed was an off-the-wall service that made no attempt at worship. The “high point” came when the pastor (inspired no doubt by the rousing prelude) stood unbeknownst behind the unfortunate person doing announcements making “horns” behind his head with his forked fingers and making faces for the congregation. This buffoonery took place in a self-proclaimed “Bible-believing church” that ostensibly worships the holy triune God of the Bible. “Murder in the Chapel”?

Sadly, stories like these are not uncommon in today’s secularized, man-centered culture. Many Christians have never thought through the meaning and importance of worship. It is not an overstatement to say that our pleasure-centered culture has produced many who work at their play and play at their worship.

Why this confusion and tragic failure regarding worship? The answer lies in another question: Why do we worship—is it for God or for man? The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today’s Christendom is that worship is primarily for *us*—to meet our needs. Worship services driven by this assumption are entertainment focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance. From this perspective preaching becomes a homiletics of consensus—preaching to felt needs, man’s conscious agenda instead of God’s. Such preaching is always topical and never textual. Biblical information is minimized, and the sermons are short and full of stories. Anything and everything that is suspected of making the marginal attender uncomfortable is removed from the service, whether it be a registration card or a “mere” creed. Taken to the nth degree,

this philosophy instills a tragic self-centeredness. That is, everything is judged by how it affects man. This terribly corrupts one's theology.

The telltale sign of this kind of thinking is the common post-worship question, "What did you think of the service today?" The real questions ought to be, "What did God think of it and of those who worshiped?" and "What did I give to God?" It is so easy to forget that in going to worship our main concern should be to worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24)—not to receive a lift for ourselves.

Therefore, it is important that we understand, in distinction to the popular view that worship is for us, that worship begins not with man as its focus, but God. Worship must be orchestrated and conducted with the vision before us of an august, awesome, holy, transcendent God who is to be pleased and, above all, glorified by our worship. Everything in our corporate worship should flow from this understanding.

What about our needs then? When we worship and adore God in our singing, prayer, and listening to the Word, his *shalom* will well in our souls so that we will leave with a glad sense of personal blessing—a great lift. But this is a byproduct, not a goal, a further evidence of the generous grace of God.

Reasons for God-Centered Worship

Divine Priority

In considering the rationale for God-centered worship, we must begin with the realization that worship is the number one priority of the church. Jesus's famous statement in John 4:23 that the Father *seeks* worshipers is unparalleled, for nowhere in the entire corpus of Holy Scripture do we read of God's seeking anything else from a child of God.³ *God desires worship above all else.*

Thus, every man who calls himself a Christian must understand that worship is the ultimate priority of his life. Worship is what God

3. Robert G. Rayburn writes: "Nowhere in all the Scriptures do we read of God's seeking anything else from the child of God. One often hears that Christians are 'saved to serve,' and there is a limited sense in which this is true, for throughout eternity as well as during our earthly life it will be our joy and privilege to serve the Lord God. But this heavenly service will itself be primarily worship (see Heb. 9:14; 12:28; Rev. 22:3). Nowhere in the Bible are we told that the Lord seeks our service. It is not servants He seeks, but true worshipers." *O Come, Let Us Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 15.

wants from you and from me. Jesus hallowed and substantiated this in his chiding of busy, frenetic Martha, who was so critical of her sister's sitting at Jesus's feet: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41–42).

A look at the massive emphasis on worship in the Old Testament reveals God's mind on worship's priority. Exodus devotes twenty-five chapters to the construction of the tabernacle, the locus of divine worship. Leviticus amounts to a twenty-seven-chapter liturgical manual. And the Psalms are a spectacular 150-chapter worship hymnal. Divine worship has always been the occupation and sustenance, the priority, of the believing soul.

Divine Presence

The other reason we ought to worship is the promise of God's presence. We all know God is everywhere—he is omnipresent—and that he has promised us, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). Nevertheless, he has given the church the unique promise that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20)—which means that his presence is with us in a very special way when we assemble to focus on him.

Dr. A. J. Gordon, founder of Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, had a dream that heightened this scriptural reality. One Saturday night Gordon, worn-out from working on Sunday's sermon, fell asleep and began to dream. He dreamed he was in the pulpit when a stranger came in and sat down. Gordon saw everything around the man with surreal clarity, even the pew number. But he could not see the man's face. He did remember, however, that the face wore a serious look, as of a person who had great sorrow—and that it gave him the most respectful attention. As he preached, he could not take his eyes off the man. The man held his gaze rather than Gordon his.

The service over, Gordon tried to reach the man through the crowded aisle, but he was gone. Approaching the man who had sat beside the stranger, Gordon asked who he was. Then came the laconic reply, "It was Jesus of Nazareth." Gordon chastised him for letting

Jesus go, but the man replied nonchalantly, “Oh, do not be troubled. He has been here today, and no doubt will come again.”

Gordon recorded his shock and subsequent self-examination, then concluded,

One thought . . . lingered in my mind with something of comfort and more of awe. “*He has been here today, and no doubt will come again*”; and mentally repeating these words as one regretfully meditating on a vanished vision, I awoke and it was a dream. No, it was not a dream. It was a vision of the deepest reality, a miniature of an actual ministry.

The impact on Gordon was historic. In fact, he says the new sense of Christ’s presence brought great blessing to Clarendon Street Church, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of a Bible training school, destined to become Gordon College.⁴

Think what such an awareness of Christ’s presence would do to corporate worship of the confessing church if we would just let the truth sink in. One thing is for sure: murder would cease in cathedral and chapel alike!

Men, when we meet for corporate worship, *Christ is in our midst*. He walks among the glowing lampstands of his churches (Rev. 1:20; 2:1). He treads the aisles of our churches and sits beside us. He searches for those who worship in spirit and truth. He desires our praise.

This being the highest priority, we must answer truthfully: Do we worship as he desires?

Doing God-Centered Worship

If I have learned anything about leading worship in my many years in the ministry, it is that worship does not just “happen.” Worship requires careful preparation on the part of ministers and congregations.

I have experienced both sides of this, and I know Sunday morning can be the worst time of the week. It is probably true that couples, especially those with young children, have more fights on Sunday morning than on any other day of the week. Sometimes by the time

4. A. J. Gordon, *How Christ Came to Church: The Pastor’s Dream* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1895), 28–30.

we get to church, worship is an impossibility—unless, perhaps, the sermon is on repentance!

Preparation

The answer to the problem begins with Saturday preparation. (Any men who interpret the following as women's work are wrong. Both husband and wife should share responsibility for the practical and spiritual preparations for the Lord's Day.) It is advisable that young families have their clothing clean and laid out on Saturday night, and even that the breakfast be decided upon. The whereabouts of Bibles and lessons should be known; even better, they ought to be collected and ready. There should be an agreed-upon time for getting up, leaving plenty of time to get ready for church. Going to bed at a reasonable hour is also a good idea. Spiritually, prayer about the Lord's Day is essential—for the service, the music, the pastors, one's family, and oneself.

The Puritans understood this well. As one of their great preachers, George Swinnock, quaintly expressed it,

Prepare to meet thy God, O Christian! Betake thyself to thy chamber on the Saturday night. . . . The oven of thine heart thus baked, as it were, overnight, would be easily heated the next morning; the fire so well raked up when thou wentest to bed, would be the sooner kindled when thou shouldst rise. If thou wouldst thus leave thy heart with God on the Saturday night, thou shouldst find it with him in the Lord's Day morning.⁵

On Sunday everyone needs to get up on time, eat at a set hour, and leave plenty early, ideally after a short time of family prayer asking that God will be glorified and speak to each family member in the service. If you do this, Sunday worship will ascend to new heights.

Expectancy

Next, you ought to come expecting to uniquely meet God in corporate worship. Congregational worship makes possible an intensity of devotion that does not come as readily in individual worship. On the tragic

5. Quoted in J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 257.

level, a mob tends to descend to a much deeper level of cruelty than individuals by themselves. It is also understood that the appreciation and enjoyment of an informed group of music lovers at a symphony is more intense than that of a single listener at home. This holds true for worship as well, because corporate worship provides a context in which passion is joyously elevated and God's Word comes with unique power. Martin Luther spoke of this when he confided, "At home in my own house there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through."⁶ We must come with great expectation—for we will experience just what we expect.

In Truth

Jesus tells us in John 4:24 that we must worship "in spirit and truth." Worshiping "in truth" means that we come informed by the objective revelation of God's Word about the great God we serve and the precepts he has spoken. In this sense our worship is governed by what we know and believe of God. The better informed we are, the better we can worship. If we know and have taken to heart passages such as Genesis 1, Psalm 139, Psalm 23, the book of Job, John 7, John 17, Romans 1–3, and Revelation 19, we will be better equipped to worship "in truth."

This knowledge of God through his Word ought to heighten our expectations and instill healthy fear and reverence. As Annie Dillard wrote,

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the Catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? . . . It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.⁷

6. Quoted in Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, 29–30.

7. Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 40–41.

Men, we need to fill ourselves with God's truth so our worship will be electrified with proper reality!

In Spirit

Besides worshiping in stupendous truth, we worship "in spirit." Notice the small "s"—John 4:24 is referring to our human spirits, the inner person. True worship flows from the inside out. Worship is not an external activity, but is of necessity first internal. Jesus warned hypocrites with the words of Isaiah: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me" (Mark 7:6–7, quoting Isa. 29:13).

Thus, true worship must spring from within a man's spirit, from the spontaneous affections of the heart—as it did so regularly from the heart of David. Psalm 130, a Psalm of Ascents, expresses the anticipation of one worshiping in spirit:

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning. (Ps. 130:5–6)

The Discipline of Worship

It is the Lord's Day. You have come to church to worship God "in spirit and truth." You are in church to give him worth—*worth-ship*, as the English word properly means. What now? Here again the word that is the theme of this book comes to center stage—*discipline*.

It is of great significance that one of the two most prominent words denoting worship in the New Testament is the word *latreuo*, which means "to work or serve." This tells us implicitly that worship involves work—disciplined work. It is from this word that *liturgy* is derived, for liturgy is one's work in worship.

All churches have liturgies, even those that call themselves "non-liturgical." In fact, having no liturgy is a liturgy! Relaxed charismatic services may be as liturgical in their format as high-church services—and in some cases more rigid. My purpose is not to recommend one

liturgy over another, though, of course, I have my opinion. The point I wish to make is that whatever your liturgy may be, you must work at it with all you have, for worship is work. There must be some holy sweat if you are to please and glorify God.

Using a typical order of service as an example, I will be very specific (and admittedly idealistic). Do not be put off because your service is different, for to properly worship, the same worth-ship ethic applies.

Prelude

You have arrived early (admittedly this is impossible in many churches—if there is an earlier service, for example) and you have the bulletin in hand. You pray silently, read the morning's Scripture text, pray for the sermon, look up the hymns in prayerful thought, and perhaps end by praying for the choir and the participants in the service. You have begun properly. You are working at worship.

Announcements

If these are at the beginning of the service, they are less intrusive than in the middle of worship.

The Call to Worship and Invocation

The call, properly done, is a call from God, who is inviting us corporately into his presence. We listen to God's words with reverent, prayerful anticipation. As the call ends, we are led in an invocation that invites God to meet us and calls us to submit ourselves in worship, for his glory.

The Apostles' Creed

This creed, scholars believe, dates from before AD 250 and is the oldest creedal affirmation to attain universal acceptance. The purpose of the creed is to make a Trinitarian confession and to affirm our solidarity with the universal church of the ages. To do this properly the creed must never be recited, but confessed. That is, one's heart and mind must work together to genuinely affirm authentic belief.

The “Gloria Patri”

The “*Gloria Patri*” (“Doxology”) is meant to draw us upward in music for the purpose for which we have come—to give glory to God. It should be sung with our whole heart.

Hymns

Surveys have shown that about 50 percent of any worship service is music, whether the service be formal or informal. Vocal praise to God in this way requires work. It is easy to let your mind wander so that you are mouthing the words with no comprehension—like the little boy who thought the gospel refrain “Gladly the cross I’d bear” was about a bear with crossed eyes! The antidote to this common peril is to realize that God is our audience and to sing to him, thus fulfilling Paul’s determination: “I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

What a glory it is to God when a hundred, two hundred, or a thousand people are all truly singing to God with their minds and spirits in the sublime labor of praise. Augustine rightly said, “A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot.”⁸

The Resources section of this book includes lists of Christian songs and choruses appropriate for adoration and praise (see Section E, “Hymns for Personal Adoration and Praise,” and Section F, “Choruses and Scripture Songs for Personal Adoration and Praise”), and also a list of praise psalms that are outstanding tools for worship (Section G, “Praise Psalms Especially Appropriate for Personal Worship”). These can be used at home in one’s own worship times, as well as in corporate worship.

The Anthem

Church choirs have their precedent in the huge choirs of voices and instruments in the Old Testament. No less than thirty-five of the Old Testament psalms have the superscription “For the director of music.” Others were sung according to recommended tunes such

8. Quoted in Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 49.

as “The Hind of the Dawn,” tunes no doubt well-known to many in Israel.⁹

Choirs offer music in a way that is beyond the average person’s capacity. It is the congregation’s way of offering its best to God and is an especially beautiful gift for him.

Silence and Congregational Prayer

Americans seem to be obsessed with the need for unending sound. Some consider silence in worship a breach of etiquette. They want no dead spots; they might suggest, “Pastor, I think it would be better if the organ played.”

But silence slows the frantic pace and gives time for reflection and individual dialogue with God. It bows to Habakkuk’s call: “But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20).

When the congregational prayer begins, all minds must engage in unison with silent or verbal agreements: “Yes, Lord”; “May it be”; “Amen.” I personally think liturgical traditions ending prayers with a congregational “Amen!” are very much in accord with Scripture.

There is also the matter of the Lord’s Prayer. If it is used by the congregation, it must never be merely “said,” but must be prayed with all our heart. Worshipers would do well to remember that when the Lord gave the church this great prayer (Matt. 6:9–13), he first warned against mindless babbling (v. 7).

Tithes and Offerings

Giving ought to be an act of conscious worship rather than a reflexive religious act. The giver, as he gives of his substance, ought to first give *himself* to God (cf. Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 8:5).

Scripture

The reading of Scripture is purely the sharing of God’s Word, while it remains to be seen whether the sermon that follows is. When Ezra

9. Lawrence C. Roff, *Let Us Sing* (Norcross, GA: Great Commission Publications, 1991), 27.

read the Law, all Israel stood “from early morning until midday” (Neh. 8:3, 5), and we should stand in solidarity with such respect for God’s Word, symbolizing our submission to it. It is imperative that we do this with ears to hear.

Sermon

Admittedly the hardest work in a worship service may be listening to the sermon. Here the minister should have done his work, but the congregation has its work to do as well. Richard Baxter, in his “Directions for Profitably Hearing the Word Preached,” said,

Make it your work with diligence to apply the word as you are hearing it. . . . Cast not all upon the minister, as those that will go no further than they are carried as by force. . . . You have work to do as well as the preacher, and should all the time be as busy as he . . . you must open your mouths, and digest it, for another cannot digest it for you . . . therefore be all the while at work, and abhor an idle heart in hearing, as well as an idle minister.¹⁰

Keep your Bible open and follow the textual argument. Look up the references mentioned. Take notes. Identify the theme. List the subpoints and applications. Ask God to help you see exactly where he wants you to apply the Scriptures being preached to your life.

There is no getting around it: worship requires *discipline*. We are to worship God “in spirit and truth,” and this is impossible without discipline. We must discipline ourselves to know God’s truth so we can worship him in truth. We must discipline our human spirits, so that authentic affections pour in spirit from our hearts to God. We must discipline ourselves in preparation for corporate worship, and that does not begin with the thirty seconds after we have breathlessly sat down.

On Saturday

I have asked Christ to make me sensitive tomorrow to needs of people in the body who are hurting.

10. Quoted in Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 254.

I have solved the “Sunday clothes hassle” by making sure that what I will wear is ready today.

I have spent time in confession so all will be right between myself and my Lord when we meet tomorrow.

I have determined to get to bed early so I will be refreshed and ready for church tomorrow.

I have planned on sustaining the delight of this time with Christ and his people by guarding against Sunday afternoon infringements.

On Sunday

I have gotten up in plenty of time so I will not feel rushed.

I have programmed my morning so I will not just arrive at church on time, but get there early.

I have eaten a good breakfast, so an empty stomach will not detract from my worship.

I have my Bible in hand plus a pen and paper for taking notes.

I have left for church with a great sense of expectancy because I know Christ will be there.¹¹

Finally, we must also understand that the discipline of worship is the way to bounding *gladness* in worship. As Eugene Peterson has so well said, “Worship is an *act* which develops feelings for God, not a *feeling* for God which is expressed in an act of worship.”¹²

Let us discipline ourselves for the purpose of worship!

Food for Thought

Which is more important—a *habit* of worship or a *heart* of worship? Which do you experience most frequently? Why? If change is needed, how will you go about working with God to effect that change?

John 4:23 tells us God is *seeking* worshipers. Is he being selfish? Why or why not? Why does God want us to worship him?

What does God’s presence have to do with our worshipping him (see Heb. 13:5; Matt. 18:20)? Generally, when you are worshipping

11. From a pamphlet titled *Preparation for Sunday* by David R. Mains.

12. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 50.

God, whether by yourself or with a group of believers, do you find the divine presence encouraging or intimidating?

What more do you (and your family) need to do to be spiritually prepared for Sunday morning worship at your church? Make a list, share it with the others in your household, and work together at putting it to work.

In your own words, what does it mean to worship God “in spirit and truth”? How does your experiencing this or not experiencing this affect your Christian walk?

What type of worship is identified in Romans 12:1? How long has it been since you’ve done what this verse says to do?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Make a list of your ten favorite passages about the character or promises of God. Then make those passages, plus appropriate Christian songs (whether traditional or contemporary), the basis for a worship service to be celebrated with others in your family, with a Bible study group, or even with your entire church.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

- A Better Way* (Michael Horton)
- The Family Worship Book* (Terry L. Johnson)
- Engaging with God* (David G. Peterson)
- How to Worship Jesus Christ* (Joseph Carroll)
- A Neglected Grace* (Jason Helopoulos)
- Sing!* (Keith and Kristyn Getty)
- True Worshipers* (Bob Kauflin)
- Worship Matters* (Bob Kauflin)

Other Resources

In the Resources section of this book, see:

Section E: “Hymns for Personal Adoration and Praise”

Section F: “Choruses and Scripture Songs for Personal Adoration and Praise”

Section G: “Praise Psalms Especially Appropriate for Personal Worship”

PART 4



CHARACTER

Discipline of Integrity

The Day America Told the Truth, a book based on an extensive opinion survey that guaranteed the anonymity of the participants, revealed an alarming crisis of integrity in America.

Only 13 percent of Americans said they see all Ten Commandments as binding on us today. Ninety-one percent confessed that they lie regularly—at home and at work. In answer to the question “Whom have you regularly lied to?” the statistics included 86 percent to parents and 75 percent to friends. A third of AIDS carriers admitted to not having told their lovers. Most workers owned up to goofing off for an average of seven hours—almost one whole day—a week, and half admitted that they regularly called in sick when they were perfectly well.

The survey also posed the question “What are you willing to do for \$10 million?” Twenty-five percent said they would abandon their families, 23 percent would become a prostitute for a week, and 7 percent would kill a stranger.¹ Think of it! In a gathering of one hundred Americans, there are seven who would consider killing you if the price were right. In one thousand there are seventy!

Even casual observers can see the demise of integrity in the whole range of American culture—with its Watergates, Irangates, Deflatagates, Emissionsgates; the much chronicled dalliances of prominent senators; congressmen and a president perjuring themselves; the

1. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), 200, 201, 45, 48, 136, 154, 155, 65, 66.

creation of “fake news”; the artful embellishment of academic records; and even the war records of presidents.² The straightforward poem/prayer of Fred Hollomon, former chaplain of the Kansas Senate, comes as no surprise:

Omniscient Father:
 Help us to know who is telling the truth.
 One side tells us one thing,
 and the other just the opposite.
 And if neither side is telling the truth,
 we would like to know that, too.
 And if each side is telling half the truth,
 give us the wisdom to put the right halves together.
 In Jesus’s name, Amen.³

Truth and integrity have not only proven elusive for many in leadership, but likewise for our future leaders, some of whom are literally schooling themselves in deception. A large survey of high school students by Rutgers University revealed that 64 percent had cheated on a test, 58 percent had plagiarized, and 95 percent had cheated in one form or another.⁴ The numbers are lower for college and graduate school, but not by enough.⁵ What a way to cheapen your education and establish a fraudulent character for life!

Today in American business there is epidemic ethical decline. Some years ago, *The Wall Street Journal* asked the Gallup Organization to conduct a now-famous survey among business executives. The study revealed a shocking disparity between top executives and the general population. Eighty percent of the executives confessed to driving while drunk, as compared to 33 percent of the general public. Seventy-eight percent admitted using a company phone for personal long-distance calls. Thirty-five percent had cheated on their income tax reports. And 75 percent had stolen work supplies for personal use, as compared to

2. Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 46–53.

3. Quoted in Ron Luce, *The Power of One: Stand Up, Be Counted, Make a Difference* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003).

4. See “Plagiarism: Facts & Stats,” Plagiarism.org, June 7, 2017, <https://www.plagiarism.org/article/plagiarism-facts-and-stats>.

5. See “Plagiarism: Facts & Stats.”

40 percent of the general populace.⁶ The sad truth is that a resident of Beverly Hills, as compared with a resident of the impoverished South Bronx, is more likely to have used illegal drugs, have committed a crime, or had an extramarital affair.⁷

These are damning statistics for the upscale life, but such numbers by no means let the general populace off the hook. In a paper presented at a symposium on employee theft, sponsored by the American Psychological Association, the authors pointed out that inventory shortages cost department stores and specialty chains \$8 *billion* every year. Of that, 10 percent is attributed to clerical error, 30 percent to shoplifting, and a whopping 60 percent—or \$16 million a day—to theft by employees.⁸

Significantly, the bulk of the blame for declining ethics resides with men, as the authors of *The Day America Told the Truth* are quick to point out:

Our current ethics at work are low, but they'd be a lot lower were it not for the great number of women who've entered the work force in recent years.

When we compared the answers given by the two sexes, we confirmed that women in this country simply behave more ethically than men.

On every question we probed, American women in the workplace held to a higher moral standard than men did. . . .

Less than half as many women as men believe that the only way to get ahead is to cheat, and not as many believe in politics rather than work as the way to success. . . .

In addition, women are much less willing to compromise their values to get ahead and somewhat more willing to quit as a matter of principle if they learn that their company is engaging in illegal activities. . . .

If valuable company property is stolen, the thief will be a man six times in seven.⁹

6. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 25, quoting from *The Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 1989.

7. Patterson and Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth*, 166, 167.

8. Sherman and Hendricks, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, 26.

9. Patterson and Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth*, 157, 158.

The truth is, American culture is in big trouble. The colossal slide of integrity (especially masculine ethics) has grim spiritual, domestic, and political implications that threaten the survival of life as we know it.

But for the Christian, the most chilling fact is this: *there is little statistical difference between the ethical practices of the religious and the nonreligious*. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, in their book *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, note Gallup's statistics that 43 percent of non-church attenders admit to pilfering work supplies, compared to 37 percent of attenders.

But is this true of *real* Christians? Sherman and Hendricks answer yes. The general ethical conduct of Christians varies only slightly from that of non-Christians, with grand exceptions, of course.¹⁰

Sadly, Christians are *almost* as likely as non-Christians to:

- Falsify their income tax returns
- Commit plagiarism (teachers especially know this)
- Bribe to obtain a building permit (because "that's the way business is done")
- Ignore construction specs
- Illegally copy a computer program
- Steal time
- Exaggerate a product
- Tell people what they want to hear
- Selectively obey the laws

Many reasons can be cited for this. A popular culprit is the subjectivism and moral relativism of our day. With people such as Justice John Harlan giving the doctrinaire statement "One man's vulgarity is another's lyric,"¹¹ and with the man in the street appealing to the supreme court of self—"My opinion is as good as yours!"—ethics and integrity suffer.

When a cultural icon such as Ernest Hemingway (who still arbitrates literary style) was an inveterate liar who misrepresented ev-

10. Patterson and Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth*, 29–31.

11. Quoted in Robert H. Bork, *The Tempting of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 248, 249.

everything—including his childhood, his athletic prowess, his military exploits, and his liaisons, so that he was, as one of his wives called him, “the biggest liar since Munchausen”¹²—how can we expect our culture to be otherwise? If our gods be mendacious frauds, how can we escape?

But the main reason for the integrity crisis is that we humans are fundamentally dishonest. We are congenital liars. Right smack in the middle of the apostle Paul’s string of observations on the depravity of man in Romans 3, we read, “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. ‘The venom of asps is under their lips’” (v. 13). No one has to instruct us in the art of dishonesty. Even once we are regenerated, if we do not discipline ourselves under the lordship of Christ, we return to deceit like a duck to water.

Our situation is exacerbated by the subtle seas of deception that surge back and forth over our culture through its media, so much so that we scarcely know where reality is. Many Christian men traffic in delusion. Some who lack integrity do not even know it.

God on Integrity

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11) knew they were deceiving the church when they sold some property and agreed to act as if they were giving all of the proceeds when they were giving only part. But the story does not give the impression that they thought what they were doing lacked integrity. After all, they were doing something good and generous.

If it happened today, Ananias would wait until the organ was playing “I Surrender All” and then humbly come forward, laying his check at Peter’s feet and mumbling, “I wish I had more to give, Peter, but this is all I have.”

Imagine the scene in the early church: Ananias’s heart was thumping rapidly under the thrill of his public display, but Peter was not smiling. Somehow he knew!

“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after

12. Quoted in Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 154, 155.

it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” (Acts 5:3–4)

Poor Ananias. His racing heart stopped, and he could not breathe. Peter’s grim visage gave way to darkness as Ananias’s life ended, and the young men came and carried Ananias out—as they later did his dead widow.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira shocks us because they suffered death for such a “small” infraction. So they misrepresented the percentage of their profits that they gave—why death? After all, *they did give*—which is more than many people do!

The answer is, the church cannot prosper with deception among its members—and God wanted to make this clear for all time. Deception wounds the body of Christ—makes it dysfunctional—and is a *sin against God*! This is why Peter cried to Ananias at the moment of his death, “You have not lied to man but to God” (v. 4).

Integrity is one of the greatest needs of the church today. The church needs people who not only refrain from blatant lying, but are free from hypocrisy. Paul says, in fact, that honesty is necessary for growth in the church: “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Literally, the divine medium for authentic church growth is *truthing in love*—speaking and doing truth to one another.

The church’s great need for integrity is directly linked to the needs of our lost world, for the world longs for liberation from dishonesty. Sure, it cultivates and promotes deception, but deep down inside, many people long to escape the pretense. A substantial number of people outside the four walls of the church will eagerly embrace the faith of believers who model the honesty and integrity for which they long.

Helmut Thielicke, the great German theologian and pastor who maintained his integrity all through Adolf Hitler’s Third Reich, said, “The avoidance of one small fib . . . may be a stronger confession of faith than a whole ‘Christian philosophy’ championed in lengthy, forceful discussion.”¹³

13. Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 55.

A truthful spirit is a great evangelistic tool. I have known people who were magnetized to Christ because they saw this quality in a church or individual. Integrity, for some, is a tantalizing cool drink in the secular desert of delusion.

Men, the experience of Ananias and Sapphira tells us that our integrity matters to God. We need to declare with Job, “Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me” (Job 27:5).

The Shape of Integrity

It is essential that we understand that the biblical idea of integrity has the root idea of completeness, that a person of integrity is whole.¹⁴ The derivation of our English word *integrity* from the Latin emphasizes the same quality because *integritas* means “wholeness,” “entireness,” “completeness.”¹⁵

Integrity characterizes the entire person, not just part of him. He is righteous and honest through and through. He is not only that inside, but also in his outer actions. Psalm 15 celebrates the completeness of the man of integrity:

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?
Who shall dwell on your holy hill?
He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;
who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;
in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things shall never be moved.

Surveys indicate that people usually lie to cover up something they did wrong.¹⁶ Take, for example, the employee who negligently jams

14. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 1070–71.

15. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 21.

16. Sherman and Hendricks, *Keeping Your Ethical Edge Sharp*, 91.

the copy machine, then slyly covers himself by calling out, “OK, who jammed the machine?”

The second most frequent reason for lying is to keep things pleasant emotionally. Have you avoided expressing the truth for the sake of peace?

This does not mean we have license to tell everyone what we think no matter what—a spiritual mandate to always speak our minds. Rather, we are never to deceive others by omission or by using unclear talk to save face or avoid offending another. We are to be “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Integrity demands that all speech be *intentionally* true. Such speech gives pleasure to God: “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight” (Prov. 12:22).

Next, a man of integrity never cheats or defrauds another; that is, he never steals. Proverbs tells us, “Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the LORD” (20:10); “A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight” (11:1); and “Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel” (20:17).

There are so many ways to casually steal that the consensus regards as justified: taking office supplies from work, taking long lunches, charging extravagant meals, accepting gifts from customers, ignoring copyright laws, claiming improper deductions, and using your cell phone while on company time. But the man of integrity avoids all such temptations, to God’s glory.

The man of God keeps his word. He never promises to do something he does not intend to do. And he follows through—he does not conveniently “forget” what he has promised. One is never “put on” by the man of integrity. Faithfulness, one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), is his trademark. Even when he discovers that keeping his word is not to his benefit, he does so, for as the psalmist says, the man of integrity “swears to his own hurt and does not change” (Ps. 15:4). This man, Scripture says, is unique: “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?” (Prov. 20:6). Integrity is a rare beauty.

Last, a man of integrity is a man of principle. We must understand that being a man of principle means more than having principles.

It means having the courage to stand up for your convictions when it costs you. Years ago, it took my daughter and son-in-law, Brian and Holly Hoch, and their three children months to find housing in Vienna, Austria, largely because housing was scarce, and because the owners of some apartments they found wanted them to sign a document that falsely stated they would be paying less than the actual rent. My daughter and her family were at that point victims of their integrity—an enviable victimization.

The Benefits of Integrity

Integrity can cost you a relationship, reputation, promotion, job, even your life. But integrity also has its benefits.

Character

There can be no doubt that integrity is its own reward, for it produces character, and notwithstanding divine intervention, character determines the course of one's life here on earth. Even more, it will glorify God for eternity by his grace.

Conscience

Closely aligned with this is the parallel benefit of a clear conscience. This is a prime benefit, because if you have a clear conscience you will be able to stand firmly in the storms that swirl around you. If your heart does not condemn you, but affirms you, you can be a tower of strength. "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely" (Prov. 10:9).

Intimacy

But the benefits of integrity go even further, because integrity of soul assures a deep intimacy with God. God desires truth in the inward parts (Ps. 51:6), and when it is there, he rejoices in his fellowship with that heart. A transparent, honest soul is a haven for the Spirit of God.

Elevation

There are also outward benefits of integrity, for integrity elevates the lives of believers. Integrity encourages more integrity, ethical conduct

spawns further ethical conduct, honesty leads to honesty, character produces character! Solomon says, “The righteous who walks in his integrity—blessed are his children after him!” (Prov. 20:7).

Evangelism

Lastly, as before, I mention the evangelistic magnetism of integrity. The following ad appeared in *The East African Standard* in Nairobi:

ALL DEBTS TO BE PAID

I ALLAN HARANGUI ALIAS WANIEK HARANGUI, of P. O. Box 40380, Nairobi, have dedicated services to the Lord Jesus Christ. I must put right all my wrongs. If I owe you any debt or damage personally or any of the companies I have been director or partner i.e.

GUARANTEED SERVICES LTD.

WATERPUMPS ELECTRICAL

AND GENERAL CO. SALES AND SERVICES

Please contact me or my advocates J. K. Kibicho and Company, Advocates, P.O. Box 73137, Nairobi for a settlement. No amount will be disputed.

GOD AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST BE GLORIFIED.

For a golden moment all of the great city of Nairobi took note that Jesus Christ had made an ethical difference in a man’s life. And no doubt souls were turned to Christ as a result. Integrity and evangelism are a potent combination.

We can hardly overstate the importance of integrity to a generation of believers that is so much like the world in its ethical conduct. The world is *dying* for us to have integrity! Its enviable benefits of *character*, a *clear conscience*, deep *intimacy with God*, the *elevation of others*, and the *winning of the lost* all powerfully argue its importance.

And the stilled hearts of Ananias and Sapphira declare its urgency.

The Discipline of Integrity

The urgency and importance of integrity suggests one thing to the serious heart—the necessity of discipline. God wants us to be men

of principle. G. K. Chesterton said, “Morality, like art, consists in drawing a line somewhere.”¹⁷ We must let God’s Word draw the line, not culture. The elevated ethics of Holy Scripture must be kept at all costs, even though culture thinks them quaint and impossible. And we must discipline ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit to maintain them.

Here news correspondent Wesley Pippert offers wise advice:

One of the most effective disciplines I know is not to do something that first time—for repetition will come far easier. . . . Not doing something for the first time is a tremendous bulwark against not doing it later. As moral philosopher Sissela Bok has said in her book, *Lying* (New York: Pantheon, 1978, 28), “It is easy to tell a lie but hard to tell only one.” Discipline will help us avoid the guilt that we often experience by dabbling in things we shouldn’t. An important fruit of discipline is integrity. Few things are more important than whether one has a good reputation, a “good name.” Not all people are gregarious or outgoing. Not all people are sought after or loveable. But everyone can have integrity. Integrity flows more out of a disciplined character than a daring personality.¹⁸

We must discipline ourselves to be truthful in all that we say. The Scriptures’ intent is not to rule out having fun with our friends, indulging in playful exaggeration, or even telling fanciful tales. But God’s Word does call us to be honest through and through, to never lie or equivocate to save face or to stay in the good graces of others.

We must never be careless about the truth. We must measure our words. If we deceive, we must immediately admit it, because deception can become a habit. William James, in his classic *Principles of Psychology*, put it this way:

Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state. We are spinning our own fates, good

17. Quoted in Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 36.

18. Quoted in Myrna Grant, ed., *Letters to Graduates* (Nashville: n.p., 1990), 82.

or evil, and never to be undone. Every smallest stroke or virtue or vice leaves its ever so little scar. The drunken Rip Van Winkle, in Jefferson's play, excuses himself for every fresh dereliction by saying "I won't count this time!" Well! He may not count it, but it is being counted nonetheless. Down among his nerve cells and fibers the molecules are counting it, registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes. Nothing we ever do is, in strict scientific literalness, wiped out. Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one.¹⁹

We must discipline ourselves to tell the truth, for truth can become a habit—something we do without thinking.

Habitual honesty—integrity—must be the goal in all our dealings. We must discipline ourselves not to succumb to the so-called "small things": the occasional phone theft, time stealing, misappropriating of office supplies, indulging ourselves in the largesse of an expense account, estimating mileage to our favor, or twisting the truth ever so slightly.

If this discipline becomes habitual, the "big things" will take care of themselves.

Sow an act,
 and you reap a habit.
 Sow a habit
 and you reap a character.
 Sow a character
 and you reap a destiny for yourself
 your family
 your church
 your world.²⁰

Food for Thought

In what ways do you see a drought of truth and integrity in your culture? What are the effects, practically and specifically, in the nation,

19. William James, *Principles of Psychology* (Chicago, London, Toronto: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 83.

20. *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 405.

the family, the workplace, and the church? How do these results affect you personally?

Review the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Do you think their punishment was too severe? Too lenient? (Be honest!) What does this early-church account teach you today?

Do you agree with Helmut Thielicke's statement "The avoidance of one small fib . . . may be a stronger confession of faith than a whole 'Christian philosophy' championed in lengthy, forceful discussion"? What small fibs do you sometimes find yourself telling? What can you do practically to stop doing this?

Do you share Job's determination on this matter: "Till I die I will not put away my integrity" (Job 27:5)? Why or why not?

Considering the connection between integrity and wholeness, what is really at stake in the twenty-first-century quest for wholeness and integrated health (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual)? What does it mean to you to be "whole"? Are you willing to pay God's price for integrity?

Which benefits of integrity mean the most to you personally? What are you willing to do to make these traits real in your life? What part does God play in this?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Read through Psalm 15, making a list of every mentioned character trait or personal action that relates to integrity and its companions, truth and honesty. Then go back through the list and indicate how you are doing on each point (poor, fair, varies, consistently obedient, etc.). Now pray for God's help in living all this out.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

The Art of Turning (Kevin DeYoung)

Christian Ethics (Wayne Grudem)

Conscience (Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley)

Delighting in the Law of the Lord (Jerram Barrs)

How Should We Then Live? (Francis Schaeffer)

The Power of Integrity (John MacArthur)

When People Are Big and God Is Small (Ed Welch)

Discipline of Tongue

In 1899, four reporters from Denver, Colorado, met by chance on a Saturday night in a Denver railroad station. Al Stevens, Jack Tournay, John Lewis, and Hal Wilshire worked for the four Denver papers: the *Post*, the *Times*, the *Republican*, and the *Rocky Mountain News*.

Each had the unenviable task of finding a scoop for the Sunday edition. They hoped to spot a visiting celebrity arriving that evening by train. However, none showed up, so the reporters wondered what on earth they would do.

As they discussed options in a nearby saloon, Al suggested they make up a story. The other three laughed at first. But before long they were all agreed—they would come up with such a whopper that no one would question it and their respective editors would congratulate them on their find.

A phony local story would be too obvious, so they decided to write about someplace far away. They agreed on China. “What if we say that some American engineers, on their way to China, told us they are bidding on a major job: the Chinese government is planning to demolish the Great Wall?”

Harold was not sure the story would be believable. Why would the Chinese ever tear down the Great Wall of China? “As a sign of international goodwill, to invite foreign trade.”

By 11 p.m. the four reporters had worked out the details, and the next day all four Denver newspapers carried the story—on the

front page. The *Times* headline that Sunday read: “Great Chinese Wall Doomed! Peking Seeks World Trade!”

Of course, the story was a ridiculous tall tale made up by four opportunistic newsmen in a hotel bar. But amazingly their story was taken seriously and soon ran in newspapers in the Eastern U.S. and even abroad.

As the story goes, when the citizens of China heard that the Americans were sending a demolition crew to dismantle the Great Wall, most were indignant, even enraged. Particularly angry were members of a secret society made up of Chinese patriots who were against any kind of foreign intervention. Moved to action by the news story and other events, they attacked the foreign embassies in Peking and murdered hundreds of missionaries from abroad.

In the next two months, twelve thousand troops from six countries, working together, invaded China to protect their countrymen. The bloodshed of that time, exacerbated by a journalistic hoax fabricated in a saloon in Denver, has been known ever since as the Boxer Rebellion.¹

What power the written or spoken word has! Nations have risen and nations have fallen to the tongue. Lives have been elevated and lives have been cast down by human speech. Goodness has flowed like a sweet river from our mouths, and so has sewage. The tiny tongue is a mighty force indeed.

Intrinsic Power

James, the Lord’s brother, understood this as well as any man in history, and through the use of graphic analogies he has given us the most penetrating exposition of the tongue anywhere in literature, sacred or secular: “If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies. . . . Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things” (James 3:3–5).

The horse is an incredibly powerful animal. If you set 550 pounds (as much as a puffing Olympic heavyweight lifter can hoist overhead) on a horse’s back, it will barely snort as it stands breathing easily

1. Paul Aurandt, ed., *More of Paul Harvey’s the Rest of the Story* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 136–138.

under the burden. The same horse, unburdened, can sprint a quarter-mile in about twenty-five seconds. A horse is half a ton of raw power! Yet, place a bridle on its head, a bit in its mouth, and a 100-pound woman on its back who knows what she is doing, and the animal can literally be made to dance.

James observed the same phenomenon in ancient ships, as vessels small and large were steered by amazingly small rudders. Today it is still the same, whether it be an acrobatic ski boat or the USS *Enterprise*. He who controls the rudder controls the ship.

So it is with the mighty tongue, that “movable, muscular organ, attached . . . to the floor of the mouth.”² “The tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things,” says James (v. 5). Or, as J. B. Phillips has helpfully paraphrased it, “the human tongue is physically small, but what tremendous effects it can boast of” (Phillips). Though it weighs only two ounces, it can legitimately boast of its disproportionate power to determine human destiny. The lives of Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill bear eloquent testimony to the dark and bright sides of the tongue’s power. On one side of the English Channel, the führer harangued a vast multitude with his hypnotic cadences. On the other side, the prime minister’s brilliant, measured utterances pulled a faltering nation together for its “finest hour.”

But we need not look to the drama of nations to see the truth of James’s words. Our own lives are evidence enough. Never doubt the power of the tiny tongue—and never underestimate it.

Destructive Power

James’s principal concern is with the destructive power of the tongue, and this produces a most provocative statement: “How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell” (vv. 5–6).

The tongue has awesome potential for harm, as the forest fire analogy suggests. As the story goes, on Sunday evening, October 8,

2. *The Free Dictionary*, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/tongue>.

1871, poor Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over the lantern as she was being milked, starting the Great Chicago Fire. That disaster blackened three and one-half miles of the city, destroying over seventeen thousand buildings before it was checked by gunpowder explosions on the south line of the fire. The fire lasted two days and cost over 250 lives.

But ironically that was not the greatest inferno in the Midwest that year. Historians tell us that on the same day that dry autumn a spark ignited a raging fire in the North Woods of Wisconsin, a blaze that burned for an entire month, taking more lives than the Chicago Fire. A veritable firestorm destroyed billions of yards of precious timber—all from one spark!

The tongue has that scope of inflammatory power in human relationships, and James is saying that those who misuse the tongue are guilty of spiritual arson. A mere spark from an ill-spoken word can produce a firestorm that annihilates everyone it touches. Furthermore, because the tongue is a "a world of unrighteousness," it contains and conveys all the world system's wickedness. It is party to every evil there is and actively intrudes its evil into our lives.

What is the effect of the tongue's cosmic wickedness? "The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life" (v. 6). "Course of life" is literally "the wheel of our genesis," with "genesis" referring to our human life or existence.³ What an apt description of human experience! About nine-tenths of the flames we experience in our lives come from the tongue.

Having grabbed our imaginations with his graphic language, James adds the final touch: "and set on fire by hell." Here the language means *continually* set on fire. James uses the same word for hell that his brother Jesus used—"gehenna." It is derived from the name of the perpetually burning garbage dump outside Jerusalem, a place of fire

3. Douglas Moo, *The Letters of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 125. Ralph P. Martin says, "The phrase, and others parallel to it, were used in the Orphic religion to describe the unending cycle of reincarnations from which deliverance was sought. But there is sufficient evidence to show that what had originally been a technical religious or philosophical expression had become 'popularized' and was used in James' day as a way of describing the course of human life, perhaps with an emphasis on the 'ups and downs' of life." *James*, Word Biblical Commentary 48 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 115.

and filth where, as Jesus said, “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:47).

Can anyone miss the point? The uncontrolled tongue has a direct pipeline to hell! Fueled by hell, it burns our lives with its filthy fires. But it is also, as John Calvin says, an “instrument for catching, encouraging, and increasing the fires of hell.”⁴

Taking James’s words seriously, we recognize that the tongue has more destructive power than a hydrogen bomb, for the bomb’s power is physical and temporal, whereas the tongue’s effects are spiritual and eternal. Walter Wangerin Jr., in his collection of short stories *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith*, turns to nature for a chilling metaphor of the tongue’s power. He explains that a female spider is often a widow for embarrassing reasons—she regularly eats those who come her way. Lonely suitors and visitors alike quickly become corpses, and her dining room is a morgue. A visiting fly, having become captive, will appear to be whole, but the spider has drunk his insides so that he has become his own hollow casket. That’s not a pleasant thought, especially if you have a touch of arachnophobia, as I do!

The reason for this macabre procedure is that the female spider has no stomach and so is incapable of digesting anything within her. Through tiny punctures she injects her digestive juices into a fly so that his insides are broken down and turned into warm soup. “This soup she swills,” says Wangerin, “even as most of us swill souls of one another after having cooked them in various enzymes: guilt, humiliations, subjectivities, cruel love—there are a number of fine, acidic mixes. And some among us are so skilled with the hypodermic word that our dear ones continue to sit up and to smile, quite as though they were still alive.”⁵

This is a gruesome but effective metaphor to describe the destructive power of evilly intended words. Words do not dissolve mere organs and nerves but souls! This world is populated by walking human caskets because countless lives have been dissolved and sucked empty by another’s words.

4. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke Volume III and the Epistle of James and Jude*, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 291.

5. Walter Wangerin Jr., *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 26.

Verbal Cyanide

Significantly, James does not tell us how the tongue's destructive power is manifested in human speech. He knows that the spiritual mind, informed by the Scriptures, will have no problem in making the connections.

Gossip

The tongue's destructive power in gossip leads the list, of course. A physician in a Midwestern city was a victim of a disgruntled patient who tried to ruin him professionally through rumor, and almost did. Several years later the gossip had a change of heart and wrote the doctor asking his forgiveness, and he forgave her. But there was no way she could erase the story, nor could he. As Solomon wisely observed, "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body" (Prov. 18:8). Gossip is greedily picked up and stored away by the hearers like tasty tidbits. Vigorous denial by the doctor would only bring more suspicion—"He protests too much!" The damage was done. Thereafter the innocent doctor would always look into certain people's eyes and wonder if they had heard the story—and if they believed it.

Gossip often veils itself in acceptable conventions such as "Have you heard . . . ?" or "Did you know . . . ?" or "They tell me . . .," or "Keep this to yourself, but . . .," or "I do not believe it is true, but I heard that . . .," or "I wouldn't tell you, except that I know it will go no further." Of course, the most infamous such rationalization in Christian circles is "I am telling you this so you can pray." This seems so pious, but the heart that feeds on hearing evil reports is a tool of hell, and it leaves flaming fires in its wake. Oh, the heartache that comes from the tongue.

Innuendo

A cousin of gossip is innuendo. Consider the ship's first mate who after a drunken binge was written up by the captain on the ship's log: "Mate drunk today." The mate's revenge? Some months later he surreptitiously wrote on his own entry, "Captain sober today." So it goes

with the word unsaid, the awkward silence, the raised eyebrows, the quizzical look—all freighted with the misery of hell.

Flattery

Gossip involves saying behind a person's back what you would never say to his or her face. Flattery means saying to a person's face what you would never say behind his or her back. The Scriptures warn us repeatedly against flatterers, for they are destructive people who carry a legion of unwholesome motives: "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet" (Prov. 29:5); "A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin" (26:28); and "May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, 'With our tongue we will prevail . . .'" (Ps. 12:3–4).

Criticism

Fault-finding seems endemic to the Christian church. Perhaps this is because a taste of righteousness can be easily perverted into an overweening sense of self-righteousness and judgmentalism. Once while John Wesley was preaching, he noticed a lady in the audience who was known for her critical attitude. All through the service she sat and stared at his new tie. When the meeting ended, she came up to him and said very sharply, "Mr. Wesley, the strings on your tie are much too long. It's an offense to me!" He asked if any of the ladies present happened to have a pair of scissors in their purse. When the scissors were handed to him, he gave them to his critic and asked her to trim the streamers to her liking. After she clipped them off near the collar, he said, "Are you sure they're all right now?"

"Yes, that's much better."

"Then let me have those shears a moment," said Wesley. "I'm sure you wouldn't mind if I also gave you a bit of correction. I must tell you, madam, that your tongue is an offense to me—it's too long! Please stick it out . . . I'd like to take some off."

On another occasion someone said to Wesley, "My talent is to speak my mind." Wesley replied, "That's one talent God wouldn't care a bit if you buried!" This is good advice for all Christians.

Diminishment

In a subsequent context James gives the command, “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers” (4:11)—literally, “Do not speak down on one another, brothers.” James forbids *any speech* (whether true or false) that runs down another person.

Certainly no Christian should ever be a party to slander—making false charges against another’s reputation. Yet some are. But even more penetrating is the challenge to refrain from any speech that intends to run down someone else, even if it is totally true. Personally I can think of few commands that go against commonly accepted conventions more than this, for most people think it is okay to convey negative information if it is true. We understand that lying is immoral. But is passing along damaging truth immoral? It seems almost a moral responsibility! By such reasoning, criticism behind another’s back is thought to be all right as long as it is based on fact. Likewise, denigrating gossip (of course it is never called gossip!) is seen as okay if the information is true. Thus, many believers use truth as a license to righteously diminish others’ reputations.

Related to this, some reject running down another behind his back, but believe it is okay if done face to face. These people are driven by a “moral” compulsion to make others aware of their shortcomings. Fault-finding is, to them, a spiritual gift—a license to conduct spiritual search-and-destroy missions.

What people like this do not know is that most people are painfully aware of their own faults; they would so like to overcome them, and are trying very hard to do so. Then someone mercilessly assaults them, believing they are doing their spiritual duty—and, oh, the hurt!

This destructive speaking down against others can also manifest itself in the subtle art of minimizing another’s virtues and accomplishments. After being with such people, your mental abilities, athletic accomplishments, musical skills, and domestic virtues seem not to be quite as good as they were a few minutes earlier. Some of this feeling might have come from their words about your Steinway—“What a nice little piano”—or from surprised exclamations about what you did not know. It was also the tone of the voice, the cast of the eye, and the surgical silences.

There are many sinful reasons why brothers in Christ talk down one another. Revenge over some slight, real or imagined, may be the motivation of “Christian” slander. Others imagine that their spirituality and sensitivity equips them to pull others from their pedestals and unmask their hypocrisies. Gideon once righteously cried, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” (Judg. 7:20), and we may do the same, but in our case it is too often a sword of self-righteousness.

Talking down others may also come from the need to elevate oneself—like the Pharisee who thanked God he was not like other sinners “or even like this tax collector” (Luke 18:11). We thus enjoy the dubious elevation of walking on the bruised heads of others.

Sometimes this diminishing of others simply comes from too much empty talk. People do not have much to talk about, so they fuel the fires of conversation with the flesh of others. The abilities and motivations of the body of Christ to run itself down could fill a library.

We are all skillful in rationalizing such talk, but God’s Word still speaks: “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.”

Verbal cyanide comes in many forms. *Gossip*, *innuendo*, *flattery*, *criticism*, and *diminishment* are only a few of the venoms with which Christians inject each other. And the results are universal: toxic gastric juices brew a Devil’s feast—the swill of souls.

Worthless Religion

James’s words are consistently surgical. But none are so penetrating as these: “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless” (1:26). An exercise in futility!

This is a spiritually terrifying statement, to say the least, for it cuts like a hot knife through warm butter, dissecting the cant and piety of the self-satisfied religious. An out-of-control tongue suggests bogus religion, no matter how well one’s devotion is carried out. The true test of a man’s spirituality is not his ability to speak, as we are apt to think, but rather his ability to bridle his tongue.

The Lord Jesus himself explained this in no uncertain terms in a heated exchange with the Pharisees: “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is

known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:33–34). *The tongue will inevitably reveal what is on the inside*. This is especially true under stress, when the tongue is compulsively revealing.

A preacher with hammer in hand, doing some work on a church workday, noticed that one of the men seemed to be following him around. Finally the preacher asked why. The man answered, “I just want to hear what you say when you hit your thumb.” The curious parishioner understood that would be the existential moment of truth. The same could be said of the domestic stresses of the home, where the mouth unfailingly trumpets one’s essence.

James does not mean that those who *sometimes* fall into this sin have a worthless religion, for all are guilty at times. Rather, he is saying that if anyone’s tongue is *habitually* unbridled, though his church attendance be impeccable, his Bible knowledge envied, his prayers many, his tithes exemplary, and he “thinks he is religious,” his “religion is worthless.”

The ever practical James has cut through all the religious decorum, but it is not butter that glistens under his knife, but the marrow of our souls. True religion controls the tongue.

Men, how is your religion? How is mine?

- Do you talk too much?
- Do you pass along choice morsels for others to gleefully take in?
- Do you say to people’s faces what you would never say behind their backs?
- Do you have the “gift” of a sharp tongue?
- Are people elevated or diminished through your words?

“The boneless tongue, so small and weak,
Can crush and kill,” declares the Greek,

“The tongue destroys a greater horde,”

The Turk asserts, “than does the sword.”

The Persian proverb wisely saith,

“A lengthy tongue—an early death!”

Or sometimes takes this form instead,

“Do not let your tongue cut off your head.”

“The tongue can speak a word whose speed,”
 Say the Chinese, “outstrips the steed.”
 The Arab sages said in part,
 “The tongue’s great storehouse is the heart.”
 From Hebrew was the maxim sprung,
 “Thy feet should slip, but ne’er the tongue.”
 The sacred writer crowns the whole,
 “Who keeps the tongue doth keep his soul.”⁶

The Disciplined Tongue

The tongue, so tiny, is immensely powerful. Four reporters, good old boys, having a few beers in a Denver bar in 1899, provided the specious spark that ignited the infamous Boxer Rebellion. The tongue is indeed mightier than generals and their armies. It can fuel our lives so that they become fiery furnaces, or it can cool our lives with the soothing wind of the Spirit. It can be forged by hell or it can be a tool of heaven.

Offered to God on the altar, the tongue has awesome power for good. It can proclaim the life-changing message of *salvation*: “And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” (Rom. 10:14–15). It has power for *sanctification* as we share God’s Word: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). It has power for *healing*: “For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more” (2 Cor. 7:5–7). It has power for *worship*: “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb. 13:15).

Men, it is up to us. No sweat, no sanctification!

First, *we must ask God to cauterize our lips*, confessing as Isaiah did, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and

6. James S. Hewitt, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 475.

I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). Then we need to submit to the cleansing touch: “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me’” (v. 8). Isaiah’s outline as a spiritual exercise, performed with all one’s heart, will work wonders in our lives. Let us all do this today!

Second, hand in hand with the first step there must be *an ongoing prayerfulness* regarding the use of our tongues—regular, detailed prayer. This, coupled with the first step, will work a spiritual miracle.

Third, we must resolve to *discipline ourselves* regarding the use of the tongue, making solemn resolutions such as the following:

- To perpetually and lovingly speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)
- To refrain from being party to or a conduit for gossip (Prov. 16:28; 17:9; 26:20)
- To refrain from insincere flattery (Prov. 26:28)
- To refrain from running down another (James 4:11)
- To refrain from degrading humor (Eph. 5:4)
- To refrain from sarcasm (Prov. 26:24–25)
- To memorize Scripture passages that teach the proper use of the tongue (See, in the Resources section of this book, a list of proverbs that provide instruction on the tongue: Section D, “Selected Proverbs Regarding the Tongue.”)

Men, discipline your tongue for the purpose of godliness!

As Charles H. Spurgeon said, “Who keeps the tongue doth keep his soul.”

Food for Thought

The author writes, “Lives have been elevated and lives have been cast down by human speech. Goodness has flowed like a sweet river from our mouths, and so has sewage.” In what ways have the words of others helped you or hurt you?

Which image for the tongue in James 3 speaks most pointedly to you? How have you tried to tame your tongue? Did it work? How has God helped you in this area?

Do you personally find it tempting to indulge in gossip? (Beware of calling this by some more benign name.) Why do you enjoy talking behind someone's back? How do you feel afterward? What kind of talk should replace the gossip?

Do you ever find yourself expressing sinful flattery? What do you hope to gain? What kind of talk should replace the flattery?

What exhortation concerning our words do we find in James 4:11? Again, identify your motives for such talk and the proper replacement(s).

Is it possible to sin even during prayer (see Luke 18:11)? Do you ever do this? Why? How do you see yourself, others, and God at such a time?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Jot down a brief thought about the tongue from each of the following passages, then summarize them all in a short paragraph: Proverbs 16:28; 17:9; 26:20, 24–25, 28; Isaiah 6:1–8; 2 Corinthians 7:5–7; Ephesians 4:15.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Good and Angry (David Powlison)

The Peacemaker (Ken Sande)

Resisting Gossip (Matthew C. Mitchell)

Respectable Sins (Jerry Bridges)

A Small Book about a Big Problem (Edward T. Welch)

War of Words (Paul David Tripp)

Other Resources

In the Resources section of this book, see:

Section D: "Selected Proverbs Regarding the Tongue"

Discipline of Work

Studs Terkel opens his widely acclaimed book *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do* with these words:

This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents. About shouting matches as well as fist fights. About nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations.¹

Millions of people regard their work as something they must bear, a living indignity. Their feelings are not without precedent. Herman Melville felt much the same: “They talk of dignity of work, bosh. The dignity is in the leisure.”

A dark cloud of dissatisfaction blankets today’s work force. Less than half of American workers say they are very satisfied with their jobs.² For many, work is dull and meaningless. This pervasive discontent has spawned the paradoxical problems of laziness on the one hand and overwork on the other. James Patterson and Peter Kim, in their book *The Day America Told the Truth*, tell us that only one in four

1. Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), xi.

2. “How Americans View Their Jobs,” Pew Research Center, October 6, 2016, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2016/10/06/3-how-americans-view-their-jobs/>.

employees gives his or her best effort on the job, and that about 20 percent of the average worker's time is wasted, thus producing, in effect, a four-day work week.³ Over half of that time is spent on personal cell phones, mostly looking up websites that company IT has blocked.

But though sloth is epidemic, so is overwork. Moonlighting is a way of life for a substantial part of our work force. This was given classic illustration when the workers at a rubber manufacturing plant in Akron, Ohio, were given six-hour workdays—and over half of them took on a second full-time job or a part-time job!⁴

The managerial counterpart to workers' moonlighting is the work-aholism of those who sublimate everything—family, leisure, friends, church—to career. The depths to which careerism can go is chronicled by Douglas LaBier, senior fellow of the Project on Technology, Work and Character in Washington, DC, who relates the “extreme but not uncommon expression” of a man who told him that he feared dying, not because of death, but because it would end his career.⁵

This mind-set has produced an unending list of shallow folk-religion epigrams that tout the requisite qualities of successful careers: *discipline*—“Creativity is 2 percent inspiration and 98 percent perspiration”; *goals*—“If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time”; *savvy*—“Success in life comes not from holding a good hand, but from playing a poor hand well”; *perseverance*—“Tough times never last, but tough people do”; *vision*—“Some men dream dreams and ask, Why? I dream dreams and ask, Why not?”; *self-confidence*—“Believe in God, and you are halfway there; believe in yourself, and you are three-quarters there.”⁶ The careerists who espouse the hubris of these credos wrongly think themselves heirs of the Protestant work ethic, but they are anything but that, as we shall see.

This delusion takes on personally tragic dimensions, because surveys have indicated that the work ethics of Christians and non-

3. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991), 155.

4. Leland Ryken, *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1987), 44.

5. Douglas LaBier, *Modern Madness* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1986), 25.

6. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1987), 27, who reference Dennis Waitley, *Seeds of Greatness* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), 199.

Christians are virtually identical. “At church they swear allegiance to values informed by creeds and Scriptures. But at work they bow to idols of expedience and career success. Moral camouflage has become *de rigueur* in the workplace.”⁷ The plain truth is, many Christian men miserably fail in their work ethics either because of sloth or over-work—or, ironically, both.

What we need is a work ethic that is informed by God’s Word and religiously lived out in the workplace and the church. The reason this is so important is that most of us spend eight to ten hours of our sixteen waking hours at work five or six days a week. So how we work not only reveals who we are, but determines what we are.

The Christian discipline of work must be observed *de rigueur* wherever God has placed us.

What the Bible Says about Work

The scriptural/Christian doctrine of work has an exalted origin because it is closely related to the doctrines of the creative energy of God and the image of God in man. We meet God the Creator as a worker in Genesis 1:1–2:2. In fact, that entire section is a log of God’s work, ending with the statement that upon completion “he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done” (2:2). As John Milton expressed it:

The planets in their stations listening stood,
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant.
“Open, ye everlasting gates,” they sung;
“Open, ye heavens, your living doors; let in
The great Creator, from his work return’d
Magnificent, his six days’ work, a World.”⁸

God’s being a worker endows all legitimate work with an intrinsic dignity.

The additional teaching of Genesis 1 is that “God created man in his own image” (1:27). We are compelled to understand from this that the image of God in man means man is to be a worker. The way

7. Sherman and Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, 18.

8. John Milton, *Paradise Lost: The Biblically Annotated Edition*, ed. Matthew Stallard (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), 277.

we work will reveal how much we have allowed the image of God to develop in us. There is immense dignity in work and in being workers.

Men, you must set this on your hearts: *Your work matters to God!*

A further observation of great importance is that work was given to man *before* the fall, before sin, before imperfection: “And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden. . . . The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (2:8, 15). From this we come to the inescapable conclusion that work is good, despite the modern thinking that it is evil and dehumanizing.

David Ben-Gurion, pioneer leader of the modern state of Israel, gave this memorable expression of the innate nobility of work:

We do not consider manual work as a curse, or a bitter necessity, not even as a means of making a living. We consider it as a high human function. As a basis of human life. The most dignified thing in the life of a human being and that ought to be free, creative. Men ought to be proud of it.⁹

Work under a Curse

So we see that God is a worker; that man, created in God’s image, also is a worker; and that work is good. But then come the fall and the curse:

Cursed is the ground because of you;
 in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.
 By the sweat of your face
 you shall eat bread,
 till you return to the ground,
 for out of it you were taken;
 for you are dust,
 and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3:17–19)

The curse made nature uncooperative, so that work became painful toil and man had to sweat for a living. Today our working conditions

9. Quoted in Tim Hansel, *When I Relax I Feel Guilty* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook, 1981), 34.

vary. Some sweat more than others. We may be in a better position than some. But the norm for the world is painful toil.

Even more, the normal experience of mankind in his labor is a malaise of futility. The writer of Ecclesiastes gave this universal expression as he bemoaned his plight from the perspective of one who leaves God out of his life. In 2:4–10 he described his professional success in acquiring vineyards, gardens, parks, slaves, flocks, and treasures. He was greater than all his contemporaries. He was denied nothing his eyes desired. But he concluded in verse 11, “Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” And he reiterated in verse 17, “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.”

Men, this is as far as work will take you apart from God. You will engage in it because, though fallen, you are in the image of God, and because work is part of the natural order, and it will produce its benefits and satisfactions—but it will also be toil, and its joys will be ephemeral. Terkel has revealed what has always been true under the sun when God is left out.

Work Redeemed

There is a Christian view of work that makes God the center of the equation. To be sure, God does not remove the curse and its painful, sweaty toil, but he does replace the meaninglessness.

Those who have been saved by faith fall heir to this grand declaration: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Being his workmanship, we are, as F. F. Bruce translates it, “his work of art, his masterpiece.”¹⁰ We are the pinnacle of God’s creation because, above every other created thing (even angels!), we are made in his image. This has mind-boggling possibilities. Beyond this, we have been regenerated—“created in Christ Jesus”—thus undergoing an even greater second creation. As Paul says

10. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1973), 52.

in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” God’s most stupendous creation is man made alive in Christ. To quote Jonathan Edwards, the “spiritual life which is reached in the work of conversion, is a far greater and more glorious effect than mere being and life.”¹¹ As subjects of Christ’s two creations, we are his ultimate workmanship!

As his masterworks, we have been “created in Christ Jesus for good works,” which God prepared in advance for us to do. Each of us has an eternally designed work assignment that includes the *task*, the *ability*, and a *place* to serve. Whatever the task to which he has called you, he will equip you for it as surely as he made the birds for flight. And in doing the works he has called you to do, you will be both more and more his workmanship and more and more your true self.

The practical implications of this are stupendous. There is no secular/sacred distinction, for all honest work done for the Lord is sacred. Historians agree that Martin Luther’s understanding of this revolutionized his life, and indeed the world of his day. He wrote: “Your work is a very sacred matter. God delights in it, and through it he wants to bestow his blessings on you. This praise of work should be inscribed on all tools, on the forehead and the faces that sweat from toiling.”¹² There are no first-class and second-class Christians because of their varying jobs. All work is sacramental in nature, be it checking groceries, selling stocks, cleaning teeth, driving a street sweeper, teaching, or painting trim.

We ought to do everything to the glory of God. Listen to God’s call to serve him:

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor. 10:31)

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col. 3:17)

11. Quoted in Clyde E. Fant Jr. and William M. Pinso Jr., eds., *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 74, which cites Edwards’s sermon “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence.”

12. Quoted in Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. 3 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1493.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Col. 3:23–24)

You may feel you are in a “nothing job.” Because of the curse, your job may involve painful toil and yield little satisfaction. But you can glorify God where you are by your heart attitude. You may feel your occupation is not holy, but it is if you see it so and do it for God’s glory. You are God’s masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God planned in advance for you. Men, everything about your work must be directed toward him—your attitudes, your integrity, your intensity, and your skill.

The Discipline of Work

The disciplines of work are *practical* disciplines. The Scriptures are very explicit here.

Energy

Both the Old and New Testaments are crystal clear on the necessity of energetic work as opposed to laziness. Proverbs mocks the false wisdom of the lazy:

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes?

There is more hope for a fool than for him.

The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the road!

There is a lion in the streets!”

As a door turns on its hinges,

so does a sluggard on his bed.

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;

it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.

The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes

than seven men who can answer sensibly.

(Prov. 26:12–16; cf. 6:6–11)

The New Testament Epistles likewise disparage all laziness—sort of a spiritual ultra-SlimFast for sluggards. Evidently the Thessalonian

church had some “brothers” who ostensibly lived “by faith” while they sponged off the church—Christian parasites, we might say. For such, Paul gave explicit advice: “Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. . . . For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (2 Thess. 3:6, 10).

In our Lord’s parable of the talents the master tells the servant who has done nothing with his talent, “You wicked and slothful servant!” (Matt. 25:26). No one has ever been both faithful to God and lazy! It is impossible. But perhaps the most withering epithet comes from Paul: “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). There is no escaping it—godliness is associated with hard work. You cannot be lazy and be a godly employee (or employer for that matter).

This said, it must be understood that the Scriptures do not commend the workaholicism that comes from pursuing wealth and a career instead of God’s glory. In this respect it should be noted that the hard-working Puritans were zealous in enforcing Sabbath laws without which employers would have made people work seven days a week.

The bottom line for us, men, is: Are we truly hard-working? And if so, are we doing it for God or merely for self?

Enthusiasm

A second, and parallel, aspect of the Christian work ethic is enthusiasm. “Whatever you do,” Paul told the Colossians, “work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23). To the Romans Paul admonished, “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (Rom. 12:11).

It is natural—actually quite easy—to be enthusiastic if your work is prominent, but less natural the more hidden it is, as the conductor of a great symphony orchestra once revealed when asked which was the most difficult instrument to play. “Second violin,” he answered.

“We can get plenty of first violinists. But to get someone who will play second violin with enthusiasm—that is a problem!”

And so it is. But doing one’s work with enthusiasm, even if hidden, plays for an audience far greater than that of the most famous symphony orchestras or world champion sports teams! If we could but really see this, our enthusiasm would never flag.

Wholeheartedness

A third aspect of the Christian work ethic, very close to energy and enthusiasm, but nevertheless bearing a distinctive and important nuance, is wholeheartedness:

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. (Eph. 6:5–8)

If you have ever observed a gym class doing push-ups, you will understand the sense of this verse. The coach orders everyone down and begins to intone “up, down, up, down.” All are following until he looks to the right, and in that moment the half on the left go on “hold” until his gaze begins to move back to the left, whereupon they begin to do proper push-ups again, and those on the right go on “hold.” There are employees who are all action when the boss is around, but otherwise loll around the watercooler. Out of his eye there is no energy, no enthusiasm, no heart.

The cheerful wholeheartedness recommended here comes, as before, when one’s work is done for the Lord. Men, we are to work as we did as boys when we knew our father was watching, because our heavenly Father is watching—always!

Excellence

Lastly, our work must be done with an eye to excellence. Dorothy Sayers said that the church in our time has forgotten that the secular vocation

is sacred; that a building must be good architecture before it can be a good church; that a painting must be well painted before it can be a good sacred picture; that work must be good work before it can call itself God's work.¹³

Work that is truly Christian is work well done.

Genesis 1 logs God's commitment to excellence when it says, "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (v. 31). Christians should always do good work. Christians ought to be the *best* workers wherever they are. They ought to have the *best* attitude, the *best* integrity, and the *best* dependability.

If what the pollsters tell us is true—that there is little difference in the work ethics of Christians and non-Christians—we have cause for alarm. If there is no difference, then large numbers of God's children have succumbed to the extremes of laziness and overwork that characterize today's work force. It also means that vast numbers of Christian lives are spiritually dysfunctional, for it is impossible to dedicate over half of one's waking hours (some 80,000 to 100,000 hours in an average lifetime) to a subbiblical work ethic and *not* suffer immense spiritual trauma.

We must recover the biblical truth—the Reformation truth—that our vocation, be it ever so humble, is a divine calling, and thus be liberated to do it for the glory of God. This alone will take the church out into the world.

Men, if you sense you are deficient, you need to do three things.

First, take an honest assessment of your life, using the Scriptures as a standard as you answer these questions:

- Do I do my work for the glory of God?
- Do I honestly work hard?
- Do I work with enthusiasm?
- Do I work wholeheartedly?
- Do I do excellent work?

Second, after honest evaluation, confess your sins.

And, third, commit your work life to the glory of God alone.

Will you do this now?

13. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed of Chaos* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), 57, quoted in Ryken, *Work and Leisure in Christian Perspective*, 174.

Food for Thought

How do you feel about the author's statement that "many Christian men miserably fail in their work ethics either because of sloth or over-work—or, ironically, both"? How does your work ethic match up with your beliefs? Explain.

What do we learn in Genesis 1:1–2:2 about the example God sets as a worker? How should what you see there be applied to your working life?

What does Genesis 3:17–19 tell us about the current nature of work? (Compare 2:4–11, 17.) Does this mean it is useless to seek fulfillment, usefulness, or success in our business, family, and church labors? If not, why not?

What work do we read about in Ephesians 2:10? What is the origin of this work? Its purpose? What must you do to experience this work in your life?

Do you agree with Martin Luther that "your work is a very sacred matter"? What can you do to remind yourself that your work matters to God?

What is the relation between a healthy work ethic and wholeheartedness (see Eph. 6:5–8)?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Read Colossians 3:15–17, 22–25, then list as many applications as you can for your work life. Then honestly put a check beside every application you have not been putting into practice. Confess this to God and ask for his help in doing better.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

The Call (Os Guinness)

Crazy Busy (Kevin DeYoung)

Do More Better (Tim Challies)

Every Good Endeavor (Timothy Keller)

God at Work (Gene Edward Veith Jr.)

Gospel at Work (Sebastian Traeger and Greg Gilbert)

Just Do Something (Kevin DeYoung)

What's Best Next? (Matt Perman)

Work Matters (Tom Nelson)

Work and Our Labor in the Lord (James M. Hamilton Jr.)

Discipline of Perseverance

During my student years, when I was working a swing shift in a factory in Los Angeles, I became friends with a law student who played tennis named Larry King (not to be confused with the former CNN talk show host), and Larry and I talked a lot of tennis during breaks. Soon we began to exchange a little tennis “trash” as to who was the best, which, after some weeks, eventuated into a casual “we’ll find out” tennis match. The game was fairly casual until Larry’s (then) wife, the famous Billie Jean King, showed up and began to do a little of her own talking. She was not impressed. Predictably our shots became crisper, and we began to sweat more—all, of course, with a conscious male “who cares!” casualness. Wimbledon champion Billie Jean’s presence definitely elevated our game.

Golfers, think what would happen to your concentration if Tiger Woods joined your foursome! Or imagine the adrenaline rush if, while you were shooting some hoops, LeBron James appeared, saying, “Mind if I join you?” Every ounce of “wanna be” in our mortal bodies would suddenly be on the court! The presence of pros, Hall of Famers, is immensely elevating.

On a transcending spiritual level, the truth also applies. In fact, the author of Hebrews draws an awesome picture of heavenly observers in an attempt to motivate and instruct a faltering church to persevere. The scene is a great coliseum. The occasion is a footrace, a distance event. The contestants include the author and the members of his

flock, as well as, by mutual faith, us. The “cloud of witnesses” (12:1) that fills the stadium is made up of the great spiritual athletes of the past, Hall of Faith members—every one a gold medal winner. They are not live witnesses of the event, but “witnesses” by the fact that their past lives bear testimony to monumental, persevering faith like Abel’s, by which, “though he died, he still speaks” (11:4).¹ Everywhere you look in the vast arena, there is a kind face nodding encouragement, saying, “I did it, and so can you. You can do it. You have my life to help you do it!” Abraham strokes his long beard and smiles. Sarah winks and gives a royal wave. Moses settles back to watch.

Your heart is pumping rapidly. You are afraid, and yet with all your being you want to do well. But how? Hebrews 12 answers eloquently with a discipline that can be summarized in four succeeding commands: *Divest! Run! Focus! and Consider!*

Divest!

The call to divestment is clearly spelled out in the opening line of Hebrews 12: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely” (v. 1a). The divestment here refers to the radical stripping off of your clothing before a race, as was the Greek custom of the day. The writer orders a double divestment—first, of all hindrances, and second, of sin.

The sin that we are especially commanded to throw off is described as “the sin which clings so closely”—that is, the specific sin(s) unique to us as individuals and to which we so easily fall; “besetting sin,” as the older translations have it. There are certain sins that easily beset us and then envelop us, though they may not entice others. Some sins have no trouble wiggling in through our eyes, ears, touch, taste, and thought simply because of who we are.² Likewise, there are sins that have little appeal to us but irresistibly engulf others. Sensuality may

1. F. F. Bruce writes: “But in what sense are they ‘witnesses’? Not, probably, in the sense of spectators, watching their successors as they in their turn run the race for which they have entered; but rather in the sense that by their loyalty and endurance they have borne witness to the possibilities of the life of faith. It is not so much they who look at us as we look to them—for encouragement.” *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 346.

2. James D. Ernest, trans., *Ceslas Spicq: Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 132.

be the Achilles' heel for many men, but not all. Another man who has gained victory over such sins might be beset by jealousy.

Among the most clinging of the besetting sins are:

- Jealousy—an ache you feel in your soul when another does well
- Pessimism—a despairing negativism that perpetually sours everything
- Lust—for others, for more things, for position
- Pride—the self-absorbed sin that plants you in the center of all things
- Anger—a Vulcan heart that belches fire
- Lying—a sin that tinges your most intimate relationships with deceit

Besetting sins are those that attract and hold us with the promise of pleasure, including even some “pleasures” that bring no happiness or enjoyment but only disappointment and more despair. Their terrifying pathology has been seen in nature billions of times over. A fly lights on a leaf to taste the sweetness that grows there. Instantly three crimson-tipped, fingerlike hairs bend over and touch the fly's wings, holding it firm in a sticky grasp. The fly struggles mightily to get free, but the more it struggles, the more hopelessly it is coated with adhesive. Soon the fly relaxes, but to its mind “things could be worse,” because it extends its tongue and feasts on the sweetness while it is held even more firmly by still more sticky tentacles—just as happens when we swill our besetting sins. When the captive is entirely at the plant's mercy, the edges of the leaf fold inward, forming a closed fist. Two hours later the fly is an empty sucked skin, and the hungry fist unfolds its delectable mouth for another easy entanglement. That is a truly terrifying allegory.

The scriptural command calls for extreme actions. If we are to finish well in the faith, we must strip our souls naked of “every weight, and sin which clings so closely.” The benevolent, knowing faces of those who have run the race before us beckon us to do so. The eternal fact is, you'll never run the race that is set before you if you do not put off your clinging sins. What are *your* besetting sins? Will you name them before God? He knows them perfectly. Why not do that now?

Going deeper, the question is: What “hinders” you? Literally, *what is the weight that hinders you*? Most likely, it is not a sin. It might be something that is good—good for others, but bad for you: a place, a habit, a pleasure, a hobby, an event, or an entertainment. If this otherwise good thing pulls you down, you must strip it away. For example, there may be an apparently harmless place (a forest, a store, an apartment, or a city) that, because of your past sins, still lures you downward. You must toss aside such a place and forget it.

This is radical talk. But it’s a matter of life! It has to do with finishing—and finishing well.

Run!

Properly divested, with every hindrance cast aside, there remains one great thing to do—and that is to run: “and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1b). Persevering grit is an awesome, beautiful thing. Writer and sometimes marathoner Art Carey described in a memorable piece for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* his experience of “hitting the wall” and then going on to finish the Boston Marathon. We pick up his story near the end:

By now, the rigors of having run nearly twenty miles are beginning to tell. My stride has shortened. My legs are tight. My breathing is shallow and fast. My joints are becoming raw and worn. My neck aches from all the jolts that have ricocheted up my spine. Half-dollar-size blisters sting the soles of my feet. I’m beginning to feel queasy and light-headed. I want to stop running. I have “hit the wall.” Now the real battle begins. Up the first of many long inclines I start to climb . . . “Heartbreak Hill”—the last, the longest and the steepest, a half-mile struggle against gravity designed to finish off the faint and faltering. . . . The last four miles are seemingly endless. . . . Finally, the distinctive profile of the Prudential Building looms on the horizon. I begin to step up my pace. . . . I can see the yellow stripe 50 yards ahead. I run faster, pumping my arms, pushing off my toes, defying clutching leg cramps to mount a glorious, last-gasp kick . . . cheers and clapping . . . 10 yards . . . finish line . . . an explosion of euphoria . . . I am clocked in at two hours, 50 minutes and 49 seconds. *My place*: 1,176. I find the

figures difficult to believe, but if they are accurate, then I have run the best marathon of my life. While times and places are important, and breaking a personal record is thrilling (especially as you grow older), the real joy of the Boston Marathon is just finishing . . . doing what you have set out to do.³

Persevering grit possesses a terrible beauty, but it is eternally beautiful when devoted to the real-life spiritual race that is marked out for us. The sense of biblical “perseverance” is *patient fortitude*, patiently “gutting it out.”

We each have a specific race mapped out for us; the course for each runner is unique. Its uniqueness is determined by God, who charts it while factoring in who you and I are right now as to our giftedness, background, responsibilities, age, health—and most of all who we are in Christ. Your race is like no one else’s. It is marked out for you where you are as a student, a single, or a parent.

Some races are relatively straight; some are all turns. Some seem all uphill; some are a flat hiking path. They are not equal. All races are long, but some are longer. But the glory is, each of us (no exceptions!) can finish the race “set before us.” I may not be able to run your course, and you may find mine impossible, but I can finish my race and you yours. Both of us can finish well if we choose and if we rely on him who is our strength and our guide. We can experience the same exhilaration the apostle Paul did as he neared the finish line: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). Depending upon God, there is no doubt that we can finish the race set before us—and finish it with satisfaction. Whoever you are and wherever you are, you can do it!

Perseverance has nothing to do with giftedness, but everything to do with your heart. In 1981 Bill Broadhurst entered the Pepsi Challenge 10,000-meter race in Omaha, Nebraska. Surgery ten years earlier for an aneurysm in his brain had left him paralyzed on his left side. But on that misty July morning, he stood with twelve hundred lithe men and women at the starting line. The gun sounded, and the crowd surged ahead. Bill threw his stiff left leg forward and pivoted on it as

3. Art Carey, “Beating Agony and the Marathon,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 12, 1978.

his foot hit the ground. His slow plop-plop-plop rhythm seemed to mock him as the pack raced into the distance. Sweat rolled down his face and pain pierced his ankle, but he kept going. Some of the runners completed the race in about thirty minutes, but it was two hours and twenty-nine minutes until Bill reached the finish line.

A man approached from a small group of remaining bystanders. Though exhausted, Bill recognized him from pictures in the newspaper. It was Bill Rodgers, the famous marathon runner, who then draped *his* newly won Boston Marathon medal around Bill's neck. Bill Broadhurst's finish was as glorious as that of the world's greatest, even though he finished last, because he ran with perseverance. Biblical perseverance that refuses to be deflected, overcomes obstacles and delays, and is not stopped by discouragement within or opposition without is available to us all.

It is quite within the reach of every one of us to manifest positive, conquering perseverance—putting one heavy foot in front of the other until we reach the glorious end. The race is not for sprinters who flame out after 100, 200, or 400 meters. It is for faithful plodders—people like you and me. Fast or slow, strong or weak, we must all persevere.

Focus!

If we have stripped ourselves bare of all besetting sins and every hindrance, and have begun to run with perseverance our race—the race that God has marked out for us—we are then given the focus that guarantees our finishing well. That focus, of course, is Jesus: we are to be “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2a).

Focus on Jesus

The writer of Hebrews is very intentional in commanding us to focus on Jesus rather than referring to him as Christ or Jesus Christ. We are to focus on Jesus the *incarnate* Son of God as he lived as a *man* here on earth. Jesus was the runner without parallel. Every obstacle was thrown in his way, but he never stumbled once—and he finished going away.

He became “the founder and perfecter of our faith” by the way he lived. His life founded (literally, *pioneered*) faith. There never was a millisecond when he did not trust the Father, resting everything in

him. So great was his trust that he lived on every word that came from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). And he continues to be “the founder and perfecter of our faith” by what he does in us. He bestows the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8–9; Matt. 11:27) and then perfects it in his children (Hebrews 11).

Since we need faith to run the race, we must be “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” That is, as the Greek literally indicates, *we must deliberately lift our eyes from other distracting things and focus with utter concentration on him—and continue doing so.*⁴ We must not look away even for an instant. Such focus is indispensable to a life of faith and to finishing the race.

On August 7, 1954, during the British Empire Games in Vancouver, Canada, the greatest mile-run match ever took place. It was touted as the “miracle mile” because Roger Bannister and John Landy were the only two sub-four-minute milers in the world. Bannister had been the first man ever to run a sub-four-minute mile. Both runners were in peak condition.

Bannister, a medical doctor who later became Sir Roger Bannister and master of an Oxford college, strategized that he would relax during the third lap and save everything for his finishing drive. But as they began that third lap, Landy poured it on, stretching his already substantial lead. Immediately Bannister adjusted his strategy, increasing his pace and gaining on Landy. He quickly cut the lead in half, and at the bell for the final lap, the two men were even. Landy began running even faster, and Bannister followed suit. Both men were flying. Bannister felt he was going to lose if Landy did not slow down.

Then came the famous moment (replayed thousands of times in print, celluloid, and video) as, at the last stride before the home stretch, the crowd roared. Landy could not hear Bannister’s footfall and looked back—a fatal lapse of concentration. Bannister launched his attack and won the “miracle mile” that day by five yards.⁵

Those who look away from Christ—the end and goal of our race—will not finish well. And this was exactly what was happening

4. Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 294, 395.

5. Video footage of the race between Bannister and Landy can be seen online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jP_NzZP_LK0.

to some treading the stormy waters around the early church. They had begun to take their eyes off Christ and to fix them instead on the hardships challenging them. Some had begun to look elsewhere for answers. The author of Hebrews called them to regain their focus on Jesus.

Focus on His Focus

Along with focusing on Jesus, we must focus on his focus—“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2b). Jesus’s focus on the coming joy of his resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at God’s right hand, plus the joys of redeeming a people for himself, strengthened him to do two things. First, he endured the terrible agony of the cross with an “intensity, and with a unity of perception, which none of us can possibly fathom . . . because his soul was so absolutely in his power . . . so utterly surrendered, so simply subjected to the suffering.”⁶ The agony that Jesus endured on the cross was worse for him precisely because he was God. Second, he scorned the shame of the cross. That is, he thought nothing of the shame—he dismissed it with contempt as nothing. Jesus did all this because he fully knew the bounding, dancing, endless joy that awaited him.

Now here’s the wonder: *Jesus’s joy is our joy!* His joy is the joy set before us! How can this be? The answer is that we are one with him. Christ is *in* us, and we are *in him* (2 Cor. 5:17). Where Christ is, we are! God has already seated us in Christ in the heavenly places, so “that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:7). We are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17). His boundless, dancing, endless joy will be ours!

To doubt this is to doubt God’s holy Word. If we will focus on the joy that Christ has set before us, we will endure the sufferings of this world and will dismiss any shame incurred in his name as nothing. And we will run the race to his glory.

6. John Henry Newman, *The Kingdom Within (Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations)* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1984), 328–29.

Consider!

In capping his famous challenge to “run with endurance the race that is set before us,” the writer of Hebrews restates the command to focus on Jesus in fitting terms of the athlete: “Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted” (Heb. 12:3). The phrase “grow weary or fainthearted” was sports lingo in the ancient world, used to describe a runner’s exhausted collapse.⁷

Therefore, the way for the Christian to avoid spiritual collapse is to consider Christ and the opposition he faced from the likes of sinners such as Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate. Consider how he faced them with confidence, meekness, and strength. No one must miss the overarching message of this passage: we are to be totally absorbed with Jesus. He is to fill our skies like the morning sunrise. He is to be our high noon and our sunset.

Whether we have been or are athletes or not, we have a race to run in this hostile world, whether we are nine, nineteen, or ninety. We are surrounded by a great cloud of lives whose examples call for our best—*patriarchs* such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; *prophets* such as Moses, Elijah, and Daniel; the inner circle of *apostles*, Peter, James, and John; *martyrs* such as Stephen, Thomas Cranmer, and Jim Elliot; great *preachers* such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and Charles Spurgeon; exemplary *missionaries* such as William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and Amy Carmichael; our departed *family members and friends*; and on and on. Their kind faces invite us to finish well. Their memories whisper, “You can do it! Don’t lose heart. The end will come before you know it. Hang sweet and tough.”

So the discipline of perseverance confronts us to:

- *Divest.* We must throw off every besetting sin, those sins whose crimson-tipped fingers so easily entangle us. Our besetting sins are unique to us. They may not tempt others, but they slay us as we swill their seeming sweetness. Probing deeper, we must

7. Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), 35.

cast off everything that hinders us—even the good things. If we don't, we'll never run as we ought. Are you willing to do some radical divesting? That is the question.

- *Run.* Then we must run our own race, the race God has marked out for us. Your race is not my race, and my race is not yours. You can finish your race. It is God's will. And he will give you the grit to persevere as you run. So run, my brother, run!
- *Focus.* We must focus on Jesus. There must be no distracted glances. Jesus must cover the sky. He must be our center. And we must focus on his focus and his joy because it is our joy. His joy set before us will give us the power to endure, even despising the world's disdain.
- *Consider.* So we are to consider him. Our life is to be spent considering how he lived.

We are to run as Jesus did, completely divested. We are to run with him. We are to run toward him. We are to fix our eyes on him. We are to focus on his focus. He is to be our perpetual consideration.

He has a race for us to run. And we can do it as we lean on him.

Food for Thought

What entanglements (besetting sins) and hindrances (legitimate things that are pulling you down) do you need to cast aside and leave behind? Be specific. Why is it so hard to do this?

What is the race that God has mapped out for you like—straight, twisting, flat, hilly? Why are you able or unable to persevere in that race? What has been your greatest victory so far?

Do you think that at the end of your life you will be able to say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith”? Why or why not? What would it take to be able to say that? What can you do today to lead to that result?

What does it really mean to “fix our eyes on Jesus”? Is his joy your joy? Why or why not?

Are you ever like John Landy—looking back, and so having a wrong focus and running the risk of failing to finish the race well? What sorts of things do you look back at? How can you avoid this or get the right focus back when it happens?

Does the list of witnesses that the author provides encourage you or discourage you? Do you think, “I really identify with Peter—I have great intentions but I find it so easy to give in”? Or, “Abraham, Daniel, Luther—I’ll never have that kind of courage”? How can the examples of the godly who have gone before us help us in our walk?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Read Hebrews 12:1–3 again. Note every detail given about Christ, then praise him for all of it. Then list the responsibilities God gives you in those verses, and pray to him about how well (or poorly) you are doing with each.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

12 Faithful Men (Collin Hansen and Jeff Robinson, eds.)

The Roots of Endurance (John Piper)

Run to Win (Tim Challies)

Run to Win the Prize (Thomas R. Schreiner)

PART 5



MINISTRY

Discipline of Church

Astute observers are becoming increasingly aware that the doctrine of the church has become progressively weakened and in some cases abandoned by American evangelicals. Robert W. Patterson, associate to the executive director of the National Association of Evangelicals, voiced his concern in *Christianity Today*:

When President Dwight Eisenhower became a Christian, he made a public profession of faith in Christ, was baptized, and was extended the right hand of fellowship at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., the second Sunday after his inauguration in 1953. Had the former President expressed interest in becoming a Christian a generation later under more consciously evangelical auspices, he might never have been challenged to identify with the body of Christ through baptism and church membership. A personal relationship with Jesus, he would have been told, is all that really matters.¹

Of course, we must wholeheartedly agree that without a saving relationship with Jesus Christ all is lost. But we must not mistakenly reason that one's relationship with Christ minimizes the importance of his church. Yet this is precisely what multitudes of evangelicals assume and act out. As a result, only 58 percent of evangelicals attend church weekly.²

1. Robert W. Patterson, "In Search of the Visible Church," *Christianity Today*, March 11, 1991, 36.

2. "Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center, May 11, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

Church attendance is infected with a malaise of conditional loyalty that has produced an army of ecclesiastical hitchhikers. The hitchhiker's thumb says, "You buy the car, pay for repairs and upkeep and insurance, fill the car with gas—and I'll ride with you. But if you have an accident, you are on your own! And I'll probably sue." The credo of so many of today's church attenders is similar: "You go to the meetings, serve on the boards and committees, grapple with the issues, do the work of the church, and pay the bills—and I'll come along for the ride. But if things do not suit me, I'll criticize, complain, and probably bail out—my thumb is always out for a better ride."

This putative loyalty is fueled by a consumer ethos—a "McChristian" mentality—that picks and chooses here and there to fill one's ecclesiastical shopping list. There are hitchhikers who attend one church for the preaching, send their children to a second church for its dynamic youth program, and go to a third church's small group. Church hitchhikers have a telling vocabulary: "I go to" or "I attend," but never "I belong to" or "I am a member." Pollster George Barna supports this, saying: "The average adult thinks that belonging to a church is good for other people, but represents unnecessary bondage and baggage for himself."³

So today, in the early years of the twenty-first century, we have a phenomenon unthinkable in any other century: churchless Christians. There is a vast herd of professed Christians who exist as nomadic hitchhikers without accountability, discipline, or discipleship, living apart from the regular benefits of the ordinances. To borrow from Cyprian's idea,⁴ they have God as their Father, but reject the church as their mother, and as a result are incomplete and stunted. The tragedy is compounded because statistics indicate that men are far less committed to the church than women⁵—inevitably producing a shriveled leadership.

3. George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), 133.

4. Cyprian (ca. AD 200–258) said, "If the name of father, which in man is commanded to be honoured, is violated with impunity in God, what will become of what Christ himself lays down in the Gospel, and says, 'He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death;' if He who bids that those who curse their parents after the flesh should be punished and slain, himself quickens those who revile their heavenly and spiritual Father, and are hostile to the Church, their Mother?" Quoted in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 384.

5. "Religious Landscape Study," <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

As to why the church has fallen on such hard times, historians tell us that an overemphasis on the “invisible” body of Christ by evangelical leaders produced an implicit disregard for the visible church. However, membership in an invisible church without participation in its local expression is never contemplated in the New Testament.⁶

Another reason for the dechurching of many Christians is the historic individualism of evangelical Christianity and the grassroots American impulse against authority. The natural inclination is to think that one needs only an individual relationship with Christ and no other authority. Such thinking produces Christian Lone Rangers who demonstrate their authenticity by riding not to church, but out to the badlands, reference Bible in hand, to do battle single-handedly with the outlaw world.

Such a cavalier disregard for the doctrine of the church is eccentric, to say the least. It disregards not only Scripture, but the consensus of the doctors of the church. Augustine holds up the visible church, saying: “For outside the church they [one’s sins] have no remission. For it is the church in particular that has received the earnest, the Holy Spirit, apart from whom no sins receive remission.”⁷ Augustine could not conceive of one being regenerated yet consciously separate from the visible church. “The deserter of the Church,” he said, “cannot be in Christ, since he is not among Christ’s members.”⁸

Martin Luther similarly stated, “Outside this Christian Church there is no salvation or forgiveness of sins, but everlasting death and damnation; even though there may be a magnificent appearance of holiness.”⁹

John Calvin echoed Cyprian’s thought that the evidence of having God as your Father is having the church as your mother. In fact, he subtitled chapter 1 of book 4 of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

6. Robert L. Saucy writes: “As for membership in an invisible church without fellowship with any local assembly, this concept is never contemplated in the New Testament. The universal church was the universal fellowship of believers who met visibly in local assemblies.” *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 17.

7. Augustine, *Saint Augustine’s Enchiridion*, trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1953), 57; see also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 1016n10.

8. Quoted in John Burnaby, *Augustine: Later Works* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 368, which quotes from Augustine’s first homily on 1 John 1:1–2:11.

9. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 37, ed. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Mullenberg, 1961), 368.

“The True Church with Which as Mother of All the Godly We Must Keep Unity.”¹⁰ And in his commentary on Ephesians he wrote, “The Church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and governs in the Lord both kings and commoners; and this is done by the ministry. Those who neglect or despise this order want to be wiser than Christ. Woe to their pride!”¹¹

The Swiss Second Helvetic Confession put the idea even more forcefully:

For as there was no salvation outside Noah’s ark when the world perished in the flood; so we believe that there is no certain salvation outside Christ, who offers himself to be enjoyed by the elect in the church; and hence we teach that those who wish to live ought not to be separated from the true church of Christ.¹²

Finally, the Westminster Confession of Faith refers to “The visible church . . . out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”¹³

So we conclude that church hitchhikers, ecclesiastical wanderers, spiritual Lone Rangers, and Christians who disdain membership are aberrations in the history of the Christian church and are in grievous error.

The Doctrine of the Church

So many today need to be blasted from their delusions by an understanding of the great doctrine of the church. There is no text that will ignite one’s soul more than Hebrews 12:22–24, which describes the seven stupendous meetings that the Christian experiences in the church:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,

10. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1011–12.

11. John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 181.

12. Second Helvetic Confession, chap. 27, quoted in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1973), 147.

13. Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.2, quoted in Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, 222.

and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Notice each of the things we have come to:

The City of God

First, we have come “to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. . . .” Mount Zion was the mountain stronghold that King David captured and made the center of his kingdom when he brought in the golden ark of God’s presence. From that time forward, as Solomon built the temple to house the ark, the city of Zion became the earthly dwelling place of God.

When we come to church, we come to Zion’s heavenly counterpart, the spiritual Zion/Jerusalem from above—the true city of God. In one sense this heavenly city is still to come; yet, at the same time, we are presently citizens of this city and can enjoy its privileges now—expressed most clearly in the church (Phil. 3:20).

Angels

Second, we have come “to innumerable angels in festal gathering.” As to these numberless angels, the Scriptures speak elsewhere in mind-boggling terms of “ten thousands of his holy ones” (Jude 14) and “ten thousand times ten thousand” (Dan. 7:10) and—regarding their awesome transportation—“The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands.” (Ps. 68:17). The heavenly hosts and their chariots are without number! But astonishingly, in the church we come to these joyful thousands of angels in celebration! Duane Litfin, former president of Wheaton College, liked to wax expansively about the wonders of corporate worship and how the angels join us in gathered worship—and therefore how today’s church needs to reawaken to this reality when gathered for worship. He recalled that this was the universal awareness of the church in its early centuries.

Angels are everywhere—mighty flaming spirits—“ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14), passing in and out of our lives, moving around and over

us, just as they did Jacob of old. This seems to be what George Herbert had in mind when he wrote, “Sundays observe tis angels music; therefore come not late.”¹⁴

Firstborn Heirs

Third, we come “to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.” Here’s how it works: Jesus is the firstborn son and heir of everything in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:15–20). The Bible repeatedly says that we Christians are “in him” (in union with Jesus Christ and members of his body). Therefore *we are all firstborn sons*, and all the rights of inheritance go to us as “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

So when we come to church, we do not come to some poor relatives looking for handouts, but to the fellowship of eternally rich firstborn heirs. Not one of us is second or third in the line of inheritance.

Worship, then, is a celebration of what Christ has done, and it is made all the more joyful by our awareness of our astonishing status and blessing.

God

Fourth, we come “to God, the judge of all men.” Before we go any further, take a second to assess how you last addressed God, either in your own time of prayer and worship, at church, or in your Bible study group. The Bible teaches that we should come to him in awe because he is the all-knowing Judge, whose throne rests on righteousness and judgment. But while we must come with proper awe and reverence, we, thankfully, do not come in dread, because his Son has borne our judgment. In fact, we come with boldness: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Does this dazzling thought buoy your soul? It should! It is simply amazing. To come before God in humble boldness is our highest delight, and it is made more intense when we worship with other Christians for whom it is also true. And this is what we do when we come together at church!

14. George Herbert, *The Works of George Herbert; The Temple, and Other Poems* (London: C. Whittingham, Took's Court, 1838), 14.

The Church Triumphant

Fifth, we come “to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.” The triumphant ones are those who have died and gone to heaven. Though they are in heaven, we experience a supernatural solidarity with them. The same spiritual life flows through them that, at this very moment, courses through us. The same mystery of Christ has been revealed to them as to us. Christ is everything to the “saints above—and to the “saints below.”

When the church gathers to hear the preaching of the Word; to reflect on the testimonies and examples of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles; and to consider the witness of believers and martyrs over the centuries—from Martin Luther to William Carey to Jim Elliot—the body of Christ naturally resonates with and desires to live after the example of “the spirits of the righteous made perfect.”

Jesus

Sixth, we come “to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.” At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup in his hand and said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20). By that Jesus declared that the new covenant, as prophesied by Jeremiah, was being inaugurated by his imminent death and resurrection, and that from then on, as Jeremiah predicted, he would write the law on their hearts and make them his people, and all would know him, from the greatest to the least (Jer. 31:31–34). Jesus Christ is the source and provider of all these blessings of the new covenant to all those who have put their faith in his death and resurrection.

The church is the new covenant community in which the blessings of the new covenant are ministered by the life-giving Spirit. Those who commit themselves to the church are those who enjoy the unrestricted flow of its graces.

The Sprinkled Blood

Seventh, we come “to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” There is such imagery and primary theology here! In the book of Genesis we read that after Cain murdered his

brother, Abel, the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” Cain answered, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” God then said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” (Gen. 4:9–10). Abel’s blood screamed for retribution. The poet and painter William Blake captured the horror of this moment when he portrayed Cain fleeing from the fallen body of Abel with his hands covering his ears, framing his gaping eyes and his own apparently screaming mouth. It was, no doubt, the inspiration for the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch’s haunting *Skrik* (*The Scream*), which evokes, for moderns, the myriad agonies of existence. But in the garden, Abel’s shed blood pleaded for cosmic judgment and justice. And Abel’s cry was met and satisfied by Christ’s far better word (shout!) from the blood-drenched cross: “It is finished” (John 19:30).

This is what we come to in the church: the better word of total forgiveness and the gift of imputed righteousness. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Brothers, the Scriptures tell us that in the church “you have come” (right now!) to these seven sublime realities: (1) the *city of God*, (2) *innumerable angels*, (3) *fellow believers*, (4) *God*, (5) the *church triumphant*, (6) *Jesus*, and (7) *forgiveness*. If this does not create a wellspring of thanksgiving in your hearts and a longing for fellowship in the visible church, nothing will!

John Bunyan once told of falling into despondency that lasted for several days and desperately seeking a word from God to meet his need—and then this same grand text, pulsing with the wonders of the church, came to him. Bunyan wrote:

But that night was a good night to me; I have had but few better; I longed for the company of some of God’s people, that I might have imparted unto them what God had showed me. Christ was a precious Christ to my soul that night; I could scarce lie in my bed for joy, and peace, and triumph through Christ.¹⁵

John Newton expressed this glorious reality in a wonderful hymn:

15. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1948), 107–8.

Savior, if of Zion's city,
 I through grace a member am,
 Let the world deride or pity,
 I will glory in Thy name.¹⁶

The dazzling images of the church assault us again and again in the New Testament in an effort to raise our thinking to the proper height. As the church, we actually are Christ's *body* (Eph. 1:22–23). He is the Head, and as members of his body we have at the same time a profound unity, diversity, and mutuality. We are a *temple* (2:19–22). He is the cornerstone, and we are living stones (1 Pet. 2:5)—forming a living place of worship. We are the *bride* (Eph. 5:25–33). And Christ, our groom, loves us with a holy love that will bring us to the marriage feast of the Lamb. We are his *sheep*, and he is the nurturing shepherd (John 10:14–16, 25–30). He is the vine, and we are the *branches*. We are organically in him, drawing all our sustenance for life from him (John 15:5ff.).

What should the truth that we are the church mean to us? It should fill us with wonder and thanksgiving. We ought to sing, “I am his body, his temple, his bride, his sheep, his branch. I have come to his city, to angels, to brothers and sisters, to God himself, to the church glorified, to Jesus, and to forgiveness through Christ's blood.”

This doctrine also tells us that the church will outlive the world. Harry Blamires wrote:

The world is like a great express train hurtling toward disaster—perhaps toward total destruction. And in this truly desperate situation certain passengers are running up and down the corridors announcing to each other that the church is in great danger! The irony of it would be laughable if it were not so searing. Why, most of the church's members have already got out at stations *en route*. And we ourselves shall be getting out soon anyway. And if the crash comes and the world is burnt to ashes, then the only thing that will survive the disaster will of course be the church.¹⁷

16. From the hymn “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” by John Newton, 1779.

17. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1963), 153.

Personally, I believe the doctrine of the church ought to tell us that we are part of the grandest institution the universe has ever known, and that we are tragically diminished by nonparticipation in Christ's body. Correspondingly, the church is diminished by our nonparticipation as well; it is our duty to be "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:25).

This straightforward exhortation ought to be enough in itself. But there are several other powerful reasons for faithful participation in the church, not the least of which is that, as Cyprian argued, we all need a mother. The church has certainly been that to me. It was the womb that warmed my soul till it was ready for birth when my pastor, Verl Lindley, led me to Christ. I was lovingly nurtured by the church through my youth sponsors, Howard and Ruby Busse. The church gave me the milk of the Word through the strong teaching of my College Department teacher, Robert Seelye. The church saw me through hard times through the prayers of spiritual mothers such as Roselva Taylor. The church was the womb and cradle for my wife too. When our children came along, the church stood with us as we dedicated our children to God. She has also been the mother of my best friends.

I owe so much to Christ's church: my life, my character, my worldview, my calling, my vision, my peace, my hope—everything. *I believe in the church!*

Understanding, then, that we need the mothering of the church, we must also understand that we will never benefit as we should from it apart from commitment to her Head. The entire Christian life is about commitment—first and above all to Christ, but also to the church, to family, to marriage, to friendship, to ministry. None of these will ever flourish apart from commitment.

For example, marriage can never produce the security, satisfaction, and growth that it promises unless there is commitment. This is why today's provisional live-in arrangements are coming up short. Commitment through good and bad times is what makes a marriage grow and brings the greatest fulfillment.

Men, on the most elementary level, you do not have to go to church to be a Christian. You do not have to go home to be mar-

ried either. But in both cases if you do not, you will have a very poor relationship.

Benefits of Church

Among the soul-enhancing benefits of commitment to the church are these:

Worship

Have your soul swept up to God in the uplifting context of gathered worship. It is one thing to worship alone, but it is quite another to worship with others who also love God, because as you sing together, confess together, and affirm your faith together, an intensity of devotion fills your hearts. This is also one of the reasons why experienced Christians often say that they cannot live without the church.

Hearing the Word

Your soul needs to regularly feed on the milk of the Word. Nothing can replace listening in the company of fellow believers week after week to the live systematic exposition of God's Word as the Holy Spirit does his unique work upon the souls of his gathered people. Listening to a podcast of the same sermon may be helpful, but it is not the same as listening with the body of Christ. Don't ever let solitary listening to the latest and greatest speaker on his weekly podcast replace your time of listening to live preaching of the Word in the company of God's people.

Attendance at the Communion Table

Communion regularly refreshes you by your remembering the work of Christ when your pastor says, as he breaks the bread, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). In the silence, you reflect along with your church family on what the bread means. Then comes the cup—"This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:25)—and your heart swells with renewed gratitude and love.

We taste Thee, O Thou Living Bread,
And long to feast upon Thee still:

We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead
And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.¹⁸

Discipleship

When you are committed to the body of Christ and live under the discipline of the church's leadership, a corresponding deepening takes place in your soul, which the uncommitted heart can never know. And more, those who are men enough to ride out the storms that come to every church will become more like the man who gave his life for the church.

Vision and Mission

Vision and mission naturally develop in your soul as you hitch your life to a gospel-centered church, as has been the experience of so many men. Men, you need the mothering of the church, regardless of how self-sufficient and tough you may be, because the holy Scriptures say you do, and because you will never become the man that you were meant to be without commitment to her.

The Discipline of Church

If the grand and great doctrine of the church tells us anything, it tells us that whoever you are and however busy you may be (whether a U.S. president, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a Fortune 500 business executive, or leader of a parachurch organization), *the church must be at the very center of your life*. Church hitchhiking is an aberration! And so is mild commitment.

Men, honestly, are you a hitchhiker, kind of a "free agent" looking for a tentative place on the roster, here for a season, there for another? If so, you will never attain to your full spiritual manhood, nor will your family reach its spiritual maturity.

Men, in these early years of the twenty-first century, both the church and the lost world need men who practice the *discipline of church*.

Attendance

You must commit yourself to regular attendance of the worship services of your church. And, no, attending a men's Bible study is not

18. From the hymn "Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts" by Bernard of Clairvaux, c. 1150.

enough, because the church includes the *whole* body of Christ, not just other men or those who are of similar age or prefer a similar style. We are to worship together with the whole church body; they have much to give to you, and you to them. Your schedule, your smartphone, and your calendar or diary must reflect the depth of your commitment. Sports may be your thing, or certain media offerings, but when the field, the screen, or anything else keeps you from regularly meeting with your brothers and sisters, there is a problem.

Men, this one discipline alone (commitment to your local church) will bring massive benefits to you, your church, and your family.

Membership

Many men give no thought to actually joining their churches. When you become a member, you commit yourself not only to attending the regular services of the church, but also to living under the discipline of the church leadership (which is the biblical ideal). This will bring inevitable blessings to you because the pastor and elders must ultimately answer to God for the care of your soul. Membership also means that you will take responsibility for the life and health of the church.

Participation

Church is not a spectator sport. Your commitment must go beyond attendance and membership. You must readily give yourself to serving her with your talents, however humble the task may be. Understand, too, that the so-called humble gifts and tasks register high in God's household (1 Cor. 12:12–26). So often Christian men are heard to say, "Oh, church does nothing for me," or "I get nothing from it." This is wrongheaded. Church is not simply for your benefit, but for what you can give to others through your commitment to it.

Giving

It is customary to think that giving is the responsibility of well-off Christians. This is a delusion. All believers—rich and poor, young and old—are called to the discipline of giving (see chap. 16). Men who develop generous hearts early in life go on to become great givers and

enjoy the smile of God, as in Jesus's own words: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Prayer

Commit yourself to praying more than the mindless "bless my church." Pray for the pastor and the needs of the people by name. Pray for the church's upcoming ministries. These kinds of prayers will pour grace on the body of Christ.

As we have seen, the explosive truth is that, when you fellowship with the church, you come to:

- the city of God;
- numberless angels in celebration;
- firstborn heirs;
- God, the judge of all;
- the church triumphant;
- Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant; and
- his sprinkled blood, which shouts forgiveness.

As such, the church is the only institution that will outlive the train wreck at the world's end.

Resolve right now to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness as you hitch your life to her eternal ride—giving her your time, your money, your prayers, your service, and your sacrifice. You are the men. You have been called by Christ at this time of history. There is no other time but now!

Timothy Dwight, heir to the Puritans and the greatest president of Yale University, penned these beautiful words:

I love Thy Church, O God!
 Her walls before Thee stand.
 Dear as the apple of Thine eye.
 And graven on Thy hand.
 For her my tears shall fall;
 For her my prayers ascend;
 To her my cares and toils be giv'n,
 Till toils and cares shall end.¹⁹

19. From the hymn "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord" by Timothy Dwight, 1800.

Food for Thought

Why is the idea of *church* so unpopular today? Why aren't more people interested in attending a good church?

According to Hebrews 12:22–24, what spiritual treasures are found in the church? Put these in your own words, then thank God for each one of them.

What does the image of the church as Christ's *body* suggest to you (Eph. 1:22–23)? His *temple* (2:19–22)? His *bride* (5:25–33)?

What do our attitudes toward church and toward Christ have to do with each another? If the latter is misguided, will the former do any good?

Why are you tempted to do what Hebrews 10:25 says not to do? What spiritual blessings might you miss out on by staying away from Christian gatherings?

The author writes, "On the most elementary level, you do not have to go to church to be a Christian. You do not have to go home to be married either. But in both cases if you do not, you will have a very poor relationship." True or not true? How do regular attendance and participation strengthen your relationship with God? With family members? With other believers? Be specific.

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

List as many strengths and weaknesses as you see in your church. Now write down the ways you personally are contributing to each of these, and also specific ways you can be part of changing the weaknesses.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

9 Marks of a Healthy Church (Mark Dever)

The Church (Edmund Clowney)

Life Together (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Listen Up! (Christopher Ash)

Uncomfortable (Brett McCracken)

What Is a Healthy Church Member? (Thabiti Anyabwile)

Why Bother with Church? (Sam Allberry)

Why We Love the Church (Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck)

Your Church Is Too Safe (Mark Buchanan)

Discipline of Leadership

“Leadership,” said Warren Bennis, the late poet-philosopher-scholar of organizational life, “is a word on everyone’s lips. The young attack it and police seek it. Experts claim it and artists spurn it, while scholars want it . . . bureaucrats pretend they have it, politicians wish they did. Everybody agrees that there is less of it than there used to be.”¹

This pessimistic consensus and longing for leadership extends to the church, which many today feel suffers from an alarming lack of leadership when compared to history as recent as the decades between the 1940s and ’70s (decades that produced leaders of the stature of Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, Carl F. H. Henry, and Francis Schaeffer, as well as dynamic local church and lay leaders).²

Is there really less leadership than there used to be? It appears so, but objective analysis is difficult. Statistics do indicate this, however: male leadership in the church is on the decline as women outnumber men, for men comprise only 45 percent of adult church attenders, and

1. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 1.

2. Harold Lindsell writes, “The New Testament eloquently witnesses to the divine work of God after the Resurrection. Peter, Paul and the other apostles carried on the work of evangelization with mighty power with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Apostolic period was followed by one in which there emerged eminently qualified people who left their mark on the history of the church: Augustine, Aquinas, Wycliffe, Hus, Calvin, Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Latimer, Ridley, Wesley, Spurgeon, Edwards, Moody, Fuller and Graham to mention just a few. At this junction point in the history of the church, when the evangelical leadership of the last generation is moving off the stage, there is need for a new dynamic leadership that is evangelical and faithful to the Word of God.” *The New Paganism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 231

some smaller churches cannot find even one man to fill the office of elder.³ More and more men are content to let others shoulder the heavy responsibilities while they go along for the ride. It is certainly true that leadership is more difficult today because of the sheer complexity of life, the size of today's institutions, and the contemporary confusion as to what leadership is. Secular analysis has produced more than 350 definitions of leadership. "Leadership is like the Abominable Snowman," writes Bennis, "whose footprints are everywhere but [he is] nowhere to be seen."⁴

But none of this excuses today's church—or today's Christian man. Unlike our culture, the Bible provides clear instruction regarding leadership through the lives of its great leaders and through specific teaching regarding the character, qualifications, and commitment of spiritual leaders. In addition, amidst our culture's confusion about leadership, some astute analysts have pinpointed the essentials of leadership and are providing information that has immense benefit for the general culture, including the church. As we tackle the topic of the discipline of leadership, we will draw from both sources, with the greatest reliance being upon God's Word.

Preparation for Spiritual Leadership

The "textbook" for learning the qualities essential for spiritual leadership comes from the mentions of Joshua in the Pentateuch, wherein the Holy Spirit recorded seven unique experiences that endowed Joshua with qualities necessary to succeed Moses as the leader of God's people. We will consider these experiences in the order that they appear in Scripture—each one successively building a surprisingly comprehensive portrait of godly leadership.

Prayer

The first mention of Joshua comes in Exodus 17:8–9, after the Amalekites' attack upon the stragglers at Israel's rear: "Moses said to Joshua, 'Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. To-

3. "Religious Landscape Study," Pew Research Center, May 11, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

4. Bennis and Nanus, *Leaders*, 4, 20.

morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

Moses, then in his eighties, took the rod of God with which he had parted the Red Sea and ascended a nearby hill. Joshua, in his fighting prime, took charge of the army below. In the ensuing battle, when Moses lifted his hands in intercessory prayer, Israel prevailed. But as Moses wearied and began to lower his arms, the tide of battle turned to the Amalekites. Then again, as Moses mustered all his power and elevated his hands, the advantage returned to Israel. Israel's fate ebbed and flowed with Moses's aged hands. Soon Aaron and Hur were called to assist Moses, seating him on a stone and standing at his sides to hold his hands heavenward. When sunset came, Moses's hands were still reaching upward to God, and Israel had carried the day.

The lessons for Joshua were clear. He learned that the real power was not in his sword, but in God. The victory undoubtedly tempted him to forget that. He was an instant hero, and that night around the campfires everyone sang the name of Joshua. But forever fixed in Joshua's mind was the image of Aaron and Hur coming to Moses's side and lifting his hands up to God.

No one attains true spiritual leadership who thinks his power is his own or that past victories are due to his own genius. The overriding lesson Joshua learned that day was that the backbone of any work done for God is prayer. E. M. Bounds said of those who have had effective spiritual leadership, “They are not leaders because of brilliancy . . . but because, by the power of prayer, they could command the power of God.”⁵

How contrary this is to conventional thinking on leadership. The first thing the world (and all too often the church!) considers is a leader's magnetism and élan—does he have the charisma to magnetize people? But the Holy Spirit places prayer first.

Vision

The next mention of Joshua in Scripture comes in Exodus 24, in the midst of the account that describes Moses's ascent of Mount Sinai

5. Quoted in J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody, 1967), 11–12.

to receive the law. That chapter tells us that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel (of whom Joshua was one) were called up the mountain. After climbing some distance and seeing a far-off vision of God's glory, the seventy remained behind, and Joshua and Moses went farther up (v. 13). Here Joshua was with Moses six days when the glorious cloud covered Sinai (v. 16). But on the seventh day Moses went on alone, leaving Joshua alone on Sinai for forty days (v. 18).

The Sinai experience left its mark on Joshua. His initial vision of God majestically standing over a pavement of sapphire (v. 10) and his subsequent forty days of solitary meditation—while Moses, up in the glowing, thundering cloud on Sinai, received the law—branded his heart with a deep sense of God's glory, holiness, and power.

The Christian leader's vision of God makes all the difference in his life. There is a grand visionary chain that links the great leaders in God's Word.

Consider Moses amidst the thunderings and lightnings of Sinai as God hides him in the cleft of a rock and makes his glory pass by him (Ex. 33:21–23).

Joshua not only sat below Moses on Sinai viewing God's glory, but later, on the eve of the battle for Jericho, he met God—"the commander of the army of the LORD"—as a warrior in full battle dress, his sword bare and gleaming in the moonlight—and Joshua worshiped (Josh. 5:13–15).

Young David's vision of God grew so great as he shepherded under the stars and contemplated God's vastness that when he saw Goliath challenging leaderless Israel he cried, "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26) and charged headlong into battle.

Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple," and this immense vision launched him into spectacular leadership and service—"Here I am! Send me" (Isa. 6:1, 8).

Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured, so that his glory shone as the sun—and they went forward as key leaders in the apostolic church (Mark 9:2–8).

Paul, who was not a part of the original apostolic band, became the missionary leader of the church, fueled by being caught up to the third heaven and hearing and seeing things he could not describe (2 Cor. 12:1–6).

An immense, growing vision of God is the *sine qua non*, the grand distinction, the continental divide of spiritual leadership. It is said that Robert Dick Wilson, the celebrated Old Testament scholar who served at Princeton Seminary at the beginning of the twentieth century, upon hearing that an alumnus was returning to preach, would slip into the back of Miller Chapel and listen only once, saying, “When my boys come back, I come to see if they are big godders or little godders and then I know what their ministry will be.”⁶ One’s vision of God, his *visio Dei*, is everything!

But at the same time do not be put off or sell your leadership potential short because you have had no beatific vision. You do not need such a vision because you have two great books of vision—the book of Scripture, which repeatedly reveals God’s glory, and the book of creation, which continuously witnesses to God’s greatness. Take, for example, the stars: “Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Ps. 19:2–3). The massive vision is always before you—if you will just look. Read the great Bible passages to enlarge your vision of God’s greatness. Look up at the stars and around at creation. Pray for a growing revelation of God’s vastness and for the grace to believe what you read and see.

Devotion

We find another aspect of Joshua’s preparation for leadership in Exodus 33, where we glimpse his growing devotion to God. He was serving in the tabernacle with Moses while the pillar of cloud towered above the tent. Verse 11 tells us: “Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.” Though he was not privileged, like

6. Quoted in John Huffman Jr., *Who’s in Charge Here?* (Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books, 1981), 63.

Moses, to speak with God face to face, Joshua was so overcome by God's presence that he would not leave the tabernacle! There is such passion in this picture. "Lord, you are so wonderful, I cannot leave this room. I beg you, let me stay."

Joshua's New Testament counterpart is Mary of Bethany, who would not leave the room where Jesus was as she sat enraptured at his feet despite her sister's scolding. And she was so right! As we have it from the lips of our Lord, "Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42). It was this same Mary who poured a year's fortune on Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair, and of whom Jesus said, "She has done a beautiful thing to me" (Mark 14:6).

True spiritual leadership is born for devotion and demands to be closeted with God. We cannot name one great leader in the church who has not made personal worship a top priority. Such were the lives of Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Müller, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and every other truly spiritual leader. There is no spiritual leadership apart from passionate devotion.

Over one hundred years ago, the great C. J. Vaughn said, "If I wished to humble anyone, I should question him about his prayers. I know nothing to compare with the topic for its sorrowful confessions."⁷ Men, leaders, how would you answer such a question?

Magnanimity

The next mention of Joshua in Scripture is not as flattering as the previous appearance. Numbers 11 tells us that when Joshua was serving as assistant to Moses, he received disconcerting news. Some elders named Eldad and Medad were prophesying (preaching) in the camp of Israel. To Joshua this was an affront to Moses's spiritual leadership, for Moses was Israel's prophet *par excellence*. Alarmed and jealous for Moses, Joshua immediately went to him, blurting out, "My lord Moses, stop them," fully expecting Moses to take action. But to Joshua's great surprise, Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake?"

7. Quoted in Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 75.

Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Num. 11:28–29).

This was a watershed experience for Joshua. Had he not been checked here by Moses's magnanimous response, his "selfless" jealousy for Moses's honor could have eventually made him a narrow, petty man, unfit for leadership. As it turned out, the lesson was well learned, and Joshua never again displayed such smallness. He became a magnanimous leader who lived only for God's glory.

Unfortunately, church leaders have not always appropriated this lesson. When John Claypool delivered the 1979 Yale Lectures on Preaching, he said that while in seminary he experienced jealous jockeying for position, and that life in parish ministry had not been much different. His tragic comments came after attending national conventions of church leaders where most of the conversations in the hotel rooms either were full of envy for a leader who was doing well or scarcely concealed delight over the failure of another.⁸

Truly spiritual leadership knows none of this, as the example of the great Charles Simeon eloquently shows. Simeon, who pastored Holy Trinity in Cambridge at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is credited with establishing the evangelical wing of the Church of England through immense leadership exhibited in his powerful personality, his great preaching—which filled twenty-one influential volumes—and his personal discipleship of some of the church's greatest missionaries and leaders. Such a man could have been tempted to resent others who might have displaced him—as, for example, when his health broke and he had to spend eight months away recuperating, and his curate, Thomason, stepped in to preach. Thomason surprised everyone with a preaching ability that rivaled Simeon's. And what was the great man's response? Rejoicing! In fact, as his biography says, he referenced John 3:30 ("He must increase, but I must decrease") and told a friend, "Now I see why I have been laid aside. I bless God for it."⁹ True spiritual leadership knows nothing of a self-promoting spirit.

8. John R. Claypool, *The Preaching Event* (Waco, TX: Word, 1980), 68.

9. Quoted in Hugh Evan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 111.

Apropos to this truth is the fact that Joshua's regular designation, used several times in the Pentateuch, is "assistant of Moses." Sometimes the word translated as "assistant" can be rendered as "servant," "page," "aide," "lieutenant," or "minister," but the title always carries the idea of subservience. Significantly, Joshua remained Moses's assistant until his leader died. Though second violin is a difficult instrument to master (much harder than first chair!), Joshua played it well. In fact, he was a virtuoso second fiddle.

Magnanimous spiritual leaders like Joshua can be number two, number three, four, five—it doesn't matter to them. Jesus, the ultimate Joshua, showed us how: "For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

Those who qualify for spiritual leadership are big-hearted, supportive Joshuas to each other and to all those around.

Faith

We next see Joshua's name in connection with the famous incident of spying out the land in Numbers 13–14. Moses commissioned twelve spies (one from each tribe) to reconnoiter the Promised Land as a prelude to conquest. Caleb and Joshua were representatives of their tribes (13:6, 8).

After forty days of covert inspection, the scouts returned. All agreed that the land was bountiful (vv. 23–24, 27). However, ten of the spies said it could not be conquered because the cities were well fortified and some of the people were giants (vv. 28–29). Caleb and Joshua countered by saying almost literally that victory would be a "piece of cake." The Hebrew of 14:9 literally says, "Do not fear the people of the land, for our bread they are." Caleb and Joshua were saying, "Do not worry, it is a piece of bread!" All Israel had to do, the two men insisted, was move in (13:30; 14:9).

But the rest of Israel sided with the majority report, and even tried to stone Joshua and Caleb (14:1–10). As a result, the people came under God's judgment and had to spend forty years wandering in the desert (one year for each of the forty days of spying out the land) until all had become corpses except Joshua and Caleb.

For Joshua, the lesson was quite clear: the majority is not always right. In fact, it is very often wrong. The men God uses have always stood against the flow—Luther, John Knox, John Fox, William Wilberforce, William Booth, William Carey, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and more. How we need to remember this. Ours is a day when truth is determined by consensus, when justice is struck by a 5-4 vote, when “everybody is doing it” has become the pervasive rationale for behavior, when Thomas Jefferson’s fear of the tyranny of the majority is a reality. Spiritual leaders do not necessarily go along with the majority opinion.

Joshua and Caleb stood alone, a common characteristic among good leaders. But the prominent leadership quality we see in their solitary stand is great faith. They simply believed in the glorious God Joshua had glimpsed from afar on Sinai. There was no way they could share the “grasshopper” complex of the other spies, for how could they feel thus when they truly believed in such a great God. Without exception, great spiritual leaders have a faith that towers above their contemporaries. The grammar of their lives is “By faith, by faith, by faith . . .” (see Hebrews 11).

Significantly, it was at this time that Moses changed Joshua’s original name Hoshea (“salvation”) to Joshua (“Jehovah is salvation”) (Num. 13:16). This is a high leadership name, for the name Jesus is the Greek form of Joshua. “You shall call his name Jesus,” said the angel, “for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21).

The Spirit

After the forty years of wandering, it came about on the plains of Moab that, according to Numbers 26:65, “Not one of them was left, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.” It was time for Joshua’s commissioning: “So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him. Make him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight” (vv. 18–19). Notice that the Spirit, capital S—that is, the Holy Spirit—was upon and in Joshua. He had the indispensable qualification for all spiritual leadership. J. Oswald Sanders says, “Spiritual leadership is not a matter of

superior spiritual power, and it can never be self-generated. There is no such thing as a self-made spiritual leader.”¹⁰ The New Testament agrees:

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.” . . . They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:3, 5)

There is no spiritual leadership apart from the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it follows that if we aspire to leadership in the church, we must be full of the Spirit. Practically, this means that we must continually confess our sins, keep ourselves in God’s Word, and continually submit to God, asking the Spirit to fill us. The telltale sign of this will be that we effervesce Christ (Eph. 5:17–20). As we walk and serve in the Spirit, the Spirit will ordain us to specific tasks in the church, and these will be tasks of leadership at all levels, be it waiting tables or heralding the gospel.

Expendability

There is one more mention of Joshua—in the final chapter of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy 34, where his preparation for leadership is completed with the death of Moses.

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. And the LORD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, ‘I will give it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.” So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. Moses

10. Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 141.

was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. (vv. 1–12)

Moses was the greatest spiritual leader Israel ever had—far greater than Joshua. The transition from Moses to Joshua was like going from poetry to prose. Yet God did not need Moses. *Even Moses was expendable!*

What a truth for all leaders to grasp. God does not need us. He has used a donkey to proclaim his word! He is perfectly capable of carrying out his plans without our leadership. But wonder of wonders, joy of joys, he has chosen to use us. We must take our call to leadership seriously. We must glory in the work, but never in ourselves.

It goes without saying that leadership per se involves many more elements beyond the seven qualities instilled in Joshua. But one thing is sure: leadership must have a *vision*, a dream, a mental image, a precise goal of what is to be accomplished. Vision is the currency of leadership. A vision or dream must grab the leader, and when it does, it will pull others along. The challenge of leadership is so great today because modern man is dreamless.

Next, a leader must not only have a dream, he must be able to *communicate* it. This is true with artists, educators, military leaders, and even fast-food franchisers. A great leader communicates with clarity, whether by speech, metaphor, diagram, or model.

Good leaders then *delegate and orchestrate*. They surround themselves with competent people. They build consensus. And they elevate the people with whom they work.

Good leaders lead by *demonstration*. They pull people along with them instead of pushing them. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower used to demonstrate the art of leadership in a simple but forceful way. He would place a single piece of string on a table and say, “Pull it and it follows wherever you want it to go; push it and it goes nowhere.”

Good leaders are *determined*. Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald’s, displayed this elaborately framed statement composed by Calvin Coolidge:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
Talent will not;
 nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with great
 talent.
Genius will not;
 unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education will not;
 the world is full of educated derelicts.
Persistence and determination are omnipotent.¹¹

Men, if we wish to be good leaders we must recognize and embrace this conventional wisdom: *vision, communication, delegation and organization, demonstration, and determination*. We laud and commend all this, but we must practice it as well.

But there is far more beyond this in our call to spiritual leadership, for the seven characteristics instilled in Joshua through his leadership training have no exact parallel in any management manual in the world—especially as they are presented in scriptural bouquet. What is more, if they are embraced as disciplines of spiritual leadership, their collective energy will provide the animus for wisely living out conventional leadership wisdom. Put another way, the transcending wisdom of spiritual leadership will energize and elevate other types of wisdom we have received—thus producing dynamic leadership.

Mature male leadership is rare in the church. Are you part of the problem or part of the answer? Be honest with yourself and God.

11. Quoted in *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations*, 3rd ed., ed. Elizabeth Knowles (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 76.

Men, Joshua's preparation for leadership tells us that if we sincerely want to improve our leadership capacities there are some things we must sweat for:

- The commitment to and practice of intercessory *prayer*
- The pursuit of a great and growing *vision* of God
- A growing *worship of and devotion to God*
- A big-hearted *magnanimity* that thrills at the elevation of others
- A *faith* that transcends the doubts of others
- The filling of the *Holy Spirit*
- A liberating understanding and embracing of one's *expendability*

The example of Joshua's preparation calls for our perspiration—holy sweat.

Rise up, O men of God!
The Church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task;
Rise up, and make her great!¹²

Food for Thought

What is the relationship between *leadership*—whether at home, at work, or in the church—and *prayer*? Be honest and specific.

The author says, "There is no spiritual leadership apart from passionate devotion." Do you agree or disagree? How does this play out in your life?

In what ways does jealousy hold you back either from being a leader or from being a more effective leader? What leaders do you wrongfully envy? What specifically do you covet in their life, ministry, or work?

In what ways does God want you to take a greater stand of faith? Regarding what issues or problems? Why aren't you doing this?

What leadership character traits of Stephen are mentioned in Acts 6:3, 5? Are these evident in your life as a father, a boss, or a church leader? What can you do to allow God to develop these in you more fully?

12. From the hymn "Rise Up, O Men of God" by William Pierson Merrill, 1911.

What does the principle of expendability mean for leadership? Apply this to your own leadership roles. In view of this, what steps should you be taking?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Review the life of Joshua as described in the Scripture passages quoted in this chapter. List the aspects of his work that mean something to you, then identify why those aspects touched you. Also list those principles that are currently weak in your performance as a leader and what you will do to grow stronger in those areas.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

- Called to Lead* (John MacArthur)
- Christian Leadership* (John Stott)
- Christian Leadership Essentials* (David S. Dockery)
- The Conviction to Lead* (Albert Mohler)
- The Heart of a Servant Leader* (C. John Miller)
- Pursuing Peace* (Robert D. Jones)
- The Shepherd Leader* (Timothy Z. Witmer)
- Spiritual Leadership* (J. Oswald Sanders)

Discipline of Giving

In 1923 a very significant meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Attending that famous gathering were nine of the world's most successful financiers. The president of the largest independent steel company, the president of the largest utility company, the president of the largest gas company, the greatest wheat speculator, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, a member of the president's cabinet, the greatest bear on Wall Street, the head of the world's greatest monopoly, and the president of the Bank of International Settlements were all present. It was a high-powered group if there ever was one. These men were supreme masters of the finance world!

Twenty-five years later, in 1948, the picture was much different. Charles Schwab had died bankrupt after living on borrowed money for the last five years of his life. Samuel Insull had died a fugitive from justice, penniless in a foreign land. Howard Hopson was insane. Arthur Cutten had died abroad, insolvent. Richard Whitney had just been released from Sing Sing prison. Albert Fall had just been pardoned from prison so he could die at home. Jesse Livermore had died by suicide, as had Leon Fraser and Ivar Kreuger. All these men, masters of finance, had been mastered by wealth!

The extraordinary sameness of the hellish gravity of their famous lives is a divine warning, for God set the ghosts of these financial giants as spectral, midcentury witnesses to a nation about to run amok in materialism. Today their ghosts have faded, and a new gallery of

forlorn spirits has assembled, with names like Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken, Kenneth Lay, and Bernie Madoff.

Yet few take serious notice. Perhaps it is because most, especially if they are Christians, do not aspire to be the head of the world's greatest monopoly or to the vulgar display of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Instead they are quite content to cultivate a less encumbering level of wealth—not realizing that the dangers for themselves are the same as for the super rich: a growing delusion that this world is everything, that someday they will be content, that “providing for one's family” means being able to give them more and better, that relationships will be enriched by wealth, and that wealth will make them better people.

Clearly the abiding reality is that wealth presents substantial dangers for all, and especially for today's increasingly prosperous Christian population. But what can we do to escape the power of materialism? Step out of the competitive world? Abandon Wall Street? Avoid the financial professions? Join a commune? Some think so, despite Christ's firm admonitions against isolation.

Actually, however, there is a better way, one that is taught repeatedly in God's Word. In fact, Scripture presents it as a grace—the *grace of giving*.

The most explicit teaching on this subject is 2 Corinthians 8, where the apostle Paul deftly instructs the Corinthian church regarding giving by citing the beautiful example of the Macedonian church's generosity. He begins: “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia” (v. 1). For Paul, giving is so much a grace that he uses the Greek word five times in this short text: verse 1, “the grace” (*charin*); verse 4, “the favor” (*charas*); verse 6, “this act of grace” (*charin*); verse 7, “this act of grace also” (*chariti*); and verse 9, “the grace” (*charin*). Giving is a matter of grace from beginning to end, as we shall see.

Grace Giving in Israel's History

To adequately grasp Paul's dynamic teaching on grace giving, we need to recall earlier biblical instruction to Israel. There is some confusion today about what God actually required from his people in the Old

Testament. Most think it was something like 10 percent, which is a woeful misconception. Actually there were multiple mandatory giving requirements in Israel that came to considerably more.

The Lord's Tithe

The foundational tithe was termed the Lord's tithe (or the Levites' tithe, Num. 18:21–29, because it went to support their priestly ministry). Leviticus 27:30 says, “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's; it is holy to the LORD.” This meant that a tithe (10 percent) of all the people's produce and animals was given to the Levites. No Israelite had any option about this. A man who did not pay it was robbing God. Malachi 3:8 refers to this, saying, “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, “How have we robbed you?” In your tithes and contributions.”

The Festival Tithe

In addition to this initial 10 percent, there was a second tithe, commonly called the festival tithe. According to Deuteronomy 12:10–11, 17–18, this tithe took effect when Israel conquered the Promised Land because another 10 percent had to be given for an annual celebration—feasting with one's family members, friends, and servants. Whereas the purpose of the Lord's tithe was to perpetuate ministry, the festival tithe was to build religious celebration and mutual community in God's people. The two tithes together comprised a substantial economic bite—a mandatory 20 percent.

The Poor Tithe

But there was still more, for Deuteronomy 14:28–29 commanded a third tithe, a poor tithe:

At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns. And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.

This provided for the social welfare of those who could not provide for themselves. Since the tithe was 10 percent every three years, it came to 3.3 percent per annum, thus bringing the total to over 23 percent per year.

These three mandatory tithes funded the priesthood and a national feast, and aided the poor. “Enough!” we might think. But Leviticus 19:9–10 commanded even more, for the people were also charged to refrain from harvesting the corners of their fields or picking all the grapes from their vineyards so as to leave gleanings for the poor. In addition to this, there were other taxes from time to time, such as a tax of a third of a shekel they later had to pay for the materials used in temple offerings (Neh. 10:32–33). The bottom line was this: God’s people were required to give a minimum of 25 percent a year.

Grace Giving

One might think that 25 percent was certainly the limit. But it was at this point that heart giving took over—“*grace giving*,” or nonrequired offerings. There were *firstfruits offerings* in which an Israelite, out of love for God, brought the firstfruits of his crop or livestock to God (Num. 18:11–13). The beautiful thing about this was that he did so when he had not yet harvested the rest of the crop and did not know what he would ultimately reap. He gave the best to God, trusting he would bring in the rest. It was faith giving and was totally voluntary.

There were also *freewill offerings*, offerings God called for when he commanded Moses to build the tabernacle: “Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me” (Ex. 25:1–2). Nothing was specified except that it be voluntary and from the heart. Here the people’s response was so great that Moses had to tell them to stop giving (36:2–7).

Giving from a heart overflowing with God’s grace, whether the giving is mandatory or voluntary, has always been the ideal for God’s people—before and after the coming of Christ. When a heart overflows in grace giving, a substantial amount of one’s income goes to God.¹

1. See John F. MacArthur Jr., *Giving: God’s Way* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1979), 60–73, where the author succinctly delineates the three mandatory tithes and two types of voluntary giving in the Old Testament.

Grace Giving in the New Testament

As we noted, Paul begins his discussion of grace giving by holding high the example of the impoverished Macedonians' astounding giving: "We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part" (2 Cor. 8:1–2).

The word used for "their extreme poverty" is the one from which we derive the English word *bathysphere*—a Jacques Cousteau word for a ship used to probe the *bathos*, the depth of the ocean. The great Greek scholar Alfred Plummer translates this as "their down-to-depth poverty."² The Macedonians were at the bottom; they were truly poor.

Today we fancy ourselves poor if we have to think twice before going out to dinner. The "American way" today is the credit card—buying things you do not need with money you do not have to impress people you do not like. But it was not so with the Macedonian Christians.

Not only were they dirt poor, they were under "a severe test of affliction" (v. 2). The literal sense is that they were being squeezed by the difficulties of their life. The surrounding culture rejected them and kept squeezing them harder and harder because of their devotion to Christ. They were in an unrelenting pressure cooker.

Their situation was impossible: grinding poverty and severe trials. But out of it came incredible grace, and their extreme poverty and severe trials mixed with deep joy that "overflowed in a wealth of generosity." This was the grace of giving.

This is truly amazing. But if this taxes one's credulity, listen to Paul's further description in verses 3 and 4: "For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints." They gave "beyond [literally, "contrary to"] their means." The early church father John Chrysostom marveled at this, saying, "They did the begging, not Paul." It was as if they were saying, "Come on, Paul. Have a heart! Do not limit us!"

2. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 234.

The *grace of giving* has nothing to do with being well off. It is not dictated by ability. It is a willingness to give. Giving is viewed as a privilege. It is joyously enthusiastic and pleads for the opportunity to give more.

What else produces such giving? Paul gives the answer in verse 5 as he relates the vertical and horizontal angles of the Macedonians' commitment: "And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us." The Macedonians' remarkable giving was the result of their first giving themselves to God. It is so simple: when all one has is given to God, giving to others becomes the natural reflex of the soul.

It is easy to surrender part when we have already given the whole. This was shown in the life of a young Norwegian named Peter Torjesen when, at the age of seventeen, his heart was so stirred by a challenge to missionary giving that he opened his wallet and poured all his money into the offering. As an afterthought he also included a scrap of paper on which he wrote, "*Og mit liv*" ("And my life").³ Significantly, young Torjesen went on to lead a fruitful life as a missionary in China.

The Macedonians did things the right way: they gave their hearts to God, then they gave themselves to their fellow believers, which in turn resulted in their giving what they had to the work of Christ. This is where grace giving must begin—giving ourselves completely to God. Grace giving cannot exist without this (cf. Rom. 12:1).

The Influence of Grace Giving

The shining example of the Macedonians' giving was held high by the apostle so as to convict and motivate the Corinthian church. Now Paul left no doubt as to what he hoped would happen: "We urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace" (2 Cor. 8:6).

The Corinthians were a gifted group who excelled in many commendable things other than giving. But Paul knew that despite all their excellences they would never become what they could and should be

3. Kari Torjesen Malcolm, *We Signed Away Our Lives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 23.

until they learned the grace of giving. The abiding spiritual fact is, there is no way to grow into spiritual maturity without committing one's giving to the Lord. *God can have our money and not have our hearts, but he cannot have our hearts without having our money.* Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21).

The spectres of the fallen Wall Street giants are not the only ones to announce the dangers of money. The entire New Testament is full of repeated warnings, many of which are from the lips of Jesus himself, who informed his listeners more often about money than about heaven and hell, sexual immorality, or violence. After the rich young ruler turned away sorrowing because Jesus told him to sell all, Jesus told the disciples, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). His point was that it is impossible for a man who trusts in riches to get into heaven. Thankfully, he added a final line: "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God" (v. 27).

Indeed, Jesus consistently presented wealth, if we depend on it rather than on God, as a spiritual handicap. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount he recommended, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matt. 6:19–20). A little later he warned, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (v. 24).

And to a man grabbing for an inheritance Christ said, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). Then he related the story of the rich man who decided to build bigger barns only to die that very night, ending his parable with a solemn pronouncement: "So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God" (v. 21).

Men, the “rich toward God” are those who give not only themselves, but also their riches—thus laying up their treasures in heaven. The key to liberation from the power of materialism is not an exodus from culture—abandoning Wall Street or leaving the wealth of the nation to others—but the *grace of giving*.

Grace giving goes beyond a mere tithe, but rather gives till it hurts. Grace giving affects one’s lifestyle. There are things one cannot have and things forgone when one indulges in grace giving. As C. S. Lewis remarked:

If our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them.⁴

Givers for God disarm the power of money. They invite God’s grace to flow through them.

It is possible you have reached a sticking point in your spiritual development and are perplexed. After all, you are attending church regularly, you enjoy the fellowship of Christians, you even read your Bible and pray regularly. The problem may be that you are not giving—that God simply does not have that part of you. If so, you need the grace of giving: *firstfruits giving*, which gives to God one’s best up front, trusting that he will provide the rest; joyous *freewill giving*, such as the Israelites experienced when Moses had to say “stop!”; and the *grace giving* of the Macedonians, whose liberality overflowed as they begged for the opportunity to give more.

The apostle has made his point convincingly, but he caps it with a supreme illustration: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Though Jesus could put his finger on every star, he emptied himself and became a poor earthly servant for us. That is heaven’s “stewardship” program, and it is the pattern for us. The Corinthians were not clubbed into giving by fear or

4. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 81–82.

some gimmicky financial appeal. Rather, it was the ultimate example of giving—"the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ"—that produced the grace of giving in their lives. It was simply because of Jesus.

The Discipline of Giving

We must understand that God's grace in our lives demands discipline. This is why the great apostle of grace says, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7, NASB). And in this matter of the grace of giving, there must be the discipline of giving as well.

Mental Discipline

Before there are any outward disciplines of giving, there must be a disciplined understanding of giving.

First, you must bear in mind that giving is not a meritorious work that will enhance your position before God. Similarly, giving will not make you better than other Christians.

Second, you need to understand that while giving will not gain favor with God, giving does bring blessing! Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). Correspondingly, Paul wrote, "The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor. 9:6).

Admittedly these blessings are essentially spiritual. But which would you rather have—a spiritual blessing or a bigger bank account; inner contentment or a new yacht?

Third, you must keep in mind that giving that pleases God is generous and sacrificial. As we have seen, the Macedonians gave out of their deep poverty. We can also profitably reflect on what Jesus said about the poor widow who humbly gave only a fraction of a penny: "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box" (Mark 12:43).

Fourth, you must understand that what you give is to be determined between you and God. Giving should never be decided casually or flippantly, but through serious prayer—asking God what he wants you to give.

Volitional Discipline

With the mental disciplines of giving firmly in mind, the way is ready for the act of giving.

To begin with, the act of giving should be accompanied by offering oneself to God, just as did the Macedonians, who “gave themselves first to the Lord” (2 Cor. 8:5). This should be done silently, not so someone will see our pious act of worship. And giving oneself to God is indeed worship (Rom. 12:1).

Second, it is strongly recommended, in light of the great giving requirements imposed on God’s ancient people Israel, that everyone should at least consider the first 10 percent as a starting point in giving—a minimum. And in the case of the Macedonians’ grace giving, the amount must have been way over 10 percent because 10 percent of their “extreme poverty” (2 Cor. 8:2) would not have helped anyone.

Third, your giving ought to be regular. Paul advised this same Corinthian church on another occasion, “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1 Cor. 16:2). The apostle knew that regular, systematic giving would help the people meet their regular obligations and most emergencies.

Fourth, you must begin giving now. The natural tendency is to put giving off until you feel able to give. Such thinking keeps many from ever giving. A preacher came to see a farmer and asked him,

“If you had \$200, would you give \$100 of it to the Lord?”

“I would.”

“If you had two cows, would you give one of them to the Lord?”

“Sure.”

“If you had two pigs, would you give one of them to the Lord?”

The farmer said, “Now that isn’t fair! You know I have two pigs.”⁵

Giving should not only be regular but responsive to need, spontaneous, like that of the Macedonians and Mary of Bethany, who in anointing Jesus so lavishly poured out her resources.

5. MacArthur, *Giving: God’s Way*, 92.

High Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely calculated less and more.⁶

Finally, your giving should be joyous, “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). “Cheerful” can also be translated as “hilarious,” suggesting a joy that leaps over all restraints.

The act of giving is a blessed state. We do well to remember that our Lord Jesus himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). May we be faithful and disciplined in giving ourselves and all we have to God!

Food for Thought

What does the phrase “grace giving” mean to you? What does grace have to do with giving? When you give to the church or various Christian ministries, do you generally do so out of obligation or willingness?

How much of your income do you believe God wants you to give to him? Support your answer with Scripture, then ask God in prayer whether he agrees.

What does Malachi 3:8ff. say to you about giving to God? Are you generally obeying or disobeying this passage?

Should we give only when we have enough to spare, so to speak—during times when God has “blessed” us? Consider 2 Corinthians 8:1–2.

What does Matthew 6:19–24 mean for *your* life? What are some specific ways you can apply these verses?

What example is found in 2 Corinthians 8:9? What does this verse say to you?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

What principles stand out on this topic in 2 Corinthians 8:1–9? List as many as you can, then rate yourself on each one.

6. William Wordsworth, “Inside of King’s College Chapel, Cambridge,” in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 4 (London: E. Moxon, Son, and Co., 1870), 87.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Chasing Contentment (Erik Raymond)

The Grace of Giving (John Stott)

Living in the Light: Money, Sex, and Power (John Piper)

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (Jeremiah Burroughs)

Redeeming Money (Paul David Tripp)

The Things of Earth (Joe Rigney)

The Treasure Principle (Randy Alcorn)

Discipline of Witness

When my wife and I are in Southern California, we ritually arrange to drive out to Newport Beach's Crab Cooker for a delicious seafood dinner served on paper plates. After eating we stroll over to the oceanfront and watch surfers, then drive out the Balboa Peninsula and board the ferry to Balboa Island for dessert—a Balboa Bar; what else? As we cross the harbor, I invariably think of Jim (“Big Jim” as his friends called him) because as a college boy in the early 1930s Jim captained these same boats during his summers. I usually say to my wife, “Jim used to run these boats,” and then she and I engage in some pleasant memories that have nothing at all to do with the ocean.

When I first met Jim in 1975, he was a proud, self-sufficient business executive entering retirement who had little use for Christianity and was often even belligerent about it. The nickname “Big Jim” was not because of his size—he was perhaps five feet five—but because of the force of his personality. He was suspicious of me and critical of those who had faith in Christ. But we became sparring partners and then friends. Conversations revealed that he did have conscious spiritual needs and a cryptic interest in Christ.

And so it came about that in August 1976, I witnessed Jim's remarkable conversion in the privacy of his living room. Tears brimmed in his eyes and began to course down his cheeks as he said, “I'm no good. But I want Christ if he'll have me.” Then we prayed together. Jim was rough. The first few times he came to church he commented,

“Pastor, that was a hell of a sermon.” But he was a learner and he became a disciple, and some of the rough edges began to disappear.

My favorite memory of Jim is of him sitting crossed-legged on the dirt in cutoffs, shirtless and tanned (ever the beach boy), working on the church sprinkler system, refusing all advice to go home and rest, saying, “After all Christ has done for me, this is the least I can do.” It is, in fact, my last memory of him, because a week later as I was about to call to invite him out to dinner, the phone rang, and I was told that Jim had passed away sitting in the same chair in which I had seen him come to know Christ.

“Average” Joys

What a sweet, sweet memory. And it is even sweeter because it is not professional, but so intensely personal. In retrospect, my family’s most enduring spiritual joys have come through everyday personal witness to people like Susie, our daughter Holly’s kindergarten teacher, who weekly promised Holly she would come to church, and finally came—and returned again and again, becoming our good friend and finding Christ.

There was our neighbor John, the industrial arts teacher, the nicest man on the block, who after several years of mutual family friendship became a Christian and then a deacon in our church.

Another particularly treasured memory is of our letter carrier, Damon, an ex-Marine, and his young wife, Bobbie. Our daily greetings evolved into a friendship that culminated in Bobbie coming to Christ through a women’s Bible study and Damon doing the same at a men’s retreat.

Nothing in my years of productive ministry has given my wife and me more joy than being a part of seeing our neighbors, Jamie and Deby Fellowes, grow into a deep relationship with Christ and then become authentic witnesses in the church, the community, and the business world. (You can read their testimony in the Resources section of this book: Section B, “James and Deby Fellowes’s Witness to Their Faith.”)

It has been an increasing revelation to my wife and me that the greatest joys in pastoral ministry have come not in the extraordinary events (such as an exceptional worship service or a groundbreaking

ceremony on a great building project), but in the normal, “average” avenues of everyday person-to-person witness—the things any Christian can do, regardless of gifts or calling.

In this respect, it is highly significant that Andrew, one of the names most associated with witness in the Bible, was an average man who shared Christ in patently ordinary ways. In fact, there appears to be some intentional divine poetry in his name, for “Andrew” comes from the Greek root *andros*, which means “man.” Thus, he is an example for everyone who would follow Christ. Andrew is what every man ought to be in witnessing for Christ, so a glance at his life will properly challenge and motivate us all.

The Gospels tell us that Andrew was in on the ground floor of Jesus’s ministry. When he met Jesus, he was already a devotee to the prophetic cause of John the Baptist (John 1:35ff.), which indicates he was a spiritually sensitive man who realized the days were evil, a man who had been baptized in repentance for sin and was awaiting the Messiah. He also had the distinction of being the brother of Simon Peter, the soon-to-be leader of the apostolic band (v. 40).

But Andrew’s initial claim to fame was that he was the first of the twelve disciples to follow Jesus. The early church recognized this and gave him the honored title *Protokletos*, which means “First-called.”¹

However, despite his enviable beginning Andrew never achieved prominence among the disciples. He was excluded from the inner circle of Peter, James, and John, and he missed the great experiences they shared with the Master—the transfiguration, the healing of Jairus’s daughter, and Jesus’s sorrow in Gethsemane. Moreover, he was not much of a leader. He preached no sermons deemed worth recording. He wrote no epistles and performed no recorded miracles. He seems to have had none of the bold audacity of his brother Peter and never appears in the foreground. But he did have one distinction, a grand distinction: *he excelled in bringing others to Christ!*

Interestingly, this humble distinction has endeared him to whole cultures so that today he is the patron saint of three diverse nations.²

1. William Barclay, *The Master’s Man* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 41.

2. Barclay, *The Master’s Man*, 44–46, successively discusses Andrew as the patron saint of Russia, Greece, and Scotland.

Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (3.1.1) alleges that Andrew later went to Scythia, the country north of the Black Sea between the Danube and Tanais Rivers, which today is part of modern Russia. Another tradition makes him the patron saint of Greece, for it says that he was martyred there on an X-shaped cross, where he hung for three days praising God and praying for his enemies. The third country that claims Andrew is Scotland, on the fanciful supposition that after the eighth-century monk Regulus brought Andrew's relics (three fingers from his right hand, an arm bone, one tooth, and a kneecap) to what is today St. Andrew's, Scotland, the Scots were led into battle by a white X-shaped cross levitating above them in the blue sky. Since then, the white St. Andrew's cross on a sky-blue background has been the standard of Scotland.

Did Andrew actually go to Russia, Greece, or Scotland? No one knows. Why do three countries, therefore, claim him? The answer rests in Andrew's winsome character as it is recorded in Scripture. He was a great-hearted man of average abilities who loved to introduce others to Christ. Average Andrew's extraordinary evangelistic heart has made his name one of such fadeless beauty that whole nations want to claim him.

Andrew's heart commends itself to every man. His heart is meant to model what ought to be the ordinary experience of the average Christian.

Average Andrew's Extraordinary Heart

A Knowledgeable Heart

Andrew met Christ personally and developed an intimate knowledge of him. It happened as Andrew and another disciple were standing beside John the Baptist when Jesus passed by and the Baptist cried out, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:35)—thus precipitating their following Jesus and spending the remainder of the day in conversation with him (vv. 39–40). Though unrecorded, that conversation was a spiritual watershed for Andrew. The winsome humanity of God incarnate elevated Andrew's spiritual horizons and galvanized his allegiance. Andrew heard Jesus speak words that were the truest he had ever heard, and his heart was set aflame. Andrew now knew and loved Jesus Christ!

The immediate reflex of Andrew's heart from his newfound knowledge of Christ was that *everyone* must know him, and it has been likewise with all who really meet Christ. When John Bunyan's Pilgrim met Christ at the foot of the cross, his joy was so great he wanted to shout it to the trees, the stars, the brooks, and the birds—to breathe it to everything and everyone.³

George Whitefield, the evangelist of the Great Awakening, records in his diary the same phenomenon when he met Christ:

O! with what joy—joy unspeakable—even joy that was full and big with glory, was my soul filled. . . . Surely it was the day of mine espousals—a day to be had in everlasting remembrance! At first my joys were like a spring tide, and overflowed the banks!⁴

My heart resonates with this because that was precisely my experience when I met Christ. In fact, some of my well-meaning friends tried to tone me down, saying, “We are happy for you—but take it easy!” The reality is, I simply could not keep it in, for in meeting Jesus I had experienced the primary motivation and qualification for sharing him.

Men, we must not let the self-evident nature of the truth dull us to its profundity, which is this: the more immediate and personal one's knowledge of Christ, the more natural it is to share him with others. This is why those who have newly met Christ are often so verbal and successful in leading others to him despite the absence of learned arguments.

If you know Christ, you, like average Andrew, have the essential heart qualification to share him—even if you do not have all the answers. And the key to ongoing effectiveness is a perpetual freshness in your growing knowledge of him.

A Magnetized Heart

The second characteristic of ordinary Andrew's extraordinary heart was that it had been magnetized by Christ. He was so drawn to Christ, he was sure that if others could just once be exposed to Jesus, it would

3. James Hastings, ed., *The Greater Men and Women of the Bible*, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 122.

4. Quoted in Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 77.

be enough. “He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah’” (John 1:41).

Certainly Andrew had the right idea! Unlike the caricatures of Christ, the Christ of Scripture is so winsome, so radically different, so utterly unlike the stereotypes, that when he is truly seen, he draws the most resistant to himself. Though men and women have always resisted Christ, and will continue to do so, there are untold thousands who will be magnetized to him when they understand the truth about him.

If we want Andrew-like hearts, we must repeatedly expose ourselves to the raw realities of Christ as they are recorded in the Gospels. Magnetized hearts draw others to Christ.

A Selfless Heart

Andrew had a knowledgeable heart, a magnetized heart, and a remarkably selfless heart—as John’s Gospel shows:

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas” (which means Peter). (1:40–42)

What we observe here, and it is substantiated by the other Gospels, is that Andrew was commonly identified as “Simon Peter’s brother” and not vice versa. The official apostolic lists in Matthew 10:2–4 and Luke 6:14–16 both identify him in this way. John’s account of the feeding of the five thousand likewise identifies him as “Simon Peter’s brother” (6:8).

Everyone knew swaggering, ebullient Peter. He naturally drew people to himself, but Andrew faded into the wallpaper—especially when the big guy was around. “Andrew? Oh, you know who he is. Peter’s brother. Sort of mauve-colored. Easy to miss.” A lesser man would have stumbled here. Having lived with Peter all his life, he knew there would be only one seat for him once he brought Peter to Christ—the back seat! But Andrew was unencumbered by self and introduced Peter to Christ anyway. And Peter became a major player indeed!

There are men who join the army only if they can be officers, who will do evangelism if *they* are the evangelists. But the true evangelist's heart is a selfless heart. Andrew's heart was ordinary perhaps, but extraordinary in its selflessness.

An Optimistic Heart

The fourth element of Andrew's heart was its optimism about what would happen when problems were brought to Christ. It was Andrew who, while Philip expressed dismay at the possibility of feeding the five thousand, suggested to Christ the lad's five loaves and two fishes (John 6:5–9). Andrew may have appeared foolish in his suggestion, but he knew Christ can mightily use all that is given to him. The result was stupendous—the all-time picnic of the ages! After this, Andrew's optimism knew no bounds.

Our attitude makes all the difference in bringing people to Christ. Belief in the sufficiency of Christ fueled the great works of John Wesley and George Whitefield. In fact, every great evangelistic work has had this optimism at its core.

Are we optimistic about what Christ can do? If so, we will see him turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, just like average Andrew did.

An Expansive Heart

The final characteristic we will note in Andrew's heart was its expansiveness. John 12:20–22 preserves a vignette that showcases this aspect:

Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

The Greeks who wanted to see Jesus were, of course, Gentiles and thus accursed in traditional Jewish eyes. Philip was unsure what to do with their request, so he approached Andrew—and Andrew, without hesitation, went straight to Jesus. Andrew has the great distinction of being the first disciple to understand that Jesus is the answer for *everyone* and to apply the universality of Jesus's ministry. No wonder he is the patron saint of the Russians, the Greeks, and the Scots.

Extraordinary Encouragement

What encouragement there is here for all of us, because Andrew was a *bona fide* average guy. He did not have an education like Dr. Luke. He did not possess a great intellect like the apostle Paul. He had nothing of the force of personality and oratorical gifts of his celebrated brother. But in his own way, he helped shape the Christian world—much to his own surprise, we can be sure.

When we think of people being brought to Christ, we think of Andrew. Every city of any size has several churches named St. Andrew's. The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association encourages people to bring others to its crusades through "Operation Andrew." *Andrew* is one of the sweetest names in Christendom.

Ordinary Andrew's extraordinary heart is one we all should emulate: a knowledgeable heart, a magnetized heart, a selfless heart, an optimistic heart, and an expansive heart—a heart that any ordinary Christian can have if he wants it, as he yields to the work of the Spirit. Average Andrew's heart not only challenges but *hallows* everyday, ordinary, average life. The greatest joys are not in the extraordinary events of ministry, but in the normal avenues of everyday witness—in bringing people to Christ.

Ordinary Andrew Evangelism

Statistics demonstrate that ordinary Andrew relational evangelism is the most effective way to go. The American Institute of Church Growth surveyed some eight thousand church attenders and found that 1 to 2 percent were people with special needs; 2 to 3 percent were walk-ins; 5 to 6 percent were influenced to come by a particular preacher; 2 to 3 percent came because they liked the church program; 1 to 2 percent came because they had responded to a visitation effort; 4 to 5 percent had been reached by Sunday school; 0.5 percent came through evangelistic crusades/TV programs; and a whopping 75 to 90 percent came through the influence of friends or relatives.⁵ Clearly, the personal ordinary Andrew approach is the most impor-

5. Win Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Monrovia, CA: Church Growth Press, 1982), 43.

tant method of evangelism, far outweighing institutional approaches many times over.

In addition, Search Ministries, an organization dedicated to equipping the church for lifestyle evangelism, tells us that about 0.01 percent of Christians are gifted to do proclamational preaching evangelism and about 0.05 to 10 percent are gifted for confrontational witness, while 100 percent can do relational evangelism.⁶ The implication is clear: while all forms of evangelism are important to the church, by far the most important is the ordinary Andrew “each one win one” style.

In 1993, pollster George Barna did a study on evangelism in the church. At that time, 89 percent of Christians who had shared their faith believed that it was a responsibility of every Christian to do so. Now that number has plummeted to 64 percent.⁷ So even though relational evangelism is effective and everyone is capable of doing it, many don’t evangelize because they do not believe they are required to evangelize. Perhaps one reason is because only 60 percent of evangelicals have heard of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28 and can remember what it is.⁸

Discipline of Witness

This means, assuming one knows how to lead another to Christ, that those of us who have been enfolded by the church need to prayerfully work at being Andrews—practicing the discipline of witness.

The Value of Relationships

We must understand that we have a sovereign God who orders all of life, including our relationships, and that our friendships, as well as casual encounters, are not a list of social accidents.⁹ God has placed us in our particular families, neighborhoods, and workplaces for a reason: he has put us next to people he wants us to influence for Christ. Susie, our daughter’s kindergarten teacher, was not a relational

6. *Heart for the Harvest Seminar Notebook and Study Guide* (Lutherville, MD: Search Ministries), 3.

7. “Sharing Faith Is Increasingly Optional to Christians,” Barna Group, last modified May 15, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/sharing-faith-increasingly-optional-christians/>.

8. “51% of Churchgoers Don’t Know of the Great Commission,” Barna Group, last modified March 27, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>.

9. *Heart for the Harvest Seminar Notebook and Study Guide*, 9.

accident. Neither was Damon, our letter carrier, or Jamie and Deby, our neighbors and dear friends. Everyone we encounter is an eternal soul of immense value whom we ought to regard with the same weight with which God regards them. As C. S. Lewis, the great Oxford don, memorably said,

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.¹⁰

Identifying Relationships

All of us have a complex network of relationships built around four natural contact points: biological (relatives and family members, and by extension our church family), geographical (people who live where we live), vocational (people who work where we work), and recreational (people who play where we play).¹¹ We need to discover our networks, make a list of likely contacts, and begin to pray for them.

Investing in Relationships

Finally, as we pray, we must invest our time, talent, and treasure in relationships.¹² We can:

10. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 14–15.

11. *Heart for the Harvest Seminar Notebook and Study Guide*, 10.

12. *Heart for the Harvest Seminar Notebook and Study Guide*, 11.

- Become personally involved in the lives of others. Plan to spend significant time with those you would like to reach, and then make sure your plan is represented on your calendar.
- Invite your friends out for lunch or dinner, or to your home for coffee.
- Do things together. Attend plays, sporting events, or art exhibits. Go fishing.
- Use special days to share your interests—birthdays, graduations, holidays, weddings, or births. Visit, call, or write a note.
- Join a service club such as Rotary, Kiwanis, or Lions.
- Join an interest club: gardening, hunting, cooking, or woodworking.
- Volunteer to coach a boys' or girls' athletic team, to be a teacher's aide, or to give your time to a hospital or one of the many charitable organizations.
- Open your home to the neighborhood. Be the most hospitable home on the block to children and adults.

Food for Thought

Why do the people you know need to hear the message of John the Baptist: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36)?

The author writes, "If you know Christ, you . . . have the essential heart qualification to share him—even if you do not have all the answers." Do you agree with this statement? Does not having all the answers make you hesitant to speak up for Christ? How can you overcome this?

With what individuals has God given you a relationship so you can be a witness by life or word? Pray for them daily for the next month, and be alert for opportunities to share Christ with them.

What is "lifestyle evangelism"? Do you use this kind of personal outreach? Why or why not?

If you are like many Christians, the people you find most difficult to witness to are family members or relatives. Why is that? How can you build bridges with them?

According to the author, "We must invest our time, talent, and treasure in relationships." Should we do this only so we can win others

to Christ? What other reasons should we have? Practically, how can we invest in relationships?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Analyze the example of Andrew and his witness for Christ in Matthew 10; Luke 6; and John 1, 6 and 12. What made his witness so effective? Why did he witness? What was his message? Now compare his experience in this area with your own. Be honest.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Confronting Christianity (Rebecca McLaughlin)

Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God (J. I. Packer)

The Gospel Comes with a House Key (Rosaria Butterfield)

Gospel Fluency (Jeff Vanderstelt)

The Gospel and Personal Evangelism (Mark Dever)

Honest Evangelism (Rico Tice)

The Master Plan of Evangelism (Robert E. Coleman)

One-to-One Bible Reading (David Helm)

The Reason for God (Timothy Keller)

Discipline of Ministry

For men who claim the name of Christ, two distinct courses of life are available. One is to cultivate a small heart. This by far seems the safest way to go because it minimizes the sorrows of life. If our ambition is to dodge the troubles of human existence, the formula is simple: avoid entangling relationships, do not give ourselves to others, and be sure not to seriously embrace elevated and noble ideals. If we do this, we will escape a host of afflictions.

This life principle bears out in other logics of life as well. Cultivate deafness and we will be spared hearing the discords of life. Cultivate blindness and we will be shielded from seeing ugliness. If we want to get through life with a minimum of trouble, all we have to do is wear blinders. This is how so many people, even those who profess to be Christians, get through life with such ease—they have successfully nurtured smallness of heart.

The other path is to cultivate a ministering heart. Open yourself to others and you will become susceptible to an index of sorrows scarcely imaginable to a shriveled heart. Enlarge and ennoble your ideals, and your vulnerability will increase proportionately.

There is a sentence in the diary of James Gilmour, pioneer missionary to Mongolia, written at the sunset of his career, which speaks to this point: “In the shape of converts I have seen no result. I have not, as far as I am aware, seen anyone who even wanted to be a Christian.” Painful words. But the depth of Gilmour’s pain can be seen only dimly

until one turns to the opening words of his diary, written when he first arrived in Mongolia: “Several huts in sight. When shall I be able to speak to the people? O Lord, suggest by the Spirit how I should come among them, and in preparing myself to teach the life and love of Christ Jesus.”¹

His throbbing words ooze his life’s blood. We naturally think “poor Gilmour.” But in truth the cause lay in Gilmour himself, for he had a “problem”—an enlarged heart. Gilmour would never have penned those pathos-filled lines if he had not cultivated a ministering heart, if he had not cared. If he had listened to the counsel of his friends, he would have remained in comfortable England instead of going to a hostile land.

Enlarge your heart, cultivate your heart, discipline yourself for ministry, and you will enlarge your experience of pain. This is an irrefragable spiritual axiom. No one has ever cultivated a ministering heart and lived to tell of a life of ease.

Of course, the effects of these two kinds of hearts are drastically different. Little hearts, though safe and protected, never contribute anything. No one benefits from their restricted sympathies and vision. On the other hand, the hearts that have embraced the disciplines of ministry—though they are vulnerable—possess the most joy and leave their “heartprint” on the world.

Cultivate deafness and we will never hear discord, but neither will we hear the glorious strains of a great symphony. Cultivate blindness and we will never see ugliness, but we also will never see the beauty of God’s creation. Or, to put this in terms of our common experience, never play baseball and you will never strike out, but you will also never hit a home run in the bottom of the ninth with the bases loaded to win the game! Never climb a mountain and you will never get banged up on the mountain’s side, but you will also never stand on an alpine peak exulting in abundant natural beauty.

Years ago, I experienced the grand reality of this principle. My wife, Barbara, informed me that she had received a call from our local youth soccer league, with which my boys were signed up to play, no-

1. Quoted in Clyde E. Fant Jr. and William M. Pinson Jr., *20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, vol. 8 (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 76.

tifying her there was a shortage of coaches and that some boys would have to be left out unless some fathers (like me!) would take a team. Barbara had indicated I might be interested.

My response was that I was too busy and that she would have to tell them so. She replied that I could do it myself, and that a call was coming that evening. I said, “Fine, no problem.”

The fateful call came during dinner with all my family as witnesses. As the caller explained the league’s plight, I found myself nodding assent and committing myself to be coach of the Awesome Aztecs.

The Scriptures wisely say, “And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?” (1 Cor. 14:8)—and that was the initial experience of my poor Aztecs. I did not even know what a fullback was, the offside rule remained inscrutable to me for most of the season, and we got clobbered in our first few games.

Humbled and desperate, I checked out soccer films and spent some evenings late in frantic reading. I also recruited a retired Scotsman who had once played professionally and persuaded another father to assist me. We discovered we had some good athletes, and the team began to win. We did so well that we went to the playoffs.

It was here that I had one of the great experiences of my life when we played Mr. G.’s team in the opening round. Mr. G. was the founder of the league and a perennial winner. But, miracle of miracles, we were ahead 1-0 at halftime. In the third quarter Mr. G.’s team tied it up, and the 1-1 tie held deep into the fourth quarter. Five minutes were left, then three, then one, then thirty seconds, ten, two—and we scored just before time ran out! There is no describing the thrill of that moment.

Never coach soccer and you will never know the ignominy of being the league doormat, but you will never know the thrill of beating Mr. G. either!

Cultivate a small heart and life may be smooth sailing, but you will never know the heady wind of the Holy Spirit in your sails and the exhilaration of being used by God. Cultivate a small heart and you will never be the heroic likes of Gilmour of Mongolia, and you will certainly never have the heart God desires for you.

We only have to glance at news reports to be reminded that we live in a time when there is an urgent need for enlarged, caring hearts

that are disciplined for ministry. Some of you are experiencing the elevating, frightening stirrings that accompany the enlarging of the heart, and you need to be encouraged to cultivate your expanding sympathies and broadening horizons. If so, the biblical account we are about to consider—the story of Jesus’s encounter with the woman at the well—is for you. It brilliantly showcases Jesus’s own discipline of ministry, one we are to imitate as his followers.

Disciplined to Labor

John’s Gospel informs us that when Jesus completed his baptizing ministry in Judea and decided to return to Galilee, he deemed it necessary to go through Samaria, which brought him to the ancient town of Sychar. Specifically, John tells us that “Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour” (John 4:6). The sixth hour was noon, midday, time for a meal. So the Lord sent his disciples into town for groceries while he wearily sat down by the well for some needed rest. The words “wearied as he was” seem to indicate that he sat down just as a tired man collapses in a motionless heap after a hard day’s work.²

He was exhausted, and for good reason. A glance at the Gospels reveals that he rarely had any time for himself unless he stole away. When not being pressed by the multitudes, he was ministering to the twelve, to the inner circle of three, or to irrepressible Peter. And he was always on the dusty road. At one point he said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matt. 8:20). No wonder he was more weary than his disciples, for when mental fatigue and physical weariness meet, there you find an exhausted man. So Jesus plopped down motionless.

It was so nice to be alone in the warm sun and not moving. It is quite possible that the Lord had his eyes closed when he heard approaching steps and looked up to see a Samaritan woman. It would have been so easy for him to sleepily close his eyes, saying to himself, “I have been ministering to thousands, but she’s alone—just one per-

2. R. H. Strachan notes, “Thus = ‘as he was.’ ‘What meaneth “thus”?’ Not on a throne, not on a cushion, but simply, as He was, on the ground (Chrysostom).” *The Fourth Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1943), 148.

son. And I have got to relax. If I do not take care of my body, who will?"

But not Jesus! Our Lord went for her heart in one of the grandest cases of spiritual aggression ever recorded. Jesus's heart was so given to the care of souls that he mustered up the strength to minister even when he was at the edge of his physical capacity. People who share the disciplines of Christ's heart will likewise reach out even when exhausted.

It has been said that the world is run by tired men, and it is true, for we daily see that America is run by tired political leaders, that wars are won by exhausted generals, that peace is secured by tired diplomats, and that great legislation is accomplished by weary legislators. The reason for this is that such leaders are willing to put themselves out whenever necessary in order to accomplish their noteworthy tasks.

Likewise, the Christian world is ministered to by tired people. The world is being evangelized by tired missionaries who are making the most of the fleeting day of opportunity. Show me a great church and I'll show you some tired people, both up front and behind the scenes, because greatness depends on a core of people who are willing to put out as the situation demands. Men, we have to understand that we will never do great things for God without the willingness to extend ourselves for the sake of the gospel even when we are bone-tired.

Christ's example teaches us that a ministering heart must of necessity be a laboring heart. The apostle Paul had a heart like that: "For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God" (1 Thess. 2:9). This apostolic work ethic is a prominent theme with Paul: "in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure" (2 Cor. 11:27).

The fact is, anyone who has ever done anything for God has had a laboring heart—no exceptions. Martin Luther is said to have worked so hard that he often fell into bed, not even taking time to change his sheets for a whole year! D. L. Moody's bedtime prayer on one occasion, as he rolled his bulk into bed, was, "Lord, I'm tired! Amen."

Big hearts, the enlarged hearts that God uses, are *laboring hearts*, which, though weary, will willingly be expended as necessary. You may fancy that you have a ministering heart, but if you are not laboring for the gospel in the place where God has put you, and do not find yourself being inconvenienced by your commitment, you are deluding yourself. Ministering hearts are disciplined to labor, for they regularly move beyond their comfort zones, they put themselves in vulnerable spots, they make commitments that cost, they get tired for Christ's sake, they pay the price, they encounter rough seas. But their sails billow full of God's Spirit.

Disciplined to Reach Out

Jesus's ensuing conversation with the Samaritan woman shows us further that a heart that is disciplined to minister not only works hard, but crosses difficult relational barriers to reach out to others. The narrative continues: "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.'" (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)" (John 4:7–9).

Racial differences form some of the most daunting barriers in this world. Australian Anglican Bishop John Reed relates that early in his ministry he was driving a bus carrying a mix of black Aboriginal boys and white boys on an outing. As they filed in, the white boys took one side and the black boys the other. And as the trip went on, they exchanged jibes with increasing intensity.

Finally, Reed could take it no longer. He stopped the bus and ordered everyone off. Then he stood at the bus door and made every boy say, "I'm green" before allowing him back on.

It took some doing, but at last the bus was full. Bishop Reed was feeling pretty good about his accomplishment until he heard someone in the back of the bus say, "Alright, light green on this side, dark green on the other!"

The Samaritan woman was amazed at Jesus's forward conduct. But to the Jews it was an even more astounding story. The hatred between Judea and Samaria went back over four hundred years and

centered around racial purity, for while the Jews had kept their purity during the Babylonian captivity, the Samaritans had lost theirs by intermarrying with their Assyrian conquerors. This, in Jewish eyes, was unforgivable. They looked down with disgust on the compromising Samaritans. Predictably, the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Gerizim, only to have it destroyed by the Jews in Maccabean times.

So in Jesus's day the hatred was ingrained and utterly implacable. The rabbis said that Jews should not even eat Samaritan bread, for "he who eats the bread of Cuthites [Samaritans] is as one who eats swine's flesh."³ And the crowning vilification came in a sulfurous Jewish prayer that concluded, ". . . and do not remember the Cuthites in the Resurrection." Thus, we see that Jesus's reaching out to this woman was a radical breach of racial and religious convention.

Piled upon this ignominy was the disgraceful fact that the Samaritan was a woman. Strict rabbis forbade other rabbis to greet women in public. There were even Pharisees who piously designated themselves "the bruised and bleeding Pharisees" because when they saw a woman they shut their eyes and thus stumbled into walls and fell over whatever was in their holy paths. Yet, Jesus spoke to a woman—a woman who was also a despicable Samaritan! And then, to add sin upon sin, Jesus scandalously requested the use of her drinking cup, thus becoming ceremonially defiled.⁴

Jesus's bold attempt to reach out to the soul of the lost Samaritan woman radically hurdled the conventional barriers of the day—and blew people's minds.

In his grand gesture Jesus modeled one of the crowning glories of the church—that it crosses barriers, be they ethnic, social, economic, or psychological. This is exactly what the early church did when Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, slave and free, men and women all met together at one table as one family in Christ. This was so radical that the ancient world began to accuse the church of magic and sorcery. Such barrier breaking was incomprehensible in Jesus's world.

3. Quoted in *Treasures of the Talmud*, trans. Paul Isaac Hershon (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1882), 188.

4. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 258.

We are all naturally more comfortable when we are reaching out to others like us—likes winning likes: the rich winning the rich, lawyers lawyers, basketball players basketball players, clerks clerks. But that is not the ideal set by Jesus and the early church. Rather, we are to have a heart so filled with love, so willing to go the extra mile, that we reach out to anybody we come in contact with, regardless of any barriers.

How are we to go about this? We must first understand that it is never to be done in a patronizing “do-gooder” manner, but rather with a relational egalitarianism informed by God’s Word, understanding that we reach across barriers as sinner to sinner, equal to equal. The opportunities are virtually limitless: lonely foreign students who long for contact with someone who genuinely cares; immigrant refugees desperately seeking to find a foothold in an alien culture; pregnant women alone and in need of sanctuary and protection; and the ever-present people at the bottom of the salary scale—those who park and wash cars, clean homes, bus dishes, and mow lawns, whom most people pass by with no more notice than they give the streetlight poles along the highway.

It is not natural to cross barriers. It takes the supernatural heart of Christ, a heart that can come only through conscious prayer and discipline. Every believer is called to have a heart that reaches out. Will you pray for this heart for yourself? Will you discipline your heart to reach out? Jesus longs for your heart to beat with his.

Disciplined in Perspective

Jesus’s exchange with the woman at the well suggests one other quality of a ministering heart: a perspective disciplined to see one’s life, as it passes from person to person, as a series of divine appointments. This is implicit in the expression in John 4:4, “And he had to pass through Samaria,” which indicates that God’s will or plan was involved.⁵ In a sense, Jesus did not have to go through Samaria. He could have gone around it, but he was aware of the sovereign ordering of his life and the people who would come his way.

5. Raymond Brown says, “iv 4. had to pass. This is not geographical necessity; for, although the main route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria (Josephus *Ant.* XX. vi.I ;#1 18), if Jesus was in the Jordan valley (iii 22) he could easily have gone north through the valley and then up into Galilee through the Bethshan gap, avoiding Samaria. Elsewhere in the Gospel (iii 14), the expression of necessity means that God’s will or plan is involved.” *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 169.

Ministering hearts are aware of this dimension. They know there are no relational accidents.

In 1968 I took twenty-five high-school students to Parker, Arizona, to share their faith with the tens of thousands of young Californians who had traveled to Arizona for Easter vacation. My plans were carefully laid out because a friend and I had flown by small plane to Parker, had taken aerial photographs of the Colorado River from Parker to the dam, and had then driven both sides of the river as I selected a campsite. However, upon arrival I found that the locale I had chosen was not available. As a result I spent the rest of the hot day leading my caravan from spot to spot and getting a series of rejections until finally, near sunset, we found an opening where we pitched our tents twenty feet from the camp of five high-school seniors—four of whom made professions of faith by the week’s end, three of whom continue following Christ today, two in the ministry!

It is a hallowed realization to know that “The steps of a man are established by the LORD” (Ps. 37:23 NASB) and that the people who pass our way are divine appointments. A holy sobering takes place as we realize that none of our appointments are with mere mortals, but that everyone (the woman at the well and at the laundromat, the religious leader and the pizza delivery boy) will continue eternally as glorious beings or lost souls. The ministering heart, like Jesus’s heart, senses this and treats all souls accordingly.

The luminous display of Jesus’s ministering heart in engaging the Samaritan woman has showcased for all time the disciplines that are necessary for a life of ministry.

First, a ministering heart is *disciplined to labor*. The man who has this heart puts out for Christ and his church. He is willingly inconvenienced. He allows his comfort zone to be invaded. Sometimes he will work to the point of exhaustion.

Second, the heart that ministers is *disciplined to reach out*. For the sake of the gospel it hurdles social barriers and even risks the opprobrium of others in doing so. It humbly goes after people who are quite different from itself.

Third, the heart God uses is *disciplined in perspective*, seeing all its human relationships as sovereignly ordered encounters with eternal

beings. To this heart, all life's relationships are shrouded with the numinous and pulsating with spiritual potential. They are part of an eternal drama in which each Christian has a special part to play.

The heart that is disciplined to labor, to reach out, and to see life's relationships full of divine potential is, above all, a dangerously enlarged heart. Its high ideals and expanded sympathies make it susceptible to a list of sorrows unknown to a small heart, but it is also open to a catalogue of joys the shriveled heart will never know.

Never coach soccer and you will never be the league doormat, but you will also never beat Mr. G. just before time runs out. And you will also never have the heart-pounding joy of having the Awesome Aztecs and their parents surprise you by showing up in the front row at church.

Cultivate a small heart and life may be smooth sailing, but you will never experience the exhilaration of the wind of the Spirit in your sails.

Men, the choice is ours. May we discipline ourselves for ministry.

Food for Thought

Do you have a little heart or a ministering heart, as the author described the two? Describe, in your own words, these two hearts.

What reasons could Jesus have found, humanly speaking, to not minister to the Samaritan woman (John 4)? Why did he reach out to her?

What lesson do we learn from 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Corinthians 11:27? How do you match up here? What barriers or distractions hold you back?

What kind of prejudices interfere with effective Christian ministry? What prejudices do you practice, even occasionally? What ministries are being aborted because of this? What will you do about this?

The author writes, "It is a hallowed realization to know that 'The steps of a man are established by the LORD' (Ps. 37:23 NASB) and that the people who pass our way are divine appointments." Is this how you see the many people you rub shoulders with at work, down the block, at church, in rush-hour traffic, in a restaurant, and elsewhere?

According to the author, "The heart that is disciplined to labor, to reach out, and to see life's relationships full of divine potential is,

above all, a dangerously enlarged heart.” What’s so dangerous for you in having a ministering heart? What might serving God and reaching out to others cost you?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

What ministries are you currently involved in for Christ? List them; then evaluate your service, positive and negative. What ministries do you feel God might want you to withdraw from? What additional ministries might God want you to enter? What preparation is necessary to do so?

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Dangerous Calling (Paul David Tripp)

Gospel-Centered Ministry (D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller)

Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands (Paul David Tripp)

Jesus Driven Ministry (Ajith Fernando)

Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome (Kent and Barbara Hughes)

Zeal without Burnout (Christopher Ash)

PART 6



DISCIPLINE

Grace of Discipline

As we learned in the opening study of this book, the word *discipline* in “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7 NASB) has the smell of the gym in it—the sweat of a good workout. It is an unabashed call to spiritual sweat.

The rich etymology of *discipline* suggests a conscious *divestment* of all encumbrances, and then a determined *investment* of all of one’s energies. Just as ancient athletes discarded everything and competed *gymnos* (“naked”), so must the disciplined Christian man divest himself of every association, habit, and tendency that impedes godliness. Then, with this lean spiritual nakedness accomplished, he must invest all his energy and sweat in the pursuit of godliness.

The lithe, sculpted figure of the classic Greek runner gives the idea. Stripped naked, he has put his perspiration into thousands of miles for the purpose of running well. Even so, the successful Christian life is always, without exception, a stripped-down, disciplined, sweaty affair.

The understanding that vigorous spiritual discipline is essential to godliness accords with the universal understanding that discipline is necessary to accomplish anything in this life. The legendary success of Mike Singletary, two-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year, is testimony to his remarkably disciplined life. Ernest Hemingway’s massive literary discipline transformed the way people throughout

the English-speaking world use language. Michelangelo's, Leonardo da Vinci's, and Tintoretto's many sketches, the *quantitative* discipline of their work, prepared the way for the enduring *cosmic* quality of those works. Winston Churchill, speaker of the twentieth century, was anything but a natural—unless by “natural” we mean a naturally disciplined man who overcame his remarkable impediments through much hard work and extra effort. Ignacy Jan Paderewski, the brilliant pianist, said it all when he remarked to an overardent admirer, “Madam, before I was a genius, I was a drudge.”

It is an immutable fact that we will never get anywhere in life without discipline—especially in spiritual matters. There are some who have innate athletic or musical advantages. But none of us can claim an innate spiritual advantage. None of us is inherently righteous, none of us naturally seeks God or is reflexively good. Therefore, as children of grace, our spiritual discipline is everything.

No discipline, no discipleship!
 No sweat, no sainthood!
 No perspiration, no inspiration!
 No pain, no gain!
 No manliness, no maturity!

This grand spiritual axiom has provided the basis for our examination of seventeen disciplines that are essential to a godly life—the disciplines of: *purity, marriage, fatherhood, friendship, mind, devotion, prayer, worship, integrity, tongue, work, perseverance, church, leadership, giving, witness, and ministry.*

It is an intimidating list, to say the least! And it is made even more daunting in that each of the disciplines has been presented in an intentionally prescriptive “do this” manner. In fact, each of the seventeen headings contains an average of seven recommended disciplines—which amounts to over a hundred “do’s”!

The Correct Response

How then are we to respond? Certainly not with the “do nothing” *passivity* that has become increasingly characteristic of the American

male. For many men, a challenge is an opportunity to duck, to pull up the covers and stay in bed: “There is so much to do. I don’t know where to begin.” This is the paralysis of analysis.

On the other hand, an equally deadly response is self-sufficient *legalism*. Admittedly, it is less a statistical danger than passivity. Nevertheless, there are many whose mind-sets could easily appropriate the seventeen disciplines and their multiplied “do’s” as a Draconian structure for a harsh legalistic hybrid. Oh, what possibilities we have for a list! “So you missed some days reading the Bible this week? Shame! Remember, five pages a day puts the Bible away.” Or “If Harry really is the husband he says he is, he would have gotten the door.”

God save us from the *reductionism* of such legalism that enshrines spirituality as a series of wooden laws and then says, “If you can do these six, sixteen, or sixty-six things, you will be godly.” Christianity, godliness, is far more than a checklist. Being “in Christ” is a relationship, and like all relationships it deserves disciplined maintenance, but never legalistic reductionism.

God save us also from self-righteous *judgmentalism*. How easily our sinful hearts can imagine that our lists elevate us, while at the same time providing us with a merciless rack on which to stretch others in judgment.

As we said when we began, there is a universe of difference between the motivations behind legalism and discipline. Legalism says, “I will do this thing to gain merit with God,” while discipline says, “I will do this because I love God and want to please him.” Legalism is man-centered; discipline is God-centered. Paul, the arch antilegalist, said, “Train [discipline] yourself to be godly”!

Wisdom for Discipline

Throughout this book I have kept before me a personal mental picture of the young men in my family, my sons and sons-in-laws, sitting across the coffee table from me as we discuss the disciplines of a godly man. Now they say, “How are we to go about it? Tell us how to discipline ourselves for godliness without being legalistic.” In response, I become intensely personal.

Prioritize

I would begin, I tell them, by reviewing the seventeen disciplines and dividing them into separate lists—a list of those areas in which I am doing well and another list of the areas where I need help. If I were married, I would seek the help of my spouse in objectifying the lists. If not, I would ask a trusted friend who is spiritually mature.

I would then number my areas of need in order of importance, say: (1) purity, (2) mind, (3) prayer, (4) witness, (5) giving, (6) work, (7) friendship, and (8) leadership. Then, beginning with the first need, purity, I would look over the suggested subdisciplines and choose one to three things that I think would best help me improve. In doing this, I would resist the temptation to commit myself to too many disciplines. It is better to succeed in a few than to assure failure by overcommitment. Perhaps, regarding the discipline of purity, I would choose to commit myself, first, to memorizing Scripture passages that will help steel me to temptations, and, second, to not watching anything sensual on TV or online. Perhaps under witness I would make commitments to pray that God would give me someone to share Christ with and to join an interest club to meet unchurched people.

After going through my list, I would have perhaps twenty specific things that I could do to improve my eight weakest areas.

Be Realistic

But before committing to the specifics, I would look at the whole list with honest realism, asking, “Are the things that I am about to commit to really within my reach with the help of God?” Perhaps, regarding the discipline of mind, I have become so convicted that I am considering committing myself to reading the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice, plus reading *War and Peace* in January. Think again! Since I have not been doing much reading, how about setting a goal of reading the New Testament through once in a year and *War and Peace* in January through April? Make sure your commitments make you sweat, but also make sure that taken together they are manageable. It is better to increase your commitments as you succeed than to bite off more than you can chew. Success begets success.

Pray

Before setting your commitments in concrete, give yourself a week to think about them and pray over them. Seek the Holy Spirit's guidance for other ways of personal discipline not mentioned in this book.

Be Accountable

Ask your spouse or friend to hold you accountable for your disciplines. Make sure you regularly confer and pray—even if it has to be over the phone. Be honest about your successes and failures. And be willing to take advice and make adjustments.

If You Stumble . . .

You will, no doubt, stumble and even fail outright at times. When this happens, wounded pride and embarrassment can make you want to take your marbles and go home. We do not like to do things at which we fail. But we must realize that failure is a part of succeeding, provided we admit our failures and go at it again. Moreover, we are not under law but grace. God is not counting our failures against us, and we are not building a treasury of merit with our successes. We are simply trying to live a disciplined life that pleases our loving Father—and he understands our failures better than we understand our own children's.

Grace of Discipline

The man who wisely disciplines himself for godliness understands the necessity of *prioritizing, realism, prayer, and accountability*, and that *failure* is part of success, but his greatest wisdom and impetus come from his understanding of *grace*. Everything in his life comes from God's grace: *sola gratia*, grace alone!

Salvation itself is by grace alone. We were dead in our transgressions and sins, captive to dark powers, no more capable of effecting our own salvation than a corpse. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—*by grace* you have been saved. . . . For *by grace* you have been saved through faith. And this is

not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:4–5, 8–9). Even the smallest percentage of works debases saving grace, as Paul made so pointedly clear: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). *Sola gratia*.

Salvation is by grace alone, and living the Christian life is by grace alone also. James makes this stunning declaration regarding the believer's universal experience in this world: "But he [God] gives more grace" (James 4:6). This is not saving grace, but grace to live our lives as we ought in this fallen world—literally, "greater grace." There is always "more grace."¹

An artist once submitted a painting of Niagara Falls to an exhibition, but neglected to give it a title. The gallery, faced with the need to supply one, came up with these words: "More to Follow." Old Niagara Falls, spilling over billions of gallons per year for thousands of years, has more than met the needs of those below and is a fit emblem of the floods of God's grace he showers upon us. There is always more to follow! The apostle John referred to this reality, saying, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16)—literally, "grace instead of grace," or as others have rendered it, "grace following grace" or "grace heaped upon grace." John Blanchard says, "For daily need there is daily grace; for sudden need, sudden grace; for overwhelming need, overwhelming grace."²

As we tackle the disciplines of a godly man, we must remember it is a matter of grace from beginning to end.

Consider slowly and carefully Paul's words, "But by the *grace* of God I am what I am, and his *grace* toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the *grace* of God that is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). You see, there is no contradiction between grace and hard work. In fact, grace produces spiritual sweat!

It is God's grace that energizes us to live out the disciplines of a godly man. There is always more grace.

1. "But he giveth more grace" (KJV). "But he gives more grace" (RSV). "But He gives a greater grace" (NASB). "Yet he gives grace more and more" (Moffatt). "But He affords the more grace" (Berkeley).

2. John Blanchard, *Truth for Life* (West Sussex, England: H. E. Walter Ltd., 1982), 239.

Grace for purity
 Grace for marriage
 Grace for fatherhood
 Grace for friendship
 Grace for mind
 Grace for devotion
 Grace for prayer
 Grace for worship

Grace for integrity
 Grace for tongue
 Grace for work
 Grace for perseverance
 Grace for church
 Grace for leadership
 Grace for giving
 Grace for witness
 Grace for ministry

Brothers, when we attempt to do his will, he always gives more grace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done;
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.
His love has no limits, his grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto men;
For out of his infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.³

Food for Thought

What responses do you sometimes make to the challenge of 1 Timothy 4:7? What does God think of those responses?

Review the seventeen disciplines studied in this book, then prioritize them in relation to your own life—the abilities and interests God has given you, the opportunities before you, your own level of spiritual understanding and maturity, your willingness to move forward.

3. From the hymn "He Giveth More Grace" by Annie Johnson Flint, © Copyright 1941. Renewed 1969 Lillenas Publishing Co. (admin. by The Copyright Co.)

Do you more often have a problem with promising God or the church too little and being a lazy Christian, or promising too much and being unable to do it all?

How do you feel about asking a close Christian friend to hold you accountable? Does the thought of this encourage you or scare you? Why do we need to hold each other accountable? Isn't being accountable to God enough?

How do you generally respond when you stumble spiritually? What usually causes you to fall or get off track? What can you do to allow God to help you not to stumble as often?

What do *discipline* and *grace* have to do with each other? Define each term carefully. What is the importance of each for your life? What aspect of the character of God most encourages you and keeps you going?

Application/Response

What did God speak to you about most specifically, most powerfully in this chapter? Talk to him about it right now!

Think About It!

Make a complete list of all the areas of your life in which you need greater discipline. Then, for each, write down what you can do to experience increased discipline. Since you cannot accomplish this in your own strength and must have God's help, your answers should include ways you can receive divine assistance and enabling.

Resources for Further Growth

Books

Christian Disciplines (Oswald Chambers)

The Discipline of Grace (Jerry Bridges)

Your Future Self Will Thank You (Drew Dyck)

RESOURCES

A

Resources for Spiritual Growth

Websites

- ESV.org
- YouVersion.com
- Audible.com
- preachingtheword.com (1,000+ sermons by R. Kent Hughes)
- gospelcoalition.org (40,000+ sermons)
- gty.org (all the sermons of John MacArthur)
- proctrust.org.uk (sermons of eminent British, Australian, and American expositors)
- www.covenanteyes.com (accountability software)
- x3watch.com (accountability software)

Apps

- ESV
- Olive Tree
- YouVersion
- Fighter Verses
- Bible Memory Verses
- Remember Me (Bible Verses)
- PrayerMate

Books

- *The Essentials of Prayer* by E. M. Bounds

B

James and Deby Fellowes's Witness to Their Faith

James: My wife, Deby, and I are glad to give witness to the change that came into our lives when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. We are grateful for those who stood tall in their faith and were instrumental in our decision for Christ.

During our courtship and early years of marriage, we never attended church, nor do I recall ever discussing God or what we believed. We were too busy with our careers and each other.

I had been born into a churchgoing family. My parents were and are marvelous examples of the Christian ideal. They are generous, loving, gracious, compassionate, kind, and humble. But, as good as their example was, in my youth I never really understood Jesus's life, death, or resurrection. I figured I was a Christian because I went to church and tried to be a good person just like my mom and dad.

Deby: Like Jamie, I grew up going to church. My mother was a Sunday school teacher for many years, and she made sure my brother and I attended every Sunday. It was in church, I believe, that the three of us found comfort and strength to deal with difficult family problems.

In the midst of a time of uncertainty and insecurity during my junior-high years, I remember having a keen interest in spiritual matters. I felt a strong desire to go to church, but could find no answers.

I recall a stained-glass window in our church depicting an angel kneeling with its wing outstretched. How I yearned to crawl under that wing for security, protection, and peace.

When I fell in love with Jamie, it seemed like I could find all these things I was searching for in him and our relationship. We had each other, and I turned my back on God. We lived for the moment and for ourselves.

James: On December 23, 1975, at 2 in the afternoon, our first child, Jennifer, was born. Experiencing childbirth in the delivery room was more than this new father could handle. I cried uncontrollably, overcome with the emotions of joy, awe, and thankfulness. This magnificent moment of birth tugged the spiritual chords within me.

In the hours and days afterward, I thought a lot about God and the creation of a baby. Only God can create a baby, I thought. I wanted to know God. I had seen his great and powerful work.

The next Sunday we searched for a neighborhood church in the Lincoln Park area of Chicago, where we lived, and finally found one that we liked. I really enjoyed this new dimension in my life. I began to learn about Christianity as an adult. I liked the people and being part of the church community. In time I became an usher, then an elder, then chairman of the board of elders.

Deby: While Jamie was finding a new dimension and fulfillment in his life, I became resentful of this new interest. He now had more meetings to attend and obligations to fill that did not include me. Knowing how much this church meant to Jamie, however, I became somewhat involved along with him.

On a spiritual level, however, I was needy. Singing hymns alone would bring me to the brink of tears. I wanted to know what to believe in. I was searching for meaning in my life, but was looking in the wrong places. Material possessions and worldly success were far too important to me. And these were attainable goals since Jamie's responsibilities and stature were growing in his family's business. In spite of our material success, though, I felt an emptiness in my life.

Both Jamie's and my background made us leery of evangelical churches. When we moved to Wheaton, Illinois, in 1979, we looked for a house far removed from the Wheaton College campus. However,

the house of our dreams happened to be one block from the area we were trying to avoid.

Five months after we moved in, the new pastor of College Church—Kent Hughes—and his family moved in across the street from us. I became friends with his wife, Barbara. She invited me to come to a Bible study at their church on Wednesday mornings, and I decided I would give it a try. From the moment I walked into that room, I sensed a difference in this group. The women seemed to sincerely care about each other. There was not the superficiality I had encountered at so many other social and business groups. Before long the Bible study became a highlight of my week. I admired these women's strength of character that I sensed was lacking in myself. I began to recognize these women were different because of the teachings of the Scripture. They were committed to displaying through their lives what the Bible taught—acting upon what they had learned. They trusted Christ to rule their lives instead of themselves. That was so contrary to the way we were living our lives.

It was during this time that Jamie and I received an invitation to a dinner being held at a country club by a business acquaintance of Jamie's. It was to feature a testimony by a business executive and his wife on what their relationship with Christ has meant in their lives. Out of respect for our friend, we went. Here I heard what I had been hearing at Bible study but by a business executive's wife, someone who had been struggling with many of the things that I was struggling with. I could definitely identify with her. I realized that Revelation 3:20 was speaking to *me*: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (NIV).

That night was one of the most stressful for me. In a moment of anxiety, I prayed that my friend Barbara would come speak to me the next day. And she did. After explaining to her the previous evening's events, she could sense the struggle I was having. She offered to lead me through the Scriptures and explain Jesus's claims. Through her leading, I took a step of faith and surrendered my life to Christ. I knew my commitment would make a big change in our marriage, but I knew this was what I had to do.

James: I went to the same dinner, of course. At the end of the testimony, we were given cards to fill out. I checked the box “Don’t call me.” I distrusted the “born-again” types. I thought they were self-righteous and often a lot worse than the rest of us. Besides that, I had been chairman of the board of elders and served our church in other ways. Was that not religious enough?

It made me sick that my susceptible wife had been drawn into this “born-again” business. Maybe it would die away.

Soon a division between Deby and me began to open. She read the Bible all the time. If not that, she was reading Chuck Swindoll, C. S. Lewis, or Kent Hughes, our neighbor. She spent all her time in Bible studies and prayer groups. She accepted party invitations, and they were boring. I felt out of it, and I didn’t want “in.” In many ways we began to grow apart.

Deby: Actually what I had feared would happen did happen. Jamie could not understand how my priorities could change overnight. Where did he now fit into the scheme of things? Although our relationship was as important to me as it had always been, a new relationship was deepening within me—one with Christ. My desire to follow, serve, and obey Christ had become first in my life. With that decision I wanted to spend my time differently. Lifestyle preferences changed. The division in our marriage opened wider. I simply had to trust Christ.

James: I was trying to be understanding and patient, but I often found myself resentful and angry. I felt lonely in my own house. If God is good, how could he be the center of a heretofore successful, happy marriage? I was very confused.

I had my own views about God based on I know not what. I figured I had a reasonable shot at heaven because I was a pretty good person. God graded on a curve, no doubt—hopefully a generous one. Deby refuted my arguments based on Scripture. She spoke of salvation through faith and God’s grace.

In the interest of family unity, I decided to go to a Sunday evening service with Deby. My experience was rather similar to Deby’s the first time she visited the women’s Bible study. I sensed something different than other church experiences I’d had. I decided to go back the next Sunday. I sensed the presence of Christ in a new and deeper way.

Maybe there was some good in all this, I thought, difficult as it might be to admit. For all that I resented about our new lifestyle, Deby had changed positively in many ways. For openers, she was at peace with our relationship. I was the one in emotional stress. She definitely was a stronger, more independent person. She was less argumentative and more forgiving. Irony of ironies, she was somehow more romantic through this period of marital tension.

I decided I might read some of her books that were lying around—*In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon, *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis, then *Loving God* by Chuck Colson. Kent Hughes and I read *Basic Christianity* by John Stott. We began to talk about our faith. On a difficult business trip to San Francisco I read the Gospel of John from a Gideon Bible in the motel desk drawer. The power of Scripture was beginning to take root for the first time in my life.

Deby: Jamie had changed. It was not an overnight experience as it had been with me, but I sensed a gradual open and sensitive spirit to know the Lord. Our relationship grew in a way it never had before—on a spiritual level. We began to trust God for our daily decisions. We realized that God was sovereign and in control of our lives. We became happier and closer than we ever had been before. Looking back over the years, we could see how God had gently yet firmly pulled us to himself, and in the process drew us closer to each other. God had done what he promised in Ezekiel 11:19–20: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God” (NIV).

James: There had been an emptiness to my life, despite a great marriage, kids, and all the nice things we could afford. How do you define an emptiness or void? It's hard. Most of the time we suppress it, or feebly attempt to fill it with something superficial.

As I began to understand the claims of Christ and why he had come to earth and died for me, I looked at my life. It was embarrassing when I reflected upon God's riches in my life and compared it to the selfishness and downright wickedness of my heart. I was ashamed.

I journeyed frequently to the foot of the cross and begged forgiveness. I prayed in detail, sickening as it was. The more I read and

listened, the better I understood where I had gone wrong. More importantly, I discovered how to get on track. Through God's forgiveness and grace I began to feel free and alive in a new way.

In those early days God seemed to fill me with a new power and a totally new sense of self-worth. By trusting in him, things seemed to work out better. Trying to please him instead of myself somehow took the pressure off and made me feel better about my life.

Jesus Christ has made all the difference in our lives. Our lives are a living testimony to his power. Through countless trials, struggles, and everyday events, he has guided our path. He has blessed us beyond our hopes. We are grateful to the many who prayed for, nurtured, and disciplined us.

As a businessman by profession, a healthy skepticism comes naturally. My own conversion was slow and deliberate, unlike Deby's. But I discovered the Way, the Truth, and the Life—the Lord Jesus Christ. I've learned where to put my trust. God is faithful. He loves you, and he loves me. Trust in him.

C

Personal Reading Survey

What we read affects us deeply, with long-term results. What books have influenced you the most? The following are the responses given to a survey of Christian leaders, sent out by R. Kent Hughes. Specific questions asked on the survey were:

1. What are the five books, secular or sacred, that have influenced you the most?
2. Of the spiritual/sacred books that have influenced you, which is your favorite?
3. What is your favorite novel?
4. What is your favorite biography?

Note that the titles and positions of these leaders are not listed. Should readers desire to know more about the respondents, their biographies can be found on the internet.

John W. Alexander

1. Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps*; H. B. Wright, *The Will of God and a Man's Life Work*; E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*; William Manchester, *American Caesar*; Garth Lean, *God's Politician*
2. E. J. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics*
3. Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*
4. William Manchester, *American Caesar*

Hudson T. Armerding

1. The Bible; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; J. O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*; S. E. Morison, *History of the U.S. Navy in World War Two*
2. After the Bible, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
3. Fyodor Dostoevski, *Crime and Punishment*; Ernest Gordon, *Through the Valley of the Kwai*
4. John Pollock, *Hudson Taylor*

James M. Boice

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*; T. M. Lindsay, *History of the Reformation*; John Stott, *Basic Christianity*; Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Romans*
2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
3. Ernest Hemingway, *Over the River and into the Trees*
4. Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*

Tim Challies

1. John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (ed. Kelly Kopic and Justin Taylor); James Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?*; R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*; Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*; John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*
2. Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*
3. Lucy Maude Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*
4. William Manchester, *The Last Lion*

Bryan Chapell

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; J. Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of Christian Religion*; John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*; Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*

Richard Chase

1. Charles Colson, *Loving God*; Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*; Sir Robert Anderson, *The Silence of God*; David J. Hassel, *City of Wisdom*; Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*
2. Charles Colson, *Loving God*
3. Mary Stewart: *The Crystal Cave*, *The Hollow Hills*, and *The Last Enchantment* (favorite)
4. Charles Colson, *Born Again*

Charles Colson

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Augustine, *Confessions*; Armando Valladares, *Against All Hope*; Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*; Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*; Donald Bloesch, *Crumbling Foundations*; Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind*; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*; Augustine, *The City of God*; Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*; R. C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*; William Wilberforce, *Real Christianity*; Jacques Ellul, *The Political Illusion* and *The Presence of the Kingdom*; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*; John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*
2. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*; Fyodor Dostoevski, *The Brothers Karamazov*
3. Augustine, *Confessions*

Mark Dever

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*; Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*; John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*
2. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*
3. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*
4. C. H. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*

Kevin DeYoung

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*; J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*;

- David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth*; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; the Heidelberg Catechism
- 2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- 3. Walter Wangerin Jr., *The Book of the Dun Cow*
- 4. Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

James C. Dobson

Rather than select several books that exceed all others in their impact on my life, I prefer to commend the authors whose collection of writings are most highly prized. This is easier because the best writers require several books to state their cases and leave their mark. First, I admire the memory of Dr. Francis Schaeffer and the anthology he left to us. Second, I have great appreciation for the writings of Chuck Colson. His best book, I believe, is *Loving God*. His life was a demonstration of its theme.

Lyle Dorsett

- 1. Besides the Bible, which I would, of course, rank no. 1, E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*; George Müller, *A Life of Trust*; G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*; Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*; Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*
- 2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*
- 3. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*
- 4. Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter*

Elisabeth Elliot

- 1. Romano Guardini, *The Lord*; George MacDonald, *Salted with Fire*; Amy Carmichael, *Toward Jerusalem*; Janet Erskine Stuart, *Life and Letters*; Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystery of Charity*
- 2. Impossible to say
- 3. Sigrid Undset, *Kristin Lavransdatter*
- 4. Augustine, *Confessions*

Howard G. Graves

- 1. The Bible; Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*; Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*; J. I. Packer, *Knowing*

- God; James Stockdale, *A Vietnam Experience: Ten Years of Reflection*; Charles Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life*
2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*
 3. Herman Wouk, *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*
 4. *The Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant*

Wayne Grudem

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*; J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*; Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*; John Wimber, *Power Evangelism*; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*
2. David McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*
3. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*
4. David McCullough, *John Adams*

David Helm

1. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks*; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; William Carus, *Memoirs of the Life of Rev. Charles Simeon*
2. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*
3. Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*
4. Peter Brown *Augustine of Hippo*

Howard G. Hendricks

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Mortimer Adler, *How to Read a Book*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*; A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*

Carl F. H. Henry

1. The Bible; James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
2. The Bible and James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*

David M. Howard

1. John Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*; Earle Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*; Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*; Carolina Maria de Jesus, *Child of the Dark*; Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*
2. Earle Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*
3. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*
4. Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*

R. Kent Hughes

1. A. W. Pink, *Sovereignty of God*; C. S. Lewis, *Space Trilogy* (*Out of the Silent Planet*; *Perelandra*; and *That Hideous Strength*); J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Sermon on the Mount*
2. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*
3. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
4. Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*; Malcolm Muggeridge, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*

Peter Jensen

1. *The Book of Common Prayer*; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; B. B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations*; Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*.
2. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*
3. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*
4. Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*

Kenneth S. Kantzer

1. Augustine, *The City of God*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Revival of the Spirit of God*; James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*; Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*
2. Augustine, *The City of God*
3. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*
4. Carl F. H. Henry, *The Confessions of a Theologian*

Jay Kesler

1. Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*; John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*; Alan Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*; Carl Sandburg, *Lincoln*; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Fyodor Dostoevski, *Crime and Punishment*
2. Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*
3. Alan Paton, *Too Late the Phalarope*
4. Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln*

Harold Lindsell

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*; Matthew Henry, *Commentary*; Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression—Its Causes and Its Cure*
2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*
3. None
4. Howard and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*

Duane Litfin

(Most influential authors rather than most influential books)

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*; *Mere Christianity*; *God in the Dock*
2. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*
3. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*
4. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana (On Christian Doctrine)*
5. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*

Wayne Martindale

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*; *The Problem of Pain*; *Mere Christianity*; Charles Sheldon, Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps*; Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*
2. Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*
3. Fyodor Dostoevski, *The Brothers Karamazov*
4. Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*

Robertson McQuilkin

1. Romans, John, Luke, 2 Timothy; C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*; B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*; Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*; Robert Pollock, *The Course of Time*
2. Robert Pollock, *The Course of Time*
3. C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*; many of Shakespeare's plays
4. Marguerite McQuilkin, *Always in Triumph: The Life of Robert C. McQuilkin*

Harold Myra

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*; Paul Tournier, *The Meaning of Persons*; Helmut Thielicke, *The Waiting Father*; Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*; Oswald Chambers's books
2. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*
3. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*
4. William Manchester, *The Last Lion*

J. I. Packer

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*; William H. Goold, ed., *Works of John Owen Works* (vols. 3, 6, 7); Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*
2. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*
3. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*
4. Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*

C. William Pollard

1. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
2. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*
3. Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*
4. Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*
5. Peter Drucker, *Managing for Results* and *Managing for the Future*

Haddon Robinson

1. Richard Halvorsen, *Christian Maturity*; H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching*; S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*; Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
2. James Stuart, *Heralds of God*
3. Olov Hartman, *Holy Masquerade*
4. Stockford Brooks, *Life and Letters of F. W. Robertson*

Philip G. Ryken

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*; C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*; J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*; *The Trinity Hymnal*
2. *The Trinity Hymnal*
3. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectation*; Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*
4. George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*

R. C. Sproul

1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Freedom of the Will*; Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; James Collins, *God and Modern Philosophy*; William Simon, *A Time for Truth*; Ben Hogan, *Power Golf*
2. Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, because of its theological insight and its literary style
3. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*
4. William Manchester, *American Caesar*

Charles R. Swindoll

1. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*; A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*; J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*; Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*; Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*

Stephen Um

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*; C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*; Timothy Keller, *Center Church*
2. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*
3. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*
4. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*

Bill Waldrop

1. The Bible; A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*; *The Knowledge of the Holy*; Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*; Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*
2. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*
3. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
4. William Manchester, *The Last Lion*

Warren Wiersbe

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*; Jill Morgan, *Campbell Morgan, A Man and the Word*; Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*; Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*; Phillips Brooks, *Yale Lectures on Preaching*
2. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*
3. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*
4. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*

Jerry Wragg

1. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*; Lawrence Bergreen, *Over the Edge of the World*; Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*; G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Faith and Sanctification*; John MacArthur, *Faith Works*; William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire*; Charles Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd*
2. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*; Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices*
3. Lawrence Bergreen, *Over the Edge of the World*

4. J. C. Ryle, *Light from Old Times*; Jonathan Aitken, *John Newton: From Disgrace to Amazing Grace*; Rebecca Nichols Alonzo, *The Devil in Pew Number Seven*; Martin Small and Vic Shayne, *Remember Us: My Journey from the Shtetl through the Holocaust*; Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air*.

*Other Than the Bible, Books Mentioned
by More Than One Respondent*

- John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (15)
- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (10)
- J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (8)
- John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (7)
- A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (5)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (4)
- Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (4)
- Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (3)
- Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* (3)
- C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (3)
- William Manchester, *The Last Lion* (3)
- Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* (3)
- Augustine, *The City of God* (2)
- Augustine, *Confessions* (2)
- Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (2)
- J. O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (2)
- Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (2)
- Charles Colson, *Loving God* (2)
- Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* (2)
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (2)
- Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (2)
- Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor* (2)
- Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (2)
- Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (2)
- C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (2)
- J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (2)
- William Manchester, *American Caesar* (2)
- Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (2)
- James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (2)

J. C. Ryle, *Holiness* (2)

Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps* (2)

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (2)

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (2)

B. B. Warfield, *Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (2)

D

Selected Proverbs Regarding the Tongue

10:11—“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.”

10:18—“He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and whoever utters slander is a fool.”

10:19—“When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.”

10:20—“The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth.”

10:21—“The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of sense.”

10:31—“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off.”

10:32—“The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked, what is perverse.”

11:9—“With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered.”

11:11—“By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown.”

11:12—“Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.”

11:13—“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.”

12:6—“The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright delivers them.”

12:19—“Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.”

12:22—“Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight.”

13:3—“Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.”

14:3—“By the mouth of a fool comes a rod for his back, but the lips of the wise will preserve them.”

15:1—“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

15:2—“The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.”

15:4—“A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.”

15:7—“The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so the hearts of fools.”

15:14—“The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouths of fools feed on folly.”

15:23—“To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!”

15:28—“The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.”

16:1—“The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.”

16:13—“Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right.”

16:23—“The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.”

16:24—“Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.”

16:27—“A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.”

16:28—“A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”

17:4—“A evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.”

17:7—“Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a prince.”

17:9—“Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.”

17:20—“A man of crooked heart does not discover good, and one with a dishonest tongue falls into calamity.”

17:27—“Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.”

17:28—“Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.”

18:2—“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

18:4—“The words of a man’s mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook.”

18:6—“A fool’s lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating.”

18:7—“A fool’s mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul.”

18:8—“The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.”

18:13—“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”

18:20—“From the fruit of a man’s mouth his stomach is satisfied; he is satisfied by the yield of his lips.”

18:21—“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

19:1—“Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool.”

19:5—“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape.”

19:28—“A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.”

20:15—“There is gold and abundance of costly stones, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.”

20:19—“Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.”

21:6—“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.”

21:23—“Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.”

21:28—“A false witness will perish, but the word of a man who hears will endure.”

23:9—“Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.”

24:1–2—“Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them; for their hearts devise violence, and their lips talk of trouble.”

24:26—“Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.”

24:28—“Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips.”

25:11—“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.”

25:15—“With patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone.”

25:23—“The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.”

26:2—“Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight.”

26:7—“Like a lame man’s legs, which hang useless, is a proverb in the mouth of fools.”

26:9—“Like a thorn that goes up in the hand of a drunkard is a proverb in the mouth of fools.”

26:20—“For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.”

26:22—“The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.”

26:23—“Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are fervent lips with an evil heart.”

26:24–25—“Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not, for there are seven abominations in his heart.”

29:20—“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

30:11–12—“There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers. There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth.”

31:26—“She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.”

E

Hymns for Personal Adoration and Praise

The following hymns are particularly suitable for singing to the Lord because they have wonderful texts and are, for the most part, in the first person singular. This selection is culled from *Hymns for the Living Church*, edited by Don Hustad, and published by Hope Publishing (Carol Stream, IL), 1981.

No.	Hymn Title	Composer
1	“Holy, Holy, Holy!”	Reginald Heber
11	“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”	Martin Luther
32	“How Great Thou Art”	Carl Boberg
33	“My God, How Wonderful Thou Art”	Frederick W. Faber
37	“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”	Thomas O. Chisholm
43	“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”	Joachim Neander
51	“I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord”	Psalm 89:1
67	“Fairest Lord Jesus”	Gesangbuch Munster
72	“My Jesus, I Love Thee”	William R. Featherstone
83	“Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee”	Attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux

90	“O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”	Charles Wesley
91	“Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts”	Attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux
99	“Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners”	J. Wilbur Chapman
101	“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence”	Liturgy of St. James
122	“Of the Father’s Love Begotten”	Aurelius C. Prudentius
131	“All Glory, Laud and Honor”	Theodulph of Orleans
136	“O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”	Attr. to Bernard of Clairvaux
140	“In the Cross of Christ I Glory”	John Bowring
148	“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”	Isaac Watts
149	“Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me”	Augustus M. Toplady
156	“Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed?”	Isaac Watts
159	“Jesus Lives and So Shall I”	Christian F. Gellert
187	“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”	Edwin Hatch
194	“Holy Spirit, Light Divine”	Andrew Reed
203	“I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord”	Timothy Dwight
220	“Break Thou the Bread of Life”	Mary A. Lathbury
229	“O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”	S. Trevor Francis
242	“Not What These Hands Have Done”	Horatius Bonar
246	“Jesus, Lover of My Soul”	Charles Wesley
248	“And Can It Be That I Should Gain?”	Charles Wesley
260	“Just As I Am, Without One Plea”	Charlotte Elliott
288	“Amazing Grace!”	John Newton
308	“My Hope Is in the Lord”	Norman J. Clayton
344	“Be Thou My Vision”	Irish Hymn
349	“May the Mind of Christ My Savior”	Kate B. Wilkinson
359	“More Love to Thee, O Christ”	Elizabeth P. Prentiss
360	“Speak, Lord, in the Stillness”	E. May Grimes
384	“All for Jesus! All for Jesus!”	Mary D. James

- 401 “When Peace Like a River Attendeth” Horatio G. Spafford
438 “Teach Me to Pray, Lord” Albert S. Reitz
448 “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” William Williams
571 “Thanks to God for My Redeemer” August L. Storm

F

Choruses and Scripture Songs for Personal Adoration and Praise

Most of the following selections are excellent for personal devotions because they are in the first person singular. All can be found in *Maranatha! Music Praise Chorus Book*, Word/Maranatha (Costa Mesa, CA), 1993.

No.	Song Title	Composer
3	"Praise the Name of Jesus"	Roy Hicks
7	"Rule Over My Soul"	
8	"Consecrate My Life"	Debby Kerner
9	"I Will Bless Thee, O Lord"	Esther Watanabe
22	"Create In Me a Clean Heart"	
45	"Glorify You"	Wayne Cordiero
49	"You Are My Hiding Place"	Michael Ledner
52	"Thy Loving Kindness"	Hugh Mitchell
54	"Psalm 5"	Bill Sprouse Jr.
55	"Worthy"	Rich Cook
64	"Holy, Thou Art Holy"	Larry Kingery
68	"Spirit of the Living God"	Daniel Iverson
97	"Glorify Thy Name"	Donna Adkins
110	"Thou Art Worthy"	Pauline Michael Mills

116	“Jesus, What a Wonder You Are”	Dave Bolton
118	“Psalm 19 (The Law of the Lord)”	
121	“Unto Thee O Lord (Psalm 25)”	Charles F. Monroe
132	“Psalm 139:23 and 24”	Guy Gray
139	“Psalm 139:7–14”	Kelly Willard
147	“O Lord You Are Beautiful”	Keith Green
155	“The Sweetest Name of All”	Tom Coomes
169	“Lord, Be Glorified”	Bob Kilpatrick
180	“Father, I Adore You”	Terrye Coelho

G

Praise Psalms Especially Appropriate for Personal Worship

Psalms 8	Psalms 67	Psalms 104
Psalms 9:1-2	Psalms 68:4-6, 32-35	Psalms 105:1-6
Psalms 16:7-11	Psalms 72:18-19	Psalms 108:1-6
Psalms 18:1-3	Psalms 84	Psalms 111
Psalms 19	Psalms 89:1-2	Psalms 113
Psalms 23	Psalms 91	Psalms 115
Psalms 24	Psalms 92:1-5	Psalms 116
Psalms 29	Psalms 93	Psalms 117
Psalms 33	Psalms 95:1-7	Psalms 118
Psalms 34	Psalms 96	Psalms 126
Psalms 40:1-5	Psalms 97	Psalms 134
Psalms 46	Psalms 98	Psalms 135
Psalms 47	Psalms 99	Psalms 136
Psalms 63:1-7	Psalms 100	Psalms 138
Psalms 65	Psalms 103	Psalms 144:1-10
Psalms 66:1-8		

General Index

- Aaron, 126, 227
Abel, 196
ability, 188
Abraham, 196, 203
Absalom, 38
abstraction, 95
acceptance, 85–86
accountability, 40, 281
Adam, 77
Adler, Mortimer, 299
admirability, 98
adoration, 113–18
adultery, 32, 39, 95
affection, 69
affirmation, 85
Africa Inland Mission, 125
agony, 21, 202
Ahithophel, 38
Aitken, Jonathan, 305
alcoholism, 17
Alcorn, Randy, 250
Alexander, John W., 295
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 128
Allberry, Sam, 224
Alonzo, Rebecca Nichols, 305
Alter, Robert, 303
Alzheimer's disease, 47
American culture, 155, 158
Amnon, 38
Ananias, 159–61
Anderson, Robert, 297
Andrew, 253–59
angels, 213–14
anger, 197
Anyabwile, Thabiti, 224
apostles, 225n2
Apostles' Creed, 145
Aquinas, Thomas, 225n2
architecture, 75
Armerding, Hudson T., 296
Ash, Christopher, 60, 224, 273
attendance, 220–21
attention spans, 95
attributes of God, 115
audiobooks, 102
Augustine, 110, 211, 225n2, 297, 298, 300, 301, 305
Austen, Jane, 102
authenticity, 211
autonomy, 84, 86
average joys, 252–54

Bach, Johann Sebastian, 117
Bainton, Roland, 304
Bannister, Roger, 201
Barna, George, 210, 259
Barna Group, 32, 95
Barnhouse, Donald Grey, 296
barriers, 269–70
Barrs, Jerram, 168
Bathsheba, 35–38
Bauckham, Richard, 304
Baxter, J. Sidlow, 133–35
Baxter, Richard, 148
beatific vision, 229
Beatitudes, 110
Beckett, Samuel, 19
Beckham, David, 17
Beeke, Joel, 74
Bennis, Warren, 225–26
Bergreen, Lawrence, 304
Berkhof, Louis, 298, 305
Berkouwer, G. C., 304
Bernard of Clairvaux, 117
besetting sin, 196–98
Bible study, 85

- Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 258
- Blake, William, 216
- Blamires, Harry, 92, 217, 297
- Blanchard, John, 282
- blessing, 247
- Bloesch, Donald, 297
- blood, 215–16
- Boesky, Ivan, 240
- Boice, James Montgomery, 104, 296
- Bok, Sissela, 165
- boldness, 214
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 36, 223, 233, 297
- Booth, Evangeline, 71
- Booth, William, 233
- boredom, 16
- “born again,” 292
- Boston Marathon, 198–99
- Boston, Thomas, 303
- Boswell, James, 304
- boundaries, 42–43
- Bounds, E. M., 121, 136, 287, 298
- Boxer Rebellion, 170, 179
- breakfast group, 85
- Bridges, Jerry, 27, 284, 296
- Bright, John, 301
- British Empire Games, 201
- Broadhurst, Bill, 199
- Brooks, Phillips, 304
- Brooks, Stockford, 303
- Brooks, Thomas, 304
- Brown, Peter, 299
- Brown, Raymond, 270n5
- Bruce, F. E., 196n1
- Buchanan, Mark, 224
- Bunyan, John, 102, 122n2, 123–24, 216, 230, 255, 296, 297, 299, 300, 302, 305
- Burroughs, Jeremiah, 250
- business, 156–57
- Busse, Howard, 218
- Busse, Ruby, 218
- Buswell, J. O., 296, 305
- busyness, 72
- Butterfield, Rosaria, 262
- Cairns, Earle, 300
- Caleb, 232
- calling, 25–26, 55–59
- call to worship, 145
- Calvin, John, 68, 102, 173, 203, 211–12, 225n2, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 303, 304, 305
- Carey, Art, 198
- Carey, William, 128, 203, 233
- Carmichael, Amy, 203, 298
- Carnell, E. J., 295
- Caro, Robert A., 300
- Carroll, Joseph, 150
- Carson, D. A., 273
- Carus, William, 299
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry, 299
- Challies, Tim, 45, 102, 104, 136, 194, 205, 296
- Chambers, Oswald, 284, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 305
- Chapell, Bryan, 296
- character, 107, 163
- Chariots of Fire*, 94
- Chase, Richard, 297
- Chester, Tim, 27, 60
- Chesterton, G. K., 165, 298
- childbirth, 61–62, 290
- China, 169–70
- choice, 93
- choirs, 146–47
- Christian Broadcasting Network, 94
- Christianity Today*, 32
- Christian life, 21, 282
- Christian literature, 101–3
- Christian mind, 91–105
- Chrysostom, John, 243
- church
 - benefits of, 219–20
 - and Christ, 49
 - discipline of, 220–22
 - doctrine of, 212–19
 - loyalty to, 209–12
 - and purity, 32
- Churchill, Randolph, 65
- Churchill, Winston, 18–19, 25, 57, 65, 171
- churchless Christians, 210
- church triumphant, 215
- city of God, 213
- Claypool, John, 231
- Clowney, Edmund, 223
- coarse humor, 34
- Coleman, Robert E., 262, 298, 305
- Collins, James, 303
- Colson, Charles, 94, 293, 297, 298, 305
- commercials, 95
- commitment, 55–56, 80–81, 218, 221
- communication, 56–57, 235, 236
- communion, 219–20
- community, 76

- completeness, 161
 complexity, 91
 compliments, 85
 confession, 111–13
 congregational prayer, 147
 conscience, 163
 consideration, 203
 contemplation, 114–16
 continual prayer, 124–125
 continuity, 76
 Coolidge, Calvin, 236
 Coopersmith, Stanley, 70n8
 corporal punishment, 69
 Cousteau, Jacques, 243
 Crabb, Larry, 27
 Cranmer, Thomas, 203
 Cranston, Alan, 137
 criticism, 64–65, 175, 176
 cross, 202
 Crowley, J. D., 168
 culture, 22, 66, 103, 138, 155
 Curry, Steph, 16–17
 curse, work as, 186–89
 Cyprian, 210, 218
- Dallimore, Arnold, 102, 296, 302, 305
 Daniel, 203
 David, 33–39, 43, 78–83, 228
 da Vinci, Leonardo, 18
 Davis, H. Grady, 303
 death, 49–50
 deception, 160
 deference, 58
 degeneration, 37–38
 de Jesus, Carolina Maria, 300
 delegation, 235
 demonstration, 236
 depravity, 112, 159
 depression, 97
 deriding, 65
 desensitization, 34
 destructive power, 171–73
 determination, 236
 Dever, Mark, 102, 223, 262, 297
 devotion, 107–19, 229–30
 DeYoung, Kevin, 27, 102, 157, 193, 194, 224, 297–98
 Dickens, Charles, 295, 300, 303
 Dillard, Annie, 114, 143
 diminishment, 176–77
 disadvantage, 19
 discipleship, 220
- discipline
 call to, 25–26
 examples of, 16–20
 grace of, 277–84
 Paul on, 20
 as punishment, 69–70
 wisdom for, 279–81
 discouragement, 65
 dishonesty, 159
 divestment, 196–98, 277
 divine awareness, 43
 divine presence, 140–41
 divine priority, 139–40
 Dobson, James, 70n8, 102, 298
 Dockery, David S., 238
 Donne, John, 117
 Dorsett, Lyle, 298
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 81, 102, 296, 297, 301, 302, 305
 double entendre, 34
 doxology, 146
 Drucker, Peter, 302
 Dwight, Timothy, 222
 Dyck, Drew, 284
- Edison, Thomas, 19
 Edwards, Jonathan, 116, 225n2, 230, 300, 303, 304, 305
 egalitarianism, 270
 Eisenhower, Dwight, 98, 209, 300
 elevation, 57, 163–64
 Eli, 70
 Elijah, 203
 Eliot, T. S., 137–38
 Elliot, Elisabeth, 132n11, 298, 300, 301, 303, 305
 Elliot, Jim, 203
 Ellul, Jacques, 297, 300, 305
 embarrassment, 281
 emotional incarnation, 54
 emotions, 134
 emptiness, 293
 encouragement, 82–83, 258
 energy, 189–90
English Standard Version (ESV), 100
 entertainment, 22–23
 enthusiasm, 190–91
 entireness, 161
 equality, 80
 Esau, 68
 ethics, 156, 184–85, 192
 Eusebius, 254

Evangelicals, 101, 209
 evangelism, 161, 164, 251–62
 Eve, 77
 excellence, 98, 191–92
 excessive strictness, 65–66
 exercise, 20
 exhaustion, 266–67
 expansive heart, 257
 expectancy, 142–43
 expendability, 234–36
 extreme poverty, 248

failure, 108, 281
 faith, 111, 232–33
 Fall, Albert, 239
 family, 203
 Farley, William P., 74
 fatherhood, 61–74
 fault-finding, 176
 favoritism, 67–68
 Fellowes, Deby, 252, 289–94
 Fellowes, James, 252, 289–94
 feminism, 21–22
 Fenelon, François, 113
 Ferguson, Sinclair B., 26, 27
 Fernando, Ajith, 273
 festival tithe, 241
 fidelity, 56
 firstborn heirs, 214
 firstfruits offerings, 242
 fixation, 35–36
 flattery, 175, 180
 flirtation, 42–43
 focus, 200–202
 forgiveness, 216, 293–94
Fortnite, 23
 Foster, Richard, 304
 Fox, John, 233
 Fraser, Leon, 239
 Freeman, John, 44
 freewill offerings, 242
 friendliness, 84–85
 friendship, 75–87
 Fuller, Charles, 225n2
 futility, 187
 gaming, 23
 gehenna, 172
 Gerhardt, Paul, 117
 Getty, Keith, 150
 Getty, Kristyn, 150
 Gilbert, Greg, 194

Gilder, George, 52
 Gilmour, James, 263–64
 Ginsberg, Allen, 137
 “Girlhood Project,” 21
 giving
 and church, 221–22
 discipline of, 247–49
 influence of, 244–47
 in Israel’s history, 240–42
 in the New Testament, 243–44
 in worship, 147
 gladness, 149
 “*Gloria Patri*,” 146
 goals, 184
 God
 attributes of, 115
 glory of, 188
 image of, 187
 on integrity, 159–61
 will of, 39–40
 godliness, 21
 Goliath, 33
 Gordon, A. J., 140
 Gordon College, 140, 141
 Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 140
 Gordon, Ernest, 296
 gossip, 174, 176, 180
 grace giving, 240–47
 Graham, Billy, 225
 grandchildren, 62
 Graves, Howard G., 298–99
 Great Chicago Fire, 172
 Greece, 254
 Greidanus, Sidney, 296
 Gretskey, Wayne, 17
 Grudem, Wayne, 167, 299
 Guardini, Romano, 298
 Guinness, Os, 193
 Guthrie, Nancy, 74
 Halvorsen, Richard, 303
 Hamilton, James M., Jr., 194
 Hansen, Collin, 205
 Harlan, John, 158
 Harrison, William K., 98–99, 107
 Hartman, Olov, 303
Harvard Business Review, 57
 Harvey, Dave, 60
 Hassel, David J., 297
 Hatch, Nathan, 297
 Hawthorne, Nathaniel, 102
 Hayakawa, S. I., 303

- healing, 179
- hearing, 109
- Heifitz, Jascha, 19
- hell, 173
- Helm, David, 262, 299
- Helopoulos, Jason, 150
- Hemingway, Ernest, 17–18, 25, 158–59, 277, 296
- Hendricks, William, 158, 299
- Henry, Carl F. H., 102, 225, 299, 300
- Henry, Matthew, 301
- Herbert, George, 117, 214
- Hewitt, James S., 178–79
- Hiestand, Gerald, 44
- hindrance, 198
- hitchhikers, 210
- Hitler, Adolf, 160, 171
- Hogan, Ben, 303
- Hollomon, Fred, 156
- Holmes, Jonathan, 87
- Holy Spirit
 - friendship in, 79
 - and leadership, 233–34
 - ministry of, 91
 - and prayer, 122–24
 - sin against, 39–40
- Homer, 102
- homosexuality, 95, 96n11
- honesty, 160, 166
- honor, 80
- Hopson, Howard, 239
- Horton, Michael, 150
- hospitality, 86
- Howard, David M., 300
- Hughes, Barbara, 48, 264–65, 273, 291
- Hughes, R. Kent, 105, 273, 291, 292, 293, 300
- Hugo, Victor, 304
- human brain, 91
- humility, 114
- humor, 34, 180
- Hunter, Drew, 87
- Hur, 126, 227
- Hus, Jan, 225n2
- hymns, 146
- hypocrisy, 55
- image of God, 187
- immorality, 63
- incarnation, 53–55
- incest, 95
- inconsistency, 67
- individualism, 24, 75, 84
- inheritance, 214, 245
- innuendo, 174–75
- in-spirited prayer, 122–24
- instruction, 70–71
- Insull, Samuel, 239
- integrity, 155–68
- intercession, 51, 127–28
- internet, 34, 40, 41, 42, 96
- intimacy, 42, 163
- intrinsic power, 170–71
- investment, 277
- invisible church, 211
- invocation, 145
- irrelevance, 33
- irritability, 66
- Isaac, 68, 203
- isolation, 75, 84
- Jacob, 68, 203
- Jacobs, Alan, 104
- Jaeger, Werner, 297
- James, 170–71, 172, 176, 177, 178
- James, LeBron, 195
- James, Samuel, 45
- James, William, 165–66
- jealousy, 197
- Jefferson, Charles, 304
- Jefferson, Thomas, 233
- Jenkins, Jerry, 60
- Jensen, Peter, 300
- Jesus Christ
 - and the church, 49, 215, 217, 221
 - focus on, 200–202
 - friendships of, 77
 - mind of, 91–92, 103
 - on prayer, 127
 - presence of, 140–41
- Joab, 35
- Johnson, Paul, 297
- Johnson, Terry L., 150
- Johnstone, Patrick, 302
- Jonathan, 77–83
- Jones, E. Stanley, 107
- Jones, Robert D., 238
- Joseph, 43
- Joshua, 226–27, 228, 229–30, 232, 236
- joy, 202, 252–54
- Judaism, 101
- judgmentalism, 37, 279
- Kauflin, Bob, 150
- Keller, Helen, 80–81

- Keller, Timothy, 44, 60, 136, 194, 262, 273, 304
 Kelly, Thomas, 124
 Kempis, Thomas à, 118, 302, 304, 305
kenosis, 111
 Kesler, Jay, 301
 Kim, Peter, 183–84
 King, Billie Jean, 195
 King, Larry, 195
 Kluck, Ted, 224
 knowledgeable heart, 254–55
 Knox, John, 233
 Krakauer, Jon, 305
 Kreuger, Ivar, 239
 Kroc, Ray, 236
- LaBier, Douglas, 184
 labor, 266–68, 271
 laboring hearts, 268
 Lambert, Heath, 44
 Landy, John, 201
 Lane, Tim S., 87
 Last Supper, 215
 Latimer, Hugh, 225n2
latreuo, 144
 laughter, 34
 Lawrence, Brother, 124–25
 Lawrence, D. H., 31
 Lay, Kenneth, 240
 laziness, 183, 189–90
 leadership, 64, 225–38
Leadership magazine, 32
 Lean, Garth, 295
 legalism, 23, 97, 100, 279
 length, 131–32
 Lewis, C. S., 83, 87, 102, 113, 260, 292, 293, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305
 Lewis, John, 169–70
 Lindley, Verl, 218
 Lindsay, T. M., 296
 Lindsell, Harold, 225n2, 301
 listening, 56–57, 85, 109–10
 literature, 101–3
 Litfin, Duane, 213, 301
 liturgy, 144–49
 Livermore, Jesse, 239
 Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, 230, 300, 301
logidzamai, 98
 “loneliness epidemic,” 84
 Lone Rangers, 211, 212
 longing, 63
- Lord’s Day, 142
 Lord’s Prayer, 110, 147
 Lord’s Supper, 219–20
 Lord’s tithe, 241
 Loritts, Crawford, Jr., 27
 love
 and fatherhood, 69
 and friendship, 79–80
 and integrity, 160
 and purity, 37
 as sacrificial, 49–51
 as sanctifying, 51–53
 loveliness, 98
 loyalty, 81–82, 210
 Lundgaard, Kris, 44
 lust, 35–36, 197
 Luther, Martin, 113–14, 131–32, 143, 188, 203, 211, 225n2, 230, 233, 267, 300, 302, 303, 305
 lying, 39, 176, 197
- MacArthur, John, 105, 168, 238, 296, 304
 MacDonald, George, 298
 Macedonians, 243–44, 246, 247, 248
 Machen, J. Gresham, 297, 299, 305
 Madoff, Bernie, 240
 magnanimity, 230–32
 magnetized heart, 255–56
 male leadership, 64
 male talk, 34
 Malik, Charles, 92
 Manchester, William, 102, 295, 302, 303, 304, 305
 manliness, 21, 86
 Mann, Thomas, 299
 marriage, 47–60, 218
 Marsden, George, 303
 Marshall, Catherine, 298
 Martindale, Wayne, 102, 301
 Martin, Ralph P., 172n3
 martyrs, 203
 Mary of Bethany, 230, 248
 masculine ethics, 158
 Mason, Mike, 49–50, 52
 materialism, 240
 Mathis, David, 119
 Matisse, Henri, 18
 “McChristian” mentality, 210
 McCracken, Bret, 224
 McCullough, David, 299
 McGill, Michael, 76
 McGinnis, Alan Loy, 76

- M'Cheyne, Robert Murray, 104
 McIntyre, David, 136, 299
 McLaughlin, Rebecca, 262
 McQuilkin, J. Robertson, 47–48, 302
 McQuilkin, Marguerite, 302
 measured work, 132–34
 media consumption, 96
 meditation, 109–11
 Melanchthon, Philip, 225n2
 Melville, Herman, 183, 303, 304, 305
 membership, 221
 memorization, 41, 180
 men's retreats, 85
 mental discipline, 247
 Merton, Thomas, 130
 Michelangelo, 25
 Milken, Michael, 240
 Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 58–59
 Miller, C. John, 238
 Miller, Paul, 136
 Milton, John, 185
 mind, 41–42, 91–105
 ministering heart, 263
 ministry, 263–73
 mission, 220
 missionaries, 170, 203, 244
 Mitchell, Matthew C., 181
 modesty, 35
 Mohler, Albert, 238
 monogamy, 83
 Montgomery, Lucy Maude, 296
 Moody, D. L., 225n2, 267
 moonlighting, 184
 Moore, Russell, 45, 74
 morality, 165
 moral relativism, 158
 Morgan, Jill, 304
 Morris, Leon, 39–40
 Morrow, Lance, 62
 Moses, 126, 196, 203, 226–27, 228, 229–30, 232, 234–35
 motivation, 23, 72
 Müller, George, 123, 230, 298
 Munch, Edvard, 216
 murder, 39
 Murray, David, 27
 Murray, Iain, 298
 Murray, John, 299
 music, 117
 muttering, 110–11
 mutuality, 79
 Myers, Kilmer, 137
 Myra, Harold, 102, 302
 mystery, 49, 92
 nagging, 65
 nakedness, 20, 277
 narcissism, 53
 Naselli, Andrew David, 168
 national decline, 39
 negation, 93
 Nelson, Tom, 194
 Neuhaus, Richard John, 297
 new covenant, 215
New English Bible, 64
 Newman, Paul, 138
 New Testament, 243–44
 Newton, John, 216–17
 Nicklaus, Jack, 16
 Nielson, Jon, 74
 nobility, 98
 nonfiction Christian books, 101
 “nothing job,” 189
 Ockenga, Harold John, 225
 offerings, 147, 242
 Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF), 99
 Old Testament, 140
 “one flesh,” 49
 “Operation Andrew,” 258
 optimistic heart, 257
 orchestration, 235
 order of service, 145–49
 ordinary, 253
 organization, 236
 Orr, James, 299, 300, 305
 Ortlund, Ray, 60
 Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 123
 overstrictness, 65–66
 overwork, 183
 Owen, John, 27, 44, 296
 Packer, J. I., 102, 262, 296, 297, 298, 300, 301, 302, 304, 305
 Paderewski, Ignacy Jan, 278
 participation, 221
 Pascal, Blaise, 81–82
 passivity, 22, 279
 patience, 59
 patient fortitude, 199
 Paton, Alan, 301
 patriarchs, 203
 Patterson, James, 183–84
 Patterson, Robert W., 209

- Paul, 20, 93, 98
- Peanuts*, 100
- perfectionism, 17
- Perman, Matt, 194
- perseverance, 184, 195–205
- persistent prayer, 126–27
- personal choice, 93
- personal discipline, 16
- perspective, 270–72
- perversion, 63
- pessimism, 197
- Peter, 116, 159, 160, 203, 225n2, 228, 253, 256, 266
- Peterson, David G., 150
- Peterson, Eugene, 56–57, 109, 149
- Peterson, J. Allan, 36
- petition, 121
- Phelps, Michael, 16
- Phillips, J. B., 171
- physical incarnation, 54
- Pierson, Floyd, 125–26
- Pink, A. W., 300
- Piper, John, 26, 60, 104, 205, 250
- Pippert, Wesley, 165
- place, 130, 188
- plagiarism, 158
- pleasure, 197
- Plummer, Alfred, 243
- Pollard, C. William, 302
- Pollock, John, 296, 302
- poor tithe, 241–42
- pornography, 31–32, 42
- Postman, Neil, 95
- posture, 131
- Potiphar's wife, 43
- poverty, 243, 248
- power, 170–73
- Powlison, David, 27, 44, 181
- Prager, Dennis, 101
- prayer
 - and church, 222
 - as continual, 124–25
 - and devotion, 107–8
 - discipline of, 132–35, 281
 - and friendship, 84
 - as in-spirited, 122–24
 - intercessory, 127–28
 - and leadership, 226–27
 - as persistent, 126–27
 - practice of, 128–32
 - and purity, 41
 - as varied, 125–26
 - prayerfulness, 180
 - prayer list, 128–30
 - PrayerMate, 130
 - preachers, 203
 - preaching, 148, 231
 - preparation, 131, 142
 - Presbyterians, 101
 - presence, 140–41
 - pride, 197
 - primal longing, 63
 - Princeton Seminary, 229
 - principles, 162–63
 - priority, 139–40, 280
 - privatization, 75, 84
 - promiscuity, 95
 - promises, 67, 82
 - prophets, 203
 - Protokletos*, 253
 - public speaking, 18, 85
 - punishment, 69
 - Puritans, 39, 142, 190, 222
 - purity, 31–45, 98
 - quantitative discipline, 278
 - “quiet” time, 130
 - races, 198–200
 - racial differences, 268
 - rationalization, 36–37
 - Rayburn, Robert G., 139n3
 - Raymond, Erik, 250
 - reaching out, 268–70, 271
 - reading, 101–3
 - realism, 280
 - reality, 43
 - recycling, 32n4
 - redemption, of work, 187–89
 - Redford, Robert, 138
 - reductionism, 279
 - Reed, John, 268
 - Reeves, Michael, 136
 - refusal, 93
 - Regulus, 254
 - Reiner, Andrew, 22n14
 - Reinke, Tony, 104
 - relationships, 77, 259–60
 - relaxation, 34–35
 - religious anorexia, 92, 101
 - repentance, 37, 38
 - resentment, 64
 - responsibility, 52
 - revenge, 177

- reverence, 113–14
- revival, 111
- Richard, A. J., 31–32
- rich young ruler, 245
- rightness, 98
- Rigney, Joe, 250
- Robinson, Haddon, 301, 303
- Robinson, Jeff, 205
- Rodgers, Bill, 200
- romance, 58–59
- roots, 76
- running, 198–200
- Russia, 254
- Ryken, Philip G., 102, 136, 303
- Ryle, J. C., 44, 297, 304, 305, 306

- Sabbath laws, 190
- sacrificial love, 49–51
- sadism, 95
- salvation, 212, 281–82
- Salvation Army, 71
- Samaritan woman, 268–69
- same-sex relationships, 63
- Samuel, 33
- sanctification, 51–53, 179
- Sandburg, Carl, 301
- Sande, Ken, 181
- Sanders, J. Oswald, 123, 233–34, 238, 303
- Sapphira, 159–61
- Saucy, Robert L., 211n6
- Saul, 78
- savvy, 184
- Sayed, Matthew, 17
- Sayers, Dorothy, 191–92, 302
- Schaeffer, Francis, 168, 225, 298, 302
- Schaff, Philip, 301
- Schreiner, Thomas R., 205
- Schwab, Charles, 239
- Scotland, 254
- Scripture
 - and the mind, 98–100
 - on work, 185–86
 - in worship, 147–48, 219
- Search Ministries, 259
- Second Helvetic Confession, 212
- Seelye, Robert, 218
- self-centeredness, 139
- self-confidence, 184
- self-esteem, 70n8
- selfishness, 293
- selfless heart, 256
- self-love, 53–55
- self-sufficiency, 24
- Selzer, Richard, 54
- sensitivity, 59
- sensuality, 196–97
- Sermon on the Mount, 127, 245
- sermons, 148
- sexuality, 31–32
- sexual voyeurism, 23
- Shakespeare, William, 53, 302
- Shayne, Vic, 305
- Sheldon, Charles, 293, 301, 306
- Sherman, Doug, 158
- silence, 147
- Simeon, Charles, 231
- Simon, William, 303
- sin, 34, 196–98
- Sinai, 228
- Singletery, Mike, 25, 277
- sinners, 112
- Sire, James W., 104
- slander, 176, 177
- Small, Martin, 305
- Smith, F. E., 18–19
- Smith, James K. A., 119
- Smith, Winston T., 60
- soccer, 264–65
- social incarnation, 54
- social media, 42, 96–97
- Solzhenitsyn, Aleksandr, 297
- spirit, 144
- spiritual sweat, 20–21
- spontaneous confession, 112
- sprinkled blood, 215–16
- Sproul, R. C., 296, 297, 303
- Spurgeon, Charles, 203, 225n2, 297, 303
- Star Wars*, 23
- statistics, 24, 32, 158
- stealing, 162
- Stephen, 203
- Stetzer, Ed., 32n4
- Stevens, Al, 169–70
- Stewart, Mary, 297
- Sting, The*, 138
- Stott, John, 238, 250, 293, 296, 300
- Strachan, R. H., 266n2
- strictness, 65–66
- strive, 21
- Stuart, James, 303
- Stuart, Jane Erskine, 298
- stumble, 281
- subjectivism, 158

- submission, 118
- suburban architecture, 75
- suffering, 50–51, 202
- Sullivan, Anne, 80–81
- Swindoll, Charles R., 292, 303
- Swinnock, George, 142
- systematic confession, 112–13

- taboos, 95
- Tamar, 38
- Taylor, Geraldine, 301
- Taylor, Howard, 301
- Taylor, Hudson, 203
- Taylor, Jeremy, 56
- Taylor, Roselva, 218
- television, 31–32, 34, 94–95, 96, 97
- temptation, 35, 162
- tenacity, 127
- Ten Commandments, 37–38, 110, 155
- tenderness, 59, 68–69
- tennis, 15–16
- Terkel, Studs, 183, 187
- testosterone, 23
- Thielicke, Helmut, 160, 302
- Thomas, Dylan, 18
- Thomas, Jay, 44
- Thoreau, Henry David, 304
- Tice, Rico, 262
- time, 58–59, 71–72, 131
- tiredness, 266–67
- tithes, 147, 241
- Titus, 82
- Today's Christian Woman*, 24
- toil, 21
- Tolkien, J. R. R., 102, 299, 302, 303, 306
- Tolstoy, Leo, 102, 300, 304, 305, 306
- tongue, 42, 169–81
- Torjesen, Peter, 244
- touch, 43
- Tournay, Jack, 169–70
- Tournier, Paul, 302
- Tozer, A. W., 115, 299, 301, 303, 304, 305
- Traeger, Sebastian, 194
- transfiguration, 115–16, 228, 253
- Tripp, Paul David, 60, 74, 119, 181, 250, 273
- Tripp, Tedd, 74
- Trobisch, Walter, 55
- Trueblood, Elton, 69
- true religion, 178
- truth, 98, 143, 156, 166
- Tunney, John, 137

- Um, Stephen, 304
- Underhill, Evelyn, 298
- Undeset, Sigrid, 298
- unity, 49
- Uriah, 36

- Vanderstelt, Jeff, 262
- Van Til, Cornelius, 299
- varied prayer, 125–26
- Vaughn, C. J., 230
- Veith, Gene Edward, Jr., 194
- Victorianism, 39
- violence, 95
- visible church, 211
- vision, 184, 220, 227–29, 235
- volitional discipline, 248
- vows, 55
- vulnerability, 80

- Waldrop, Bill, 304
- Wangerin, Walter, Jr., 60, 173, 298
- Warfield, B. B., 296, 300, 302, 306
- Watts, Isaac, 117
- wealth, 190, 239–40, 245
- weariness, 266–67
- weddings, 47, 55
- Welch, Edward T., 87, 168, 181
- Wells, David F., 298
- Wesley, Charles, 117
- Wesley, John, 125, 175, 203, 225n2, 230, 257
- Westminster Confession of Faith, 212
- Wheaton College, 92, 290
- White, David, 45
- Whitefield, George, 255, 257
- Whitehead, Barbara Defoe, 21
- Whitney, Donald, 119, 136
- Whitney, Richard, 239
- wholeheartedness, 191
- wholeness, 161
- Whyte, Alexander, 300
- wickedness, 172, 293
- Wiersbe, Warren, 304
- Wilberforce, William, 233, 297
- Willard, Dallas, 108
- Will, George, 102
- will of God, 39–40
- Wilshire, Hal, 169–70
- Wilson, Robert Dick, 229
- Wimber, John, 299
- wisdom, 111, 236, 279–81
- Witmer, Timothy Z., 74, 238

witness, 196, 251–62

witnesses, 196

women, 23–24, 76, 108, 269

Woods, Tiger, 195

work

discipline of, 189–92

ethics of, 156, 184–85, 192

friendship as, 85

ministry as, 266–68

prayer as, 132

redemption of, 187–89

Scripture on, 185–86

under the curse, 186–89

workaholism, 190

World of Warcraft, 23

worldview, 79

worship, 116–18, 179, 219

discipline of, 144–49

as God-centered, 141–44

reasons for, 139–41

worthless religion, 177–78

Wouk, Herman, 299

Wragg, Jerry, 304

Wright, H. B., 295

Wycliffe, John, 225n2

Yancey, Philip, 303

YouVersion, 100

Zwingli, Ulrich, 225n2

Scripture Index

Genesis

1116, 143, 185,
192
1:1–2:2.....185, 193
1:27.....185
1:31.....192
2:2185
2:4–11193
2:8186
2:15.....186
2:17.....193
2:18.....77
2:24.....48
3:17–19186, 193
4:9–10216
39:9.....43

Exodus

17.....126, 135
17:8–9226
17:10–13...126
20:1–17110
24.....227
24:10.....228
24:13.....228
24:16.....228
24:18.....228
25:1–2242
33.....229
33:11.....229
33:21–23...228
36:2–7242

Leviticus

19:2.....39, 44
27:30.....241

Numbers

11.....230
11:28–29...231

13–14232
13:6.....232
13:8.....232
13:16.....233
13:23–24...232
13:27.....232
13:28–29...232
13:30.....232
14:1–10....232
14:9.....232
18:11–13...242
18:21–29...241
26:18–19...233
26:65.....233

Deuteronomy

5:1–22110
12:10–11...241
12:17–18...241
14:28–29...241
17.....34
17:14–17...34
17:17.....83
32:46–47...111
34.....234
34:1–12234–35

Joshua

5:13–15228

Judges

7:20.....177

1 Samuel

3:11–1370
14–18.....86
14:6.....78
15–17.....78
16:7.....33
17:26.....228

17:45–47...78
17:45–49...33
18:1.....79
18:3–480
19:4.....81
20:14–17...82
20:31.....81
20:41–42...82
23:16.....82

2 Samuel

1:25–2783
11.....33, 44
11:1–335
11:2.....35
11:4–537
11:13.....37
5.....34
5:13.....34

Nehemiah

8:3148
8:5148
10:32–33...242

Esther

6:6–9.....80

Job

27:5.....161, 167
31:1.....41, 42

Psalms

1110
1:2110, 111, 119
8319
9:1–2319
12:3–4175
15.....161, 167
15:4.....162

16:7-11 ...319
 18:1-3319
 19.....114, 319
 19:1-2114
 19:2-3229
 19:7.....111
 23.....143, 319
 24319
 29.....114, 319
 33319
 34319
 37:23.....271, 272
 40:1-5319
 40:6.....109
 46319
 46:7-8109
 47319
 51:6.....163
 63:1-7319
 63:6.....111
 65319
 66:1-8319
 66:18.....113, 119
 67319
 68:4-6319
 68:17.....213
 68:32-35 ...319
 72:18-19 ...319
 84.....319
 89:1-2319
 91.....319
 92:1-5319
 93.....319
 95:1-7319
 96.....319
 97.....319
 98.....319
 99.....319
 100319
 101:2-3 ...97-98, 103
 103.....319
 104319
 105:1-6 ...319
 108:1-6 ...319
 111319
 113319
 115319
 116319
 117319
 118319
 119:9.....41
 119:1141

119:97111
 119:97-98
 111
 119:97-100
 99-100, 103
 119:148.....111
 126319
 130.....144
 130:5-6 ...144
 134319
 135319
 136319
 138319
 139.....112, 114, 143
 139:1-6 ...114
 139:7-12...114
 139:13-16 .114
 139:23-24 .112, 119
 144:1-10...319
 146-150 ...116, 119
 150.....116

Proverbs

4:23.....92, 103
 6:6-11189
 6:27.....41, 42
 10:9.....163
 10:11.....307
 10:18.....307
 10:19.....307
 10:20.....307
 10:21.....307
 10:31.....307
 10:32.....307
 11:1.....162
 11:9.....307
 11:11.....307
 11:12.....307
 11:13.....307
 12:6.....308
 12:19.....308
 12:22.....162, 308
 13:3.....308
 14:3.....308
 15:1.....308
 15:2.....308
 15:4.....308
 15:7308
 15:14.....308
 15:23.....308
 15:28.....308
 16:1.....308

16:13.....308
 16:23.....308
 16:24.....308
 16:27.....308
 16:28.....180, 181, 308
 17:4.....309
 17:7.....309
 17:9.....180, 181,
 309
 17:17.....82
 17:20.....309
 17:27.....309
 17:28.....309
 18:2.....309
 18:4.....309
 18:6.....309
 18:7.....309
 18:8.....174, 309
 18:13.....309
 18:20.....309
 18:21.....309
 19:1.....309
 19:5.....309
 19:28.....309
 20:6.....162
 20:7.....164
 20:10.....162
 20:15.....309
 20:17.....162
 20:19.....310
 21:6.....310
 21:23.....310
 21:28.....310
 22:6.....69, 73
 23:7.....93
 23:9.....310
 24:1-2310
 24:26.....310
 24:28.....310
 25:11.....310
 25:15.....310
 25:23.....310
 26:2.....310
 26:7.....310
 26:9.....310
 26:12-16...189
 26:20.....180, 181, 310
 26:22.....310
 26:23.....310
 26:24-25...180, 181, 310
 26:28.....175, 180, 181
 28:13.....113

29:5.....175
29:20.....311
30:11–12...311
31:26.....311

Ecclesiastes

2:4–10187
2:11.....187
2:17.....187

Isaiah

6:1228
6:1–8.....181
6:5112, 180
6:8118, 119, 180,
228
29:13.....144

Jeremiah

31:31–34...215

Ezekiel

11:19–20...293

Daniel

7:10.....213

Habakkuk

2:20.....147

Malachi

3:8241, 249

Matthew

1:21.....233
4:1–1141
4:4201
5:3–12110
5:29.....97, 103
6:7147
6:9–13111, 147
6:19–20245
6:19–24249
6:21.....245
6:24.....245
7:7127
8:20.....266
10.....262
10:2–4256
11:27.....201
12:33–34...178
12:34.....42
17.....115

18:20.....140, 149
25:26.....190
28.....259

Mark

1:35.....131
7:6–7.....144
9115
9:2–8.....228
9:42.....41
9:47.....41, 173
10:25.....245
10:27.....245
12:43.....247
14:6.....230
14:38.....127

Luke

1:17.....73
1:46–55117, 119
6262
6:14–16256
6:38.....247
10:41–42...140
10:42.....230
12:15.....245
12:21.....245
18:1–5126
18:11.....177, 181
22:19.....219
22:20.....215
22:27.....232
23:16.....69

John

1117, 262
1:16.....282
1:35.....253, 254
1:36.....261
1:39–40254
1:40.....253
1:40–42256
1:41.....256
3:30.....231
4272
4:4270
4:6266
4:7–9.....268
4:23.....139, 149
4:24.....139, 143, 144
6262
6:5–9.....257

6:8256
7143
10:14–16...217
10:25–30...217
12.....262
12:20–22...257
15:5.....217
15:13–15...77, 86
17.....51, 143
17:17.....179
19:30.....216

Acts

1:14.....124
2:42.....124
5167
5:1–11159
5:3–4.....160
5:4160
6:3234, 237
6:5234, 237
9:450
20:35.....222, 249

Romans

193
1–3.....143
3159
3:9–1820, 26
3:9–20112
3:13.....159
4:6282
8:17.....202, 214
8:26–27122, 135
10:14–15...179
10:17.....111
11:6.....282
11:36.....118
12:1.....118, 119, 147,
150, 244, 248
12:2.....92
12:11.....190

1 Corinthians

2:16.....92
3:10–1525
9:25–2721, 26
10:31.....188
11:25.....219
12:12–26...221
14:8.....265
14:15.....146

15:10.....282
16:2.....248
16:13-14...59

2 Corinthians

5:17.....188, 202
5:21.....216
7:5-7.....179, 181
7:6-7.....82, 87
8.....240
8:1.....240
8:1-2.....243, 249
8:1-9.....249
8:2.....243, 248
8:3.....243
8:4.....240, 243
8:5.....147, 248
8:6.....240, 244
8:7.....240
8:9.....240, 246, 249
9:6.....247
9:7.....249
11:27.....267, 272
12:1-6229

Galatians

5:22.....162

Ephesians

1:22-23 ...217, 223
2:4-5.....282
2:7.....202
2:8-9.....201, 282
2:10.....187, 193
2:19-22 ...217, 223
4:15.....160, 162, 180,
181
5.....49, 53, 55
5:3-4.....42
5:3-7.....41
5:4.....180
5:17-20 ...234
5:22-23 ...60
5:25.....49
5:25-33 ...217, 223
5:26-27 ...52
5:28-30 ...53
5:29.....68
5:31.....48
5:32.....49

6.....132
6:4.....64, 70, 73
6:5-8.....191, 193
6:18.....122, 132, 135
6:19-20 ...127, 135

Philippians

2.....117
2:5-11111
3:10.....110
3:20.....213
4:6.....124
4:8.....93, 98, 103

Colossians

1:15-18 ...117
1:15-20 ...214
3:14.....55, 59
3:15-17 ...193
3:17.....188
3:21.....65
3:22-25 ...193
3:23.....190
3:23-24 ...189

1 Thessalonians

2:9.....267, 272
4:3-8.....39, 41, 44
5:17.....124

2 Thessalonians

3:6.....190
3:10.....190

1 Timothy

2:1.....125
4:7.....20, 33, 247,
277, 283
4:7-8.....25, 26, 103
4:10.....21
5:8.....190

2 Timothy

2:22.....41, 43
4:7.....199

Hebrews

1:14.....213
4:16.....214
9:14.....139n3

10:25.....218, 223
11.....201, 233
11:4.....196
12.....196
12:1.....20, 26, 196,
198
12:1-3205
12:2.....200, 202
12:3.....203
12:22-24 ...212, 223
12:28.....139n3
13:2.....86, 87
13:5.....140, 149
13:15.....179

James

1:26.....177
3.....180
3:3-5.....170
3:5.....171
3:5-6.....171
3:6.....172
4:11.....176, 180, 181

1 Peter

2:5.....217
4:9.....86, 87

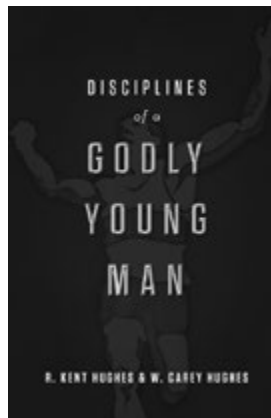
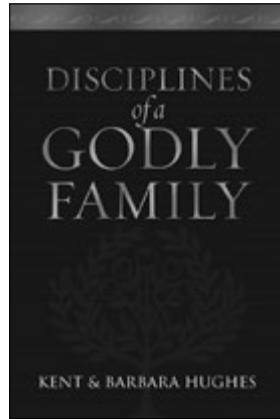
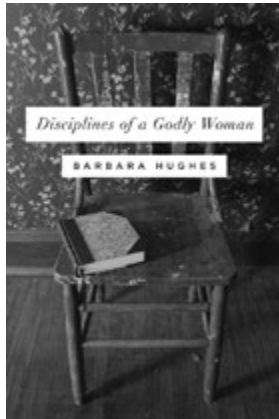
Jude

14.....213
20.....122, 135

Revelation

1:20.....141
2:1.....141
2:7.....110, 119
2:11.....110, 119
2:17.....110, 119
2:29.....110, 119
3:6.....110, 119
3:13.....110, 119
3:22.....110, 119
4.....117
4-5.....119
4:11.....114
5.....117
5:9-13114
19.....143
22.....116
22:3.....139n3

Also Available



For more information, visit crossway.org.

A BEST-SELLING CLASSIC
with OVER 400,000 COPIES SOLD



Seasoned pastor R. Kent Hughes's inspiring and best-selling book *Disciplines of a Godly Man*—now updated with fresh references and suggested resources—is filled with godly advice aimed at helping men grow in the disciplines of prayer, integrity, marriage, leadership, worship, purity, and more.

“Hughes fills a gaping void with this superb volume. If there is a spark of spiritual desire in your soul, this book will surely kindle it into a blazing passion for godly discipline.”

John MacArthur, Pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California;
President, The Master's University and Seminary

“Someone taking seriously the biblical call of ‘agonizing to enter the kingdom’ is the most refreshing thing I could have set my eyes on.”

John Piper, Founder and Teacher, desiringGod.org; Chancellor, Bethlehem College & Seminary; author, *Desiring God*

“What an outstanding volume! Digest this book and you will bid the blahs farewell.”

Charles Swindoll, pastor; best-selling author

R. Kent Hughes (DMin, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is senior pastor emeritus of College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and a founder of the Charles Simeon Trust, which conducts expository preaching conferences throughout North America and worldwide. He serves as the series editor for the Preaching the Word commentary series and is the author or coauthor of many books.

CHRISTIAN LIVING / MEN

