

HORIZONS UNLIMITED

Pastor Sarah W. Utterbach

REDEEMING LOVE CHRISTIAN CENTER

Insights For
Each Day

September • October • November 2007



In 1979, I observed in the life of a friend a devotional practice that seemed unusual to me. Every day, she would walk into an open field across the parking lot from her office, then sit down on a rock to pray and write in what appeared to be a notebook or journal. After several weeks of watching this odd ritual, I wondered, What is she writing down? Finally, when the opportunity presented itself, I asked her and she said, "Oh, I'm

just writing down what I hear the Spirit of God speak to my heart while I pray."

God speaks to people? I thought.

The concept left me both baffled and intrigued. I determined right then and there that I was going to start taking pen and paper into my times of prayer and devotion. I wanted to know if God would show up and speak to me, too. What I discovered was that not only did God show up to speak to me, but He had been there, waiting for me to listen, all along.

In John 10:27, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Prompted by this verse, I began to train myself to be able to distinguish the voice of the Lord from all other voices. To know Him became more than a mere suggestion—it became my desire, resulting in a way of life. I no longer want to walk any other way with anyone else. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life I pursue.

The passages in this devotional are drawn from words the Lord has spoken to me in times of daily fellowship with Him. As you begin this devotional, wherever you may start to read, make Jesus your way, your truth, and your life.

Precious Father, please take these words and seal them in the hearts of each reader desiring to have You reveal Yourself to them. May You, precious Holy Spirit, take each entry and expand it and increase it in the hearts of the hungry ones.

I sowed this book into the lives of millions to be encouraged long after I am gone, for them to experience You in a very personal way, on a daily basis.

My desired harvest is that lives will be changed, souls will be saved, and that every victim will become victorious.

Give them this day as their daily bread Your words, which will make them free. Feed them, dear Lord, as You did me, a daily supply so that they will return for a new daily requirement to keep us both sustained and maintained for Your glory, in Jesus' Name.

His Joint Heir,
Sarah W. Utterbach

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A ministry of
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All scripture references are taken from *The King James Version*, unless otherwise noted.

Turn Your Life Around

...by submitting your life to Jesus Christ. If you do not recall making a confession of Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we invite you to say the following prayer. Confessing the prayer marks the beginning of a new life or being "born again" as Jesus explains in John 3:3-6.

Father in Heaven,

I believe that You are God and that Jesus is Your Son. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and that after three days, He arose from the dead. Today I make a quality choice to turn from my past ways. Jesus, I ask You to please forgive me of my sins and I invite you to come into my heart to be Savior and Lord of my life. Make something new of me. Create in me a hunger for Your Word. By Your Spirit lead me to a church where I may gather together with other believers and be taught Your promises and principles accurately and uncompromisingly. I want to fully understand my responsibility and authority as Your child. Thank You for salvation and for the promise of abundant life—spiritually, physically, economically, and socially. Father, I purpose to give Your name the praise, honor, and glory with my words and with my life, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Amen.

Note: If you prayed the preceding prayer, welcome to the family of God! We invite you to contact us so that we can mail you a memento of this important step. We're waiting to hear from you!

The Lord Is Peace

Judges 6:24 (NLT)—*And Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and named it "The Lord Is Peace." The altar remains in Ophrah in the land of the clan of Abiezer to this day.*

Without the presence of the Lord in your life, you will have no peace. Jesus Christ is our peace who has broken down every wall that separated God's chosen people under the Old Covenant from His chosen people under the New Covenant (Ephesians 2:14). Peace is not the lack of something, such as anxiety or fear — it is the presence of Someone. The Lord is our peace!

The queen of Sheba came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, whose name means *peaceful*. However, Jesus said concerning His own presence, "Behold, One greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:42).

Recently, I visited a certain salon for the very first time. One of the operators kept saying, "She has such a glow on

her face." She said it several times before I realized she was speaking about me. I said, "Thank you. I'm glad it shows."

We can use any number of new makeup products that promise to add "that special glow." But it washes off with your next shower and must be applied again. But the peace of Jesus is not applied externally; it comes from within. Therefore, makeup or no makeup, everyone should be able to see it.

I was not always this peaceful. It was not until I submitted to Jesus, and allowed His Holy Spirit to take the lead and direct my life that I found the peace that I now carry. And I would not trade it for all the treasures of this world. He is a gift that cost me nothing, but cost Him everything. I will not frustrate His grace by looking any further. The Lord is peace, and I have Him.

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Don't Kid Yourself

Every Spring in the U.S.A. we are instructed to set our clocks ahead one hour and then return them to their original time in Fall. Some people think that they can do that with their spiritual life — that they can somehow manipulate time and simply “will” things to go a certain way in their life.

I have news for you. Unless and until you accept Jesus as Savior and Lord, nothing of eternal consequence about your life will change.

There are those who think, *I have time to set things right*. Others think they are just fine and need no change. Because of Adam and Eve's choice to disobey God, all of mankind is now born in sin and shaped in iniquity. Without a spiritual change, they will spend eternity in hell.

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Jude 7 (NLT) reads, “And don't forget the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, which were filled with sexual immorality and every kind of sexual perversion. Those cities were destroyed by fire and are a warning of the eternal fire that will punish all who are evil.” But, thank God, Jesus came as our Redeemer to

ransom us back to God. He paid a high price, but what He purchased for us is free to all who will receive Him.

If you have not accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, I strongly exhort you to acknowledge that you are a sinner in need of His grace. Invite Him into your heart by simply calling on His name from a sincere heart. Otherwise, you are kidding yourself. He is the only Way to reach the One who created you in the first place. The choice is yours, and I believe that your heart and your mind will agree to tell your mouth what to confess: that Jesus is Lord and the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We can help you with this process if you will turn to page 2. Trust me, the devil can't stop you once you choose to stop kidding yourself.

Have Faith In the Word, Not Just In the Power

Proverbs 4:20-22 (NLT)—*Pay attention, my child, to what I say. Listen carefully. Don't lose sight of my words. Let them penetrate deep within your heart, for they bring life and radiant health to anyone who discovers their meaning.*

There is no question that God is sovereign and can do whatever pleases Him. Like you, I have experienced God's power without requesting it. Also, we can pray long enough and hard enough to attract the power of God to meet our need, and it works temporarily. However, when our faith matures so that we can say or do something because that is what God's Word says about our situation, not only will we receive results, they will be results that will last for as long as we continue to apply what is written, regardless of when or how Satan comes.

There are times in church when the presence of God is so strong to accomplish so much that I just tell the people to reach out with faith and receive whatever they need or desire that lines up with God's

Word. Many do and they receive results. However, I teach that when you don't sense His presence at the moment, you can get the same results by saying back to God what He has already promised in His Word.

I have probably experienced more positive results by quoting in confidence what is written than I have by experiencing the power present to perform. Having faith in God means to trust His spoken and written word to you, as much or more than it means being at the right place at the right time when God acts sovereignly. Learn His will and His ways, but most of all learn His *words*. He works His will, but you can work His Word.

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Am I Doing God's Work or Mine On My Patrol?

Mark 13:34 (NLT)—*The coming of the Son of man can be compared with that of a man who left home to go on a trip. He gave each of his employees instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return.*

There is no doubt that God is always at work, so when you are not aware of a specific assignment to perform, then wake up and ask God where He's working today and let Him know you are willing to join Him in whatever He is doing.

I often hear people say, "I don't know what God wants me to do." That usually tells me they have an agenda of their own that they want God to bless. They don't want to put faith or effort toward or get too involved with what God is doing, or they'll miss accomplishing what *they* prefer to do.

The Lord did not leave us here without both the instruction and the Instructor telling and showing us our assigned task. Each of us, I believe, has a season and a time of "watch" to work with. Is your watch — your patrol, or assigned time of duty — being used up with things *you* enjoy and find pleasurable, or will He find at His returning that you're doing *His* will?

All of us have preferences. Some of us even obtain an education and degree in the field in which we expect to make our lifelong career. However, often we find that God will change our career path with no prior notice!

As a child, I desired to be an undercover detective. But I also wanted to drive a tractor-trailer — yes, an 18-wheeler! I believe I would have been pretty good at either or both. But God had something else in mind.

I never pursued either of those areas as an adult, because I thought I'd missed obtaining educationally what it would take to qualify me. Certainly, I could have pursued equipping myself for these careers of choice, even as an adult, but I didn't. However, while God is not opposed to education, He is also not impressed with it, nor limited by it.

Now on my "watch," I am constantly looking to see what He would have me to do next, since I know He would not have me sit idly by doing nothing, or pursue my own interests instead of what interests Him.

Failing To Wait For God's Approval Is Costly

Joshua 8:2 (TM)—Do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king. Only this time you may plunder its stuff and cattle to your hearts' content. Set an ambush behind the city.

As a parent or leader, you may not be able to prevent those under your care from doing things contrary to your instruction. But what do you do when you discover it? Preceding the battle at Jericho, Achan heard the instructions God had given Joshua that “no one was to take any of the plunder from Jericho, because it was cursed” (Joshua 6:17-19). But Achan violated the command. Later, Joshua lost the battle at Ai not even knowing that Achan had disobeyed — that there was sin in the camp. When Joshua consulted God and it was revealed to him who caused the defeat, Joshua addressed it immediately, and Achan and his family lost their lives because of Achan’s sin (*see* Joshua 7:1-26).

Achan’s sin cost Joshua 36 men and a humiliating defeat at Ai. But, the very army that had defeated them at Ai was about to lose everything and everybody, with Israel being permitted by God to loot with pleasure the city and its possessions (Joshua 8:2). What was the difference? Jericho was cursed, yet God gave Israel a definite command not to plunder it. Ai was conquered but not cursed, and God gave Israel permission to enjoy their conquest.

Two things should be remembered here. First, had Achan not been greedy and disobedient, he would have received later more than he had stolen. His failing to wait for God’s approval proved very costly.

It does not pay to disobey God’s command! Second, “sin in the camp”

will cause you to be defeated by those you were intended to conquer. Also, your sin and mine cause a rippling effect on others even when they are innocent.

It is always profitable to do things God’s way. That’s the only way He can reward us. We must keep our homes in order by dealing with any known offense to Him. He is watching what we do.

**It is always profitable
to do things God’s way.**

For That You Are Cursed

Joshua 9:23—*Now therefore you are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.*

Fear of one's "press" can make some into liars. For example, out of fear of Israel's reputation, the Gibeonites disguised themselves as foreigners from a faraway country, hoping that the Israelites would receive them cordially. These people from Gibeon had heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, so they "cooked up" a ruse. In other words, they planned an elaborate lie to keep from being eliminated from the land by the Israelites. Joshua and the men of Israel simply accepted the evidence without asking God about it. Although Joshua could clearly hear the voice of God, when he failed to confer with God, he was deceived. (See Joshua 9:3-14.)

How often are we found making wrong choices because we react to one of our five physical senses? I always say that evidence presented *to* us does not replace the Holy Spirit *in* us. It matters not how much evidence you have, failure to talk to the Lord about it, or check out what you're sensing in your spirit, could cause you to be deceived.

Years ago when I went to the movies, one of my most memorable lessons came from the movie "The Sting." How badly you want something in life will usually determine the extent of what you are willing to do to obtain it, including perpetuating fraud. And make no mistake about it, you can always find someone to cooperate with you and your lie, because most people have a purchase price, or a price at which they can be bought.

Thank God, we also have a purchase price. Jesus paid ours in full. That is why we never have to be slaves to anyone in order to save our life. In the affairs of life, we can deal with others in honesty, integrity and freedom from fear, which contributes to our having life eternal.

Don't perpetuate lies, and don't be drawn in by someone else's lie. Confer with God. Never allow your behavior to bring a curse upon you.

Make It Light on Yourself

Proverbs 15:16 (TM)—*A simple life in the fear of God is better than a rich life with a ton of headaches.*

It is so sad to see how much the media — television, in particular — has affected our values and lifestyles. The result is that so many youth today hardly ever use their brains to make choices that will benefit anyone but themselves. When you locate a person who thinks outside of this box and is not afraid to express these thoughts, you find that he or she is often labeled as anything from a nerd to a rebel to a snob.

Because most people want to be accepted and liked, they often compromise what they believe and recognize as truth in order to fit in. Too often we are fed thoughts and attitudes by others, even by our loved ones, because they have a goal for us that, actually, they have for themselves.

And they do this regardless of whether their goals fit us or are even a part of God's plan for our lives.

A simple life is frowned upon anymore, because others measure us by what we have, not by who we are in Christ.

A simple life is frowned upon anymore, because others measure us by what we have, not by who we are in Christ. In truth, we are measured in life by our fear of the Lord — by our reverence for Him — not by our treasures that often bring with them the turmoil of having to maintain them. The richest life we can experience could include wealth (God is not opposed to blessing us financially), but we must continue to reverence Him.

A simple, uncomplicated life provided by God can be so rich for those who understand what life is really all about: the worship of Him without grief while allowing Him to determine our worth, not our financial portfolio or the neighborhood where we live.

A little free advice: Make it light on yourself and avoid a ton of headaches.

The Best Way Is Not Always ‘Instant’

Proverbs 15:14 (TM)—*An intelligent person is always eager to take in more truth; fools feed on fast-food fads and fancies.*

Most intelligent people are also wise people. This verse in another translation reads, “A wise person is hungry for truth, while the fool feeds on trash.”

There was an era in my life when things were made to last, and a good meal cooked for family that consisted of quality nutrients was the highlight of the mother’s day. Now, because many homes require both parents’ income, moms have no time to plan a meal or to train their children in the importance of well-planned, healthy meals.

Although my mother had to work because she was the breadwinner — the sole support of the family — she always placed before us a good solid breakfast before we departed for school. She also saw that we attended Sunday school and worship service each week, even when she could not go herself. We also attended the

Sunday afternoon youth services and the “fourth Sunday” evening service when it occurred.

Growing up, I didn’t have a lot of academic education around me to influence me, but I thank God for the wisdom that was poured forth from those He placed in my life.

God says that wisdom is the principal thing, so He commands us to obtain wisdom (Proverbs 4:7).

Growing up, I didn’t have a lot of academic education available to influence me, but I thank God for the wisdom that was poured forth from those He placed in my life. Fast-food fads and fancies were not a choice we were given.

One thing I remember about my childhood was that Mother did not become concerned when we thought she was strict and old-fashioned. She knew we didn’t know enough to find our way out of a paper bag that was soaking wet with holes in it! Instead, she set the standard and the pace that would lead us to truth, which was to make us free.

I Delight To Do Thy Will

Psalm 40:8—*I delight to do thy will, O my God: Yea, thy law is within my heart.*

Most of us respond favorably to someone doing something for us without being asked or told to do it. This is especially true when what they do is free of “strings” and personal motives.

I have a couple of friends who are senior citizens. They don’t live nearby, so to visit them takes considerable effort on my part. They do not require this of me, but the joy I see on their faces when I show up is worth more to me than treasures of wealth. Nothing I could do for them brings them more pleasure.

Imagine how the Father responds when we incline ourselves to do His pleasure. When we bend in His direction “just because,” what joy He must experience!

It is a sign of spiritual maturity when we lean in God’s direction, wanting nothing in return but to please Him.

It is a sign of spiritual maturity when we lean in God’s direction, wanting nothing in return but to please Him. Of course, being the way He is, He is not going to permit you to out-give Him, so when you delight to do His will, you can expect to receive things you would have never thought to ask for. That’s just the way God is.

I recently performed the wedding of one of our “original” babies in the church. I did this after saying “not yet” three times to her and her fiancé. There was nothing wrong with them as a couple, but I had a “scratch” in my spirit that something was not quite right. We finally discovered what was causing the scratch, and they fixed it. They waited for their pastor to perform the ceremony when other options were available to them. Because they did what was right and pleasing to God and me as their pastor, I delighted to give the bride something personal of mine as a reminder that God always knows best.

Touch Not God's Anointed

1 Samuel 24:6 (NKJV)—*And he said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord."*

It is not always easy to stay focused on how to separate your respect for God's anointed from wanting to yield to the flesh, which always wants to get even.

Saul was not interested in sparing David's life. Fear of David prompted Saul to see him as an enemy and a threat to what he thought was his. Saul forgot who made him king and why he was selected in the first place. If Saul had stayed focused and conscious of the Lord and His plan for His people, then David would have been of no concern to him. Remember David was God's second choice. God never wanted the people to have a king in the first place and was gracious enough to share with them in advance how the king would treat them.

When we don't allow God to protect us from others, He will attempt to work in the situation for our good. David's heart condemned him for even cutting off the end of Saul's robe. David was surrounded by people who wanted him to take advantage of the opportunity to do away with Saul. I am here to tell you that you will always have opportunities to make wrong choices but when you know God's Word and you have His heart, you will view each opportunity to do wrong as a test to prove your love for the Lord and your honor for His Word.

Luke 6:38 is used often when offerings are received and there is nothing wrong with that. But the Lord has taught me that I can't apply verse 38 until I apply verses 27-37. Loving your enemy and doing what is good toward them can only happen when you want to please the Lord more than you want to receive from Him. Your flesh and mine want to retaliate, fight back, become defensive, and give back word for word when someone curses or criticizes you. Once I learned that no one can curse me because Christ became the curse for me when He died on Calvary's tree, total liberation was mine. You might speak foul words to me or about me, but my obedience to please the Lord insulates me from any ill effects and allows me to release love words over my foes.

Satisfaction Doesn't Cost A Dime

Genesis 43:1 (NLT)—*But there was no relief from the terrible famine throughout the land.*

Since money is no more than a medium of exchange, it has no value if what we need or desire is unavailable. When Israel sent his sons to Egypt the second time to purchase corn to eat (Genesis 43:2), he also asked them to tote double money in their hands, as well as the money previously returned to them on the last try (verse 12).

Israel's sons obviously were not lacking in funds. However, in a severe famine, money does not feed the hungry. In fact, in this story, Benjamin—not money—was the medium of exchange.

The weekly news usually tells how many millions of dollars new movies have brought in. I always smile and say, "Even in this 'slow' economy, people have this excess money to attend films."

No, the famine in our land is not for food. It is as Amos 8:11 (KJV) says: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

Looking around, I see money everywhere. Awhile back, a cruise ship left New York harbor for a trip around the world. The minimum cost per person for the trip was \$25,000, and the maximum was \$375,000. While I would have enjoyed the trip, I longed more to tell the passengers on board that if they were not believers, they would still have a hunger for something when they returned—and His name was Jesus.

I live well, but it is not because of where I live. It is because of "Who" lives in me. The one who lives in me will go wherever I go.

We never have to run to and fro, seeking to satisfy the spiritual famine we once experienced. Money certainly did not satisfy what I needed, only Jesus did. God gave Him as a free gift to everyone who believes, and He is alive forever.

I enjoy many creature comforts, but my famine ended when Jesus became my all in all. I simply sought first His kingdom and all of His righteousness, and I did not spend a dime to get Him.

Nevertheless The People Refused To Obey

1 Samuel 8:19 (NKJV)—*Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us."*

Imagine being told all of the negative behavior of a man and his evil intentions concerning you and you still go to the polls to elect him president. That is concentrated stupidity yet this is what Israel did. Samuel told the people everything God said concerning the behavior of the king they wanted to reign over them. It was not to their advantage to have him, but they said "Nevertheless..."

"Nevertheless" means it matters not what you say, I want what I want regardless; and I want it now. How much pain could have been avoided in our lives if we had chosen to listen, rather than to run headlong after that which we thought we had to have?

At the age of 12, I thought my mother was the meanest person in the world when she told a young man my true age after I had told him that I was 14. Not only was he 16 years old, but he was cute and blew a mean trumpet in the high school band. Mother knew best and was not affected by what I wanted at age 12. Years later I saw him during a visit home and I am still singing the praises of God that my mother made my choices at 12 and didn't care whether I hated her or not.

Perhaps I would have made better choices if I had known more of the Lord and His Word, or if I had some godly role models to teach me what was pleasing to God—as well as the consequences of not pleasing Him. Instead, I saw the ungodly actions of so-called Christians and other authority figures. The few saints I knew were ridiculed by the people around me, and they seemed not to have the power and strength to stand up for their convictions.

Unfortunately, today I still see in the church much failure to uphold and require godly standards and convictions. Pastors and parents, we must reflect God's standard before we can expect our youth to hear us. We will stand at the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for the quality of our influence upon their lives. Nevertheless.

His Goodness and Wonderful Works Deserve Thanks

Psalm 107:8,15,21,31—*Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*

I recognized back in 1977 that if I would just think about Who God is, thoughts of what He had done for me would push to the forefront of my mind past any dark clouds of despair, doom, and doubt. Suddenly, in place of a “dry spot,” a bubbling up of His Spirit within me would bring fresh revelation of His goodness and His wonderful works. I would begin to just say, “Thank You, Lord; thank You.” This would be followed by a song—either one I already knew or a tune with lyrics never before heard.

I learned that my heart knew how to write songs that would pierce through any heaviness or dark clouds over me. Around the same time I began to practice saying thank you to other people.

I was overwhelmed by their response to a simple thank you.

God does not need your “thank you,” but it certainly does get a rise out of Him. The more you say thank you to Him, the more He does for you to thank Him for. You’ll soon recall things of the past that He delivered you from and brought you through. This song from my childhood would begin in my heart and proceed from my mouth:

Lord, I thank You, thank You, thank You

Lord, I thank You, thank You, thank You

Lord, I thank You for all the days of my life.

Then we would enumerate what we were grateful for and say:

When I was lost, Lord, You found me

When I was lost, Lord, You found me

When I was lost, Lord, You found me

I just thank You for all the days of my life

Then we would add on and on with whatever we thought to thank Him for. The next thing we knew, such a breakthrough erupted, it took effort not to run around the building. I challenge you to begin to hum this simple song and watch the devil flee as if in terror. If you can’t sing it, say it and see what God will do.

Arise and Go Do

John 14:31—*But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.*

As humans, at times fear of the unknown causes us to be reluctant to obey, and we hesitate to follow the command of the Lord. Our tendency is to remain with what has become comfortable. Don't do that—especially at the price of obedience.

Jesus essentially said, "I do the Father's commands so that the world will know that I love the Father." Obedience to do the will of God is a sign that we love and trust the Father. The world trusts in only what their five physical senses tell them, and most of the time they pay a high price for following their senses. What a witness it becomes for them to see and hear of our success as we trust and believe the words of the One whom they have neither seen nor known. This is why when God speaks, we should say, "Arise, let us go hence; let us move out from where we are to where we are supposed to be."

When we read the Word, have a vision, dream a dream, or hear the Spirit of God speak to our spirit, it is good to stop long enough to ponder when and how the revealed message will come to pass. Know, however, that the "where" of it will only be revealed as we in obedience arise and go.

You and I will never know what awaits us on the other side of our obedience if we linger too long with the familiar. I have a poster that reads, "When God speaks, never look over your shoulder to see who is following." Friends and family can be a blessing from the Lord, but the time may come when He will direct you to an unfamiliar place to be a blessing to those whom you do not know.

Go ahead—dream your dream; ponder your vision; meditate on the word you have heard. But when you have clearly heard His voice, never allow yourself to get ahead of or far behind God. Allow His precious Holy Spirit to lead you. Then, as an expression of your faith and a statement of your love, go and do. I charge you today: Get on with God.

**Allow God's precious
Holy Spirit to lead you.**

Frustrated Enterprises

Job 5:12—*He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise.*

While we are expected to do those things our hands find to do, it's always a good idea to make sure God is in agreement with it.

God will frustrate, cast off, defeat, dissolve, divide, utterly make void, break up, bring to naught, and cause to cease anything that is not pleasing to Him and is potentially damaging to His plan for mankind.

God wants His people to succeed, and He wants us to increase and prosper.

The bottom line is that God will clean house of the crafty, negatively cunning people. They may have busy hands, but the things that these cunning people say that are for the support and intellectual gain of others are actually for personal gain. Such people will lack permanent or lasting success.

God is not against our being creative and enterprising. He is against our using those abilities for selfish reasons. God wants His people to succeed, and He wants us to increase and prosper. He just does not want us doing it on the backs of others, especially members of His Son's body.

I used to think that life was about accumulating and acquiring. "The one with the most toys wins" summed up my beliefs. Now I say, "The one with the most toys is probably playing too much," and that is not the goal and purpose of a believer.

Jesus was not concerned with time to play. He had a purpose and a plan. It was to do the will of the One who sent Him and to be pleasing in His sight.

If what you are attempting to do is not happening as you had hoped, it may be that God, knowing the end from the beginning, has frustrated your efforts. Check out your motives. The devil may not be the one hindering your progress. It may be that he wanted you to succeed at it but God knew what was best for you, and He lovingly frustrated the enterprises that would not produce for your good.

This Turn of Events Was From the Lord, Part 1

1 Kings 12:15 (NKJV)—*So the king did not listen to the people: for the turn of events was from the Lord, that He might fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken....*

I have learned to rest in whatever is taking place in my life. I no longer believe that satan can do anything to affect me negatively when I am walking with the Lord with a “do right” determination in my heart and mind. Yet some turn of events must occur because of what God has already said about His plan for my life.

In the past, I have taken some pot shots at Rehoboam for listening to and accepting counsel from his peers instead of giving heed to the counsel of his elders concerning Israel submitting to him. If, in fact, he had listened to the elders, then God’s plan for Jeroboam to rule over ten tribes of Israel would never have come to pass, and that could never be. Like me, you most likely have your own ideas about how certain situations should go especially as they relate to you and those you love.

God gave Jeroboam the wisdom to protect himself until it was his season to reign.

King Rehoboam’s choice to disregard wise counsel reflected the arrogance of his own heart, and was allowed by the Lord so that God could perform what

He had already declared to Solomon would take place in Israel.

One of the exciting things about becoming familiar with the voice of the Lord is that once you hear Him speak something to you, little else matters enough to throw you, because you are confident that God will perform that which He has spoken.

In 1 Kings 11:11, God told Solomon that because He had spoken to him twice yet Solomon still chose to follow his own path and not God’s plan for him, he was going to lose most of the people of Israel. God told Solomon that his servant Jeroboam was going to become the heir after Solomon’s death. Because of this, Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, which caused him to flee to Egypt until Solomon died. God gave Jeroboam the wisdom to protect himself until it was his season to reign.

This Turn of Events Was From the Lord, Part 2

1 Kings 12:15 (NKJV)—*So the king did not listen to the people: for the turn of events was from the Lord, that He might fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken....*

Because God would not allow the followers of Jeroboam to fight against their brothers, Jeroboam concluded that those in the northern kingdom would again turn to serve the house of David. Jeroboam made two golden calves; he lied and told the people that these calves were responsible for bringing them up from Egypt, and going to Jerusalem to worship was too far. He made shrines on the high places and selected priests from every class of people who were not the sons of Levi (those whom God had appointed to be His holy priests). Jeroboam either did not understand what the prophet Ahijah had spoken to him or he thought that as a servant and not Solomon's son, he was not worthy of this honor. Therefore, Jeroboam said in his heart that the kingdom would return to David. But that was not God's plan.

Take watch that your heart does not speak words to you contrary to what God has already spoken to and about you. A doubting heart is a deadly heart. You can't outrun what God has said. It matters not if you move to Egypt or the Bronx, God's plan will be fulfilled, even if you only enjoy it and experience it temporarily. Far too many of God's men and women have missed God's plan long term because they failed to believe Him or refused to learn from others before them. When you see someone else miss it because they did not follow after the Lord, what makes you think you will succeed in the same venture unless God has specifically spoken a word to you? Disobedience and following after false gods of any kind made by hand is a "no-no."

Stop where you are, examine what you are doing at this time, and assess how it lines up with God's Word to you. Will what you are doing cause abundant, long-term success to be yours? Or, are you improvising and altering God's command towards your own destruction? Stop resisting the events that God is turning in your life. He must perform what He has promised. Just believe Him and live.

His Will, His Time, His Way

Numbers 9:18 (NLT)—*In this way, they traveled at the Lord's command and stopped wherever he told them to. Then they remained where they were as long as the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle.*

Who inspires God? What motivates Him? These may sound like silly questions, but hopefully they will lead you to the realization that the One who needs no encouragement to do what is already designated to be done is a sound Person to follow.

Anxiety and impetuosity are not traits that God exudes. He has a fullness of time for everything. He has a scheduled appointment for all things to come to pass. His clock is never off, and He has never been late for what He has planned.

He knows just what He has in mind to do. He does the unusual, the unique, and the extraordinary. He selects people, tools, and avenues often ignored by others. After all, would you have thought to use a cloud that appeared to be a pillar of fire by night and reverted to just being a cloud covering by day? Yet God established a pattern using this cloud. As long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle, the people stayed put. The length of time was never the issue with the people. Day or night, when the cloud moved the people broke camp and moved with it.

Most of us take weeks and months to pack and unpack when it is time to move because we have accumulated and become attached to far too many things that we find unbearable to leave behind. While we do not follow a cloud today, when we follow the move of God for our lives, we are to be led by His Holy Spirit—and He moves according to the Father's will. He always cooperates with the Father's season for fruit-bearing and harvest, though the direction He sends us in often seems strange and out of step with others around us.

If Israel could move with and obey God's command by observing an external cloud, how much more should we find ourselves in His perfect will, at His perfect time, performing according to His perfect way as we follow His Spirit within us?

Trust the uniqueness of His whole plan for your life. While He may not confer with you about what is to take place, He will communicate to you that it is He who is prompting you to stay or move as it pleases Him. Trust Him.

Watch What You Wish for Others

Proverbs 26:27 (NIV)—*If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.*

At a very young age, I noticed that the words people used to wish bad things on others would cause me to recoil. I had a knowing inside. It seemed that whatever negative thing I wished on someone else had to pass through me to get to them. The theory may not have been accurate, but the principle was.

This verse is telling me that the seedtime and harvest principle works in the negative just as it does in the positive. Our words contain life and death. The power that God has entrusted to us in the form of words is powerful and creative, but it can also be destructive.

As His children, His representatives in the earth, we are to correct, improve, and positively change conditions and circumstances with the words of our mouths. Out of the abundance of our hearts, our mouths will speak. Our hearts are our spirits, so from our spirits we speak either life or death, blessings or cursings. A fountain is not to give out both fresh and salt water. Neither should our mouths speak life one moment and death another.

Never dig pits for others you don't want to fall into. Trouble you initiate will revolve back to you. Hurt, harm, or danger you cause will ultimately rest on your head and in your household.

This is not a popular subject, but it is a message each one of us needs to fully comprehend. I've learned that God does not always provide truths I want to hear, but as the loving heavenly Father He is, He sends me what I need to know to be victorious, successful, prosperous, and pleasing in His sight.

When I heed His Word, maturity dictates that God is not trying to prevent me from having fun and enjoying life. He is trying to position me and secure me in a path that He has made for me to travel.

Dear Father God, I thank You for caring for me and sharing truth with me. Your plan for me has always been good. Forgive me for often not seeing You in the midst of what is going on because I'd rather go another way. I desire to do and say what You would do and say because others then will benefit. Bless You, Father, in Jesus' name.

A People Dwelling Alone

Numbers 23:9 (NKJV)—*For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him; there! a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations.*

In the Old Testament, it was God's plan for His covenant people to dwell alone to demonstrate His power and their uniqueness among the nations. In the New Testament, however, the will of God was expressed through Jesus when He asked the Father in John 17:15 that He not take us out of the world, but that He should keep us from evil.

Jesus knew that His obedience to death would provide us with everything necessary to live "among them" in the world without being negatively affected by them. We are admonished to "...come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17, KJV).

The last thing God wants today is for His people to isolate themselves from the world. We have what they need. Unless we share and demonstrate truth with them, they will be lost forever. Christian communes are not of God. He wants us to walk among people of the world, but to walk above their attitudes, actions, and aspirations. We were not saved to fellowship only with other believers. We come together to encourage one another so we can go back out among those who do not yet know God's love for them. We are to leave our place of assembly to tell the world that Jesus has already paved the way for them to spend eternity with the Father God through Him.

The ultimate act of selfishness is to become born again and then isolate oneself from the rest of the world, leaving people abandoned without truth and subject to the devil's merciless influence. Living alone is not the same as dwelling alone.

Any single person could and should live alone so they can enjoy quality time with the Lord. However, once we have become recharged and fortified we should make ourselves available so the Lord can send someone cross our path who is in need of what we have to share. Real living is not having and hoarding. Real living is having a heart to care to share. How will anyone know you care if you spend your life avoiding them?

Take Back Your Life

Jeremiah 17:5—*Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.*

I believe God is saying, “My dear children, My Son’s shed blood has redeemed you from the curse of the law, so do not walk as those who are without liberty. You are neither caged as an animal nor loosed without control, but you are free in Christ. You are one with Me. In order to experience the glorious benefits of this privilege, your trust must always be in Me.

“To trust, rely, and depend on another human and to lean on any arm other than Mine for strength is to say that I am inadequate to sustain you here in the earth. This limited, narrow thinking causes you to forfeit your freedom and legally authorizes your enemy, the devil, to toss you to and fro at his will. I sent My Son to shed His precious blood for you to be free to move in the spirit as directed by My Spirit. Therefore, do not put your confidence in any flesh, for the arm of flesh will fail you—including your own.

“Israel was cursed when they turned

from Me to trust man. You are redeemed from that curse. If, however, you violate that redemption, the enemy will know that you don’t know you are liberated, and he will proceed to treat you like one in captivity.

“Today, take back your life. Take back your freedom. Walk in the liberty with which Christ has made you free. Announce to all concerned that you are taking back your life by trusting only in Me. I am the One who will not fail you, the One who will never disappoint you, the One who can never lie to you. Refuse to live as one who is cursed, because Calvary has covered the cost and cleared away the curse for you. So, rise up and take your life back!”

**‘Today, take back your life.
Take back your freedom.
Walk in the liberty with which
Christ has made you free.’**

A Spirit of Want-To

John 7:17 (NKJV)—*“If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.”*

I have often wondered why some believers seem to mature so rapidly and others remain infantile in their walk far beyond the length of time that seems reasonable.

The answer came to me in this verse, John 7:17, which is about wanting to do the will of God. It seems apparent that when God finds anyone who is more interested in pleasing Him than in being popular or coming up with some new wrinkle to God’s revelation, He releases a “spirit of knowing” to them.

I have never thought of knowing as a spirit before. Like most, I thought for years that knowing came with learning; however, I discovered that many people with academic accomplishments really know nothing.

The previous verse, 16, says, “And the Jews marveled, saying, ‘How does this Man know letters, having never studied?’” They, like most, failed to realize that the type of knowing Jesus demonstrated did not come from studying; it came from a desire to do the will of God.

Nothing makes you wiser than wanting to do God’s will. The first time I read that Jesus came not to do His will but to do the will of the One who sent Him, I made a conscious choice that if I was going to have a lifelong goal, that would be it.

When anyone wants to do His will, every doctrine in the Bible is suddenly illuminated for that person. However, be aware that wanting to do His will is costly and sometimes painful to the flesh—ask Jesus! But the joy and reward far exceed the pain and the price.

A friend of mine once said, “Never let persecution change your confession.” That lodged in my heart and will remain there forever.

Whatever we say about God because of what is written in His Word, whatever we confess because of His promises, does not change with our condition or circumstances. Darkness is not an option for any child of God wanting to do His will. Choose today to walk in His light. Do it His way, according to His Word.

An Established Heart

Hebrews 13:9—*Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established by grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.*

Our hearts represent our thoughts, our emotions, and the core of our existence. It is our control center. Since Jesus is never-changing, the focus of our hearts must continually be on Him.

Jewish law allowed and also forbade various foreign and alien teachings about food or related articles that in no way benefited them; neither are such rules and observances advantageous to us, because they contribute in no way to divinely influencing our control center. Jesus

Himself noted that what goes into a man's stomach does not defile him, but that which proceeds from the heart is what defiles

(Matthew 15:16-20).

Furthermore, merely

external observances do not reflect in our lives what God has established for us.

What goes into a man's stomach does not defile him; that which proceeds from the heart is what defiles.

Apart from God's divine influence (grace) on our thoughts, emotions, and actions, we are not confirmed or stabilized by anything that could make us pleasing to God. His grace is not only sufficient: it is the protective barrier to ward off any forces that come against us to deter and detract us from the master plan.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His Word and the example of His life are to be our focus. Don't allow yourself to become attracted to and follow strange observances and ceremonial rules that have no spiritual power to impart. Do not follow any observance or teaching you hear unless your "control center"—your spirit—confirms it with the peace that is only known by a believer whose heart is established upon the Word of God.

What Are You Working For?

Isaiah 2:17 (NIV)—*The arrogance of man will be brought low and the pride of men humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.*

Man's arrogance allows him to get involved in superstition, divination, and idol worship (Isaiah 2:6), but it will not matter in the end. The Lord Almighty has a day in store for all who are proud, lofty, and self-exalted. He will arise to shake the whole earth, and anyone not anchored in Him through Jesus Christ and according to His Word will be humbled. Verse 20 says, "In that day men will throw away the rodents and bats, their idols of silver and

idols of gold, which they made to worship."

I grieve for believers who have little or no time for God.

I grieve for believers who have little or no time for God. They rely

on their *relationship* and miss the refreshing of *fellowship* with Him.

You may live in a mansion, a castle, or a palace. You may drive a luxury vehicle or fly in your private jet—yet not realize that you are being driven, not by the light and Truth of God's Word, but by the desire for increasingly more. Yes, be willing to work, but what are you working for?

One thing worse than not knowing what you're working for is to have desires and be lazy. Proverbs 21:25 says, "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work."

The Day of the Lord is near, and God will require an accounting. Who and what are you trusting in? Isaiah 2:22 says, "Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?" Human beings are limited to the very breath in their nostrils. Everything being made today is subject to rust, corruption, decay, and destruction tomorrow.

Make a choice that this is the day of the Lord. He has made it, and we must rid ourselves of all things that hinder our walk with Him. Promotion comes from the Lord to those who humble themselves and trust in Him.

Offer the Sacrifices of Righteousness

Psalm 4:5—*Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.*

It appears that the Lord is more interested in our availability than He is our ability. Living right for the Lord is not an automatic thing when you acknowledge Jesus Christ as His Son. Although the Lord has set apart for Himself those who will live godly, living godly and righteous begins with a desire to be pleasing to the Lord God of heaven. And, righteous living does indeed require sacrifices.

One such sacrifice of righteousness is stated in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." The grief this verse speaks of is experienced not simply as a result of your failure to submit to the Word, but because your disobedience affects your own profitability. When you fail to submit yourself to the Word and to the Spirit of God, the devil is not your problem and God is not the one withholding blessings from you. You have become a hindrance to yourself. Poor choices plus poor planning produces poor results. I like what Vince Lombardi said: "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

Let us not become so comfortable in our daily dealings that we neglect to include the One who wants nothing more than for us to be found in the perfect will of God. The number one sacrifice of righteousness is, therefore, to put all your trust in the Lord. It takes humility to abandon oneself to Him who cannot fail. It takes wisdom to submit what you can do to the One who will take your ability to a level that you could never have imagined.

The sacrifice of righteousness that God is looking for is our trust, as we submit all of our scientific, technical, and academic know-how to the Invisible One who can only be seen through the eyes of faith. God is not looking for us to *give up* anything as much as He is longing for us to *give unto* Him, allowing Him to take the lead in our lives so that life's pitfalls can be avoided. Trust Him today and every day.

Worry Is Misdirected Energy

Matthew 6:34 (NLT)—*“So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”*

Years ago, when the Lord showed me that He would only give me daily bread as I requested it so I would establish a habit of coming to Him on a daily basis, He also told me that worry was misdirected energy.

Jesus said, “So, I tell you, don’t worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn’t life consist of more than food and clothing?... Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not. And why worry about your clothes?... So don’t worry about having enough food or drink or clothing” (verses 25,27,28,31).

The reason Jesus wants us worry-free is that worry is what the pagans and heathen do. They are deeply concerned about things (verse 32).

How should the children of God look at their needs? Jesus stated, “...Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern” (verses 32-33).

Many times, the Lord has asked me to do some rather costly, unusual things for others; but He has always supplied what I needed to obey His command.

In the past, I have done things for others because they were nice things to do, but they were not God-ordained or Spirit-directed. What happened was that then I expected the recipients to be appreciative and grateful. I expected them to be there when I needed them. I expected God to honor my nice gesture. However, I discovered that He only supports what He authorizes. He multiplies the seed He tells me to sow. He meets my need from day to day if I live for Him and make His kingdom my primary concern. I used to worry about many things that were not my business in the first place. Now I live for Him, teaching others about the profit in doing the same. God’s kingdom is my primary concern, but I sure don’t worry about it. One day I heard a wise friend say, “It is not my concern, even though it concerns me.” I have been worry-free ever since.

Your Words Maintain Your Integrity

Job 2:9 (NIV)—*His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"*

Integrity is not just what you do. It is also what you say. Job's wife wanted him to speak words about God that could result in his death. In the list of positives that God enumerated to satan about Job, one was that "he holdeth fast his integrity." God was essentially saying, "Job's words are innocent." Job 1:22 says, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing."

One definition of the root of the original Hebrew word for "integrity" is *prosperity*. Though disaster, calamity, and misfortune were evident and real in the natural, Job by maintaining his innocent words about God was holding fast to his prosperity. He could not stop the demise of the first prosperity, which was acquired in the natural, but he could ensure prosperity according to God's plan for him. Job did not blame God for the ills that befell him. He did not know he had put in motion a law that would double his wealth, replace his children, and provide a long, full life in which he would see even his great-great-grandchildren.

What a day it will be when we, the children of God, without even thinking about it continue to praise God and honor Him with our words through every kind of trouble. We need to begin to practice and rehearse often who God really is to us, not just what He has given to us, for what He is to us is more important than what He gives. I have heard rank sinners say, "Oh, thank God," when something has gone the way they wanted it to go. I've also heard the same people question God, accuse God, and even blaspheme God when life has dealt them a low blow.

I desire the Lord to help me recall all that I know of Him when a crisis comes. I believe and thank Him often for helping me to be a living witness of Him to others regardless of what is taking place.

Gracious Father, my thoughts and my deeds do not determine my innocence or my guilt, but my words do. Burn into my heart the value of words. Not one of them is without power. Therefore, I need to practice speaking words of life into every situation. When I don't guard my words, death and destruction follow, regardless of what I think or do. Give to me a spirit of integrity concerning all things.

Truth Locked Up in Your Heart Blocks out Sin

Psalm 119:11—*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

The seedtime and harvest principle is quite evident in this scripture. The Word is the seed. My heart is the soil, or the good ground the seed is sown in. And freedom from sin is the harvest, or desired result.

The only way I know to block sin from operating in me is to lock the truth of God's Word into my heart. The Hebrew word here for "hid" means to *cover over, to hoard or reserve, to deny, to favorably protect*. We are not hiding the Word in our hearts as if it were some deep, dark secret. On the contrary, we are using it as a covering.

We are stockpiling it; we are favorably protecting our hearts and denying the enemy access because out of the abundance of our hearts our mouths will speak and words spoken from our hearts have creative power—power to produce what is said.

Accept Psalm 119:130 as a word inspired by the Lord: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." Have you ever tried to hide light? You can't without denying or smothering it with darkness. If you really want to keep sin out of your life, allow God's Word to enter into your heart. The light will accompany the Word and cover over and protect your heart so that the darkness of sin cannot enter. Then what proceeds from your heart will bring understanding even to the most simple among us.

God is not going to force His Word on us or in us. We must diligently seek after it for the benefit and value it brings with it.

A sin-free life is a result of a heart full of the Word of God.

Father, help each of us to understand and pursue Your Word. Our desire is to please You and be kept from the evil in this world (John 17:15). The only way to do this is to allow the entrance of Your Word, to lock it in our hearts so that the things flowing from our hearts represent Your life and light in us. The time is short, and we choose a Word-filled, Spirit-filled life with You now and forevermore. Amen and amen.

Rejoice in the Middle of the Mess

1 Peter 4:12 (NKJV)—*Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.*

The Bible says each trial comes “to try you.” Trials come solely to determine whether we have resolve or will cave in like a sandcastle before the first little wave at high tide.

“High tide” comes for everyone. God permits it to help us locate where we are and to discover what we need to do to stay anchored. We, the children of God, should use each new attack and event to cement our partnership “...with Christ in His suffering, and afterward [we] will have the wonderful joy of sharing his glory when it is displayed to all the world” (1 Peter 4:13, NLT).

I have grown to anticipate and expect what used to surprise me. Since I now know that trials will come and I fully understand their purpose is to sway or influence me, I simply go about life as though they didn’t exist.

How can I do that? I don’t allow myself to look at the here and now, but I focus on “afterward.” Since there is the promise of “afterward,” I realize that the fiery trial cannot destroy me. Therefore, I destroy its power in my life by seeing Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27).

When we keep our eyes on the invisible Jesus, we keep going. What an advantage we have over the devil’s crowd! They look at what can be seen; we move towards the invisible. Though Jesus also died for them and wants them to come into the saving knowledge of the truth, unbelievers are limited to the five physical senses.

I do not ignore my physical senses. God has given them to me so I can function here in the earth. But sometimes I must go beyond what I see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Unsaved, unregenerate people cannot consistently do that, but we believers can.

I charge you this day to begin to rejoice in the middle of the mess all around you. What you are experiencing is no surprise to your Father God. Because He is already aware of it, He has taken the necessary steps to get you through it to His promised victory. He has guaranteed it.

The Way of Life

Proverbs 15:24 (NKJV)—*The way of life winds upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell below.*

When you operate according to the wisdom of God to make right choices, godly wisdom guarantees that you need not be concerned with hell as a future residence.

The way of life winds upward. This strongly suggests that you and I cannot afford the luxury of foolishness in our lives, because foolishness is a pathway to death which winds ever downward. Never allow yourself to be intimidated, deterred, or deceived by comments such as "Oh you are too serious" or "Why not lighten up a little? Relax. Very few things are fatal." True, very few things are fatal, but the few that are could very well seal your fate for eternity. Are you willing to risk everything for a few seconds of satisfying your flesh?

Philippians 3:20 tells us that "our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly await the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." I frequently visit a number of countries and islands outside of the

United States, but I always return home to America because no matter where I go "there is no place like home." My citizenship is here, and I am more than nominally aware of what is going on

**Our assignment:
to live wisely by honoring
the Lord above all.**

here. Whatever transpires in a foreign country, I have to tolerate it while I am there because I have no right to change it. My vote counts in the USA. If I do not like what is taking place in another land, I may leave it at will; my opinion or preference holds no weight and carries no transforming power because my citizenship is elsewhere.

Heaven is the home of every believer; we are merely passing through this world during our earthly excursion. Therefore, it is important for us to operate in the wisdom that insures our future. Much preparation is made by some to live well on earth, yet they appear to have forgotten that as believers, our time on earth is nothing more than a temporary assignment. Our assignment: to live wisely by honoring the Lord above all.

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Obedience: A Delight, Not An Obligation

Psalm 119:143 (NLT)—*As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands.*

As I was growing up, many times God was presented as some big bad ogre whose sole purpose was to swat you like a bug when you didn't do things His way. So I always felt obligated to obey God in order to avoid being annihilated!

When I found that the purpose for obeying God's standards, rules, and regulations was so that He could position us to submit to Him and, thereby, have the ability to resist the devil, I learned a few things. God was not trying to keep me from enjoying life; He was trying to train me concerning that which was to be enjoyed without compromise.

God presents us with opportunities to work with Him as a partner and not a peon. I have never minded obligating myself to something that I believed in, but I did not like for people to

**God presents us with
opportunities to work with Him
as a partner and not a peon.**

require something of me without my approval. When I realized the amount of slack God had given me over the years when I was not deserving of it, I acquired a taste

for obeying Him. It was my choice to obey, not His requirement. He seemed to love me in spite of me.

At one period in my life, pressure and stress dictated that I should run from God in shame for what I had done. Then truth found its way into my life, and I began to find such delight in obeying the Lord's commands. I obligated myself to the Lord in appreciation for His love extended toward me.

You can stop crying rivers of tears and make a choice to obey — not out of obligation, but out of love to and for the One who is worthy of it.

Utter Abandonment

When are we going to see the fallacy of trying to do things apart from the Holy Spirit's direction and participation? He is looking for people whose trust has grown so much in spiritual things that we see that anything less than utter abandonment to Him only delays the release of His best arriving at our door.

Your utter abandonment to the Lord will make others uneasy who have not given Him their all. For example, when you meet new people and decline their invitation to participate in what is for them "the norm,"

you make them uncomfortable without saying one word to accuse them or attack their actions. They will tolerate your utter abandonment to something in almost any area of your life except in your relationship with the Lord.

...anything less than utter abandonment to Him only delays the release of His best arriving at our door.

I never totally understood this until I began to sense in my life that the spirit in them detected that for me to be utterly abandoned to spiritual things could mean that I was prepared to utterly abandon them, and to them, that was scary. People don't have a problem with you serving the Lord as long as you don't let go of them in the process.

Jesus often speaks of those who love parents and siblings more than Him as not being worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). He further states, "...he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (verse 38). Simply put, without total and utter abandonment to the Lord, you are not deserving of, compatible with, or suitable for a relationship with Him. He gave His all for you; the next move is yours. Are you prepared to give your all for Him?

Relatives especially have a hard time with this. They don't want Jesus to withhold anything from them that they need or desire, but they struggle with giving Him their all. Ask Him to reveal to you where you are holding back or holding out.

They Did Not See

Deuteronomy 11:3 (NLT)—*They weren't there to see the miraculous signs and wonders he performed in Egypt against Pharaoh and all his land.*

Much of this chapter is talking about what was expected of the children of Israel who experienced His mighty power versus their children who saw none of what He did to cause discipline in their lives. "Where much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48). Once God has proven Himself to you by what He has done for you, He is expecting your obedience to all of His laws, requirements, regulations, and commands (Deuteronomy 11:1).

Because the offspring of the original covenant generation had not seen what God had done, they were exempt from absolute love and obedience to Him. We know that without faith, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6), but He is not opposed to proving Himself to you so that you have no excuse not to believe Him.

We must allow the Holy Spirit to position us to see all the Lord's mighty deeds with our own eyes.

However, once He operates His love, care, and faithfulness on your behalf, He will not settle for less than *your* best.

The younger generation was exempt because they had not seen. Where we are concerned, on the other hand, we get to see God's miraculous signs and wonders because we first believed. Therefore, total love and absolute obedience are essential to our success in spiritual matters. We must allow the Holy Spirit to position us to see all the Lord's mighty deeds with our own eyes.

Once we experience Him, we should love Him. The more we love and obey Him, the more we can expect to encounter Him. Instead of a vicious cycle, we enjoy a *victorious* cycle.

At The Right Time, He Will Do It

Galatians 4:4—But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.

You and I can rest in the truth that God has never been late or limited. It matters not what we have been taught or have even experienced. God is accurate and timely in everything He does. He and He alone understands the fullness of time, because He operates according to His clock, schedule, and calendar.

When the fullness of time occurs according to what He has predicted, or planned, He usually initiates contact with the vessel He wants to use. He did so with Moses, Abraham, Paul, and others. He also initiates contact when He is ready to work with you and me. He carries the whole picture and knows the story from “once upon a time” all the way to the period following the words “The End.”

Why not train yourself to relax, and trust and follow Him. Just as He chose to use a woman to make His Son, and just as He made Him under the Law, He knows the designated timeframe He has for you to function in for Him. When the fullness of time comes for you to blossom and bloom, you’ll think He’s doing a new thing. But it won’t be new; it was always on His agenda for you.

...any desire you have to submit to Him is because He initiated it and placed the desire in your heart.

At the right time, He will do His will. Forget your plans, even your desire to work with Him. Did you really think that you were smart enough to choose to work with God? Trust me, any desire you have to submit to Him is because He initiated it and placed the desire in your heart. And when the time is right, He will fulfill it.

Can Devotion Be Measured?

Devotion is not the songs we sing and the prayers we pray in the assembly. Devotion is not the time we set aside each day to get in the Word or read books written by others. Devotion is not even how long we talk to the Lord. These are all nice things to do, and we should do them. But I believe devotion means daily communication with the Father as to how to establish a love relationship with Him, desiring only to do His will His way, including in His timeframe.

Human devotion to God can be measured, but not by another human. God is the only one through Jesus capable of measuring our devotion. First of all, we must be single-minded in our devotion to God and Him alone. He is the only One deserving and worthy of our affection. The Father does not measure our devotion according to what we do for others. Unless He has inspired our action, He is not measuring "the deed to meet the need"; He is measuring our obedience to what He has spoken concerning every situation.

Devotion to God means to examine ourselves to make sure nothing and no one occupies first place in our life except Him. The Lord measures our devotion according to the priority of our hearts and our willingness to obey even when we don't understand what's being required and why. How do you fit on His chart?

Love, Obey, and Serve

Deuteronomy 11:22-23—*For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to cleave unto him. Then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves.*

With this requirement to love, obey, and serve came a solemn promise to the children of Israel from God Himself. What do you suppose He has in mind for us when we respond to His commandments in willing obedience?

Some seem to struggle with willing obedience. Their obedience is expressed when there is no way to get around what God desires. I personally believe that we are void of the ability to willingly obey and serve God until we have fallen so in love with Him that it becomes our pleasure to obey and serve Him.

The promise to Israel when they obeyed God diligently was that He would initiate the removal of anything or anyone from their lives that was not contributing to their success in Him. They would dispossess nations that were “*greater and mightier*” — nations beyond the scope of their natural abilities to conquer.

**...we are void of the ability
to willingly obey and serve God
until we have fallen so in love
with Him that it becomes
our pleasure to obey and serve Him.**

God is expecting us to possess “*mightier*” nations than ourselves. Today, there are nations and neighborhoods inhabited by too many heathen who have never had an encounter with Jesus. They are our inheritance (Psalm 2:8). We must love, obey, and serve God and then watch Him fulfill His promise.

Peace In Me

John 16:33—*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure. Having spoken parables to them at times in the past, He was now making plain what they needed to know. After they announced that they finally believed He came from God, Jesus responded, “*So now you believe?*” (verse 31). Then He predicted, or foretold, they were going to abandon Him. But Jesus always had the assurance that, although others left Him, He was never really alone. Jesus always experienced and enjoyed fellowship with His Father (see verse 32).

Jesus shared with His disciples, “...that in me ye might have peace...” to get them to understand that they, too — despite that fact that He was leaving — could and should find comfort and peace in their relationship with the Father.

**Over the years, many people
have entered and exited my life,
but my peace was always
found in Jesus Christ.**

In death, “my mother and my father walked out and left me, but God took me in” (Psalm 27:10 TM). The spirit of death robbed me of a spouse of 32 years, but under-

standing of who I am in Christ Jesus sustains and maintains me. Over the years, many people have entered and exited my life, but my peace was always found in Jesus Christ. How can you experience loneliness when you have the Lord and a desire to do His will!

I did not say you would never be alone. One of the greatest lessons the Lord has taught me is the value of solitude. His voice is so much clearer when all the other voices are silenced. Because I know that He has already overcome the world for me, I am able to enjoy His peace.

Convinced That There Would Be Followers

John 17:20 (NCV)—*I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for those who will believe in me because of their teaching.*

This prayer of the Lord Jesus has convinced me more than ever that all I need to do is teach and preach the Word to those I come in contact with. Why? Because Jesus has already conferred with the Father about them.

When people assemble together, I believe that taking the opportunity to teach and preach about Jesus carries with it enough anointing and power to change the crowd from mere “people” status to “believer” status. However, too often, we want people to come to the local assembly so we can preach Jesus to them. But I say preach Jesus wherever and whenever there are people to hear. Preaching should occur whenever two or more are gathered. Introduce them to His name. Teach the assembly of believers, but preach to all other people assembled, wherever they are assembled.

Jesus was headed to the Cross for the sins of mankind, and He knew that the Father would not require this of Him without a plan. More than just those considered His disciples or followers would

benefit from His death. This is why He could endure the cross with joy (Hebrews 12:2). He understood that those traveling with Him would tell others about Him, and the hearers would believe what was told them.

Teach the assembly of believers, but preach to all other people assembled, wherever they are assembled.

Altar calls in the assembly are great, but I personally believe that more people would be won to Christ if we who are followers would more openly share about Him in everyday conversation. It's the Holy Spirit's job to prepare hearts to receive. It's our job to seize the day and to proclaim God's truth to others. After all, Jesus did pray for them already. How will they know if we won't tell?

Never Settle for Less Than He Promised

Joshua 19:47 (TM)—*But the people of Dan failed to get rid of the westerners (Amorites) who pushed them back into the hills. The westerners kept them out of the plain and they didn't have enough room.*

Failure to possess what God has promised may allow you to conquer some other area in life, but it's not a true conquest until you "take over" what the Lord has promised. Naturally, you can't fight in the hill country as you can in the plain, so don't allow yourself to be pushed back to the point where your space is limited.

If you allow the enemy to crowd you with activity and not godly accomplishment... you will find yourself settling for less than His best.

If you allow the enemy to crowd you with activity and not godly accomplishment, so that your time with God

and your obedience to Him is stifled, you will find yourself settling for less than His best. Just because you gain the victory in a less difficult place, where the opposition is not as strong, does not mean you have pleased God or that you've done His will.

Never rejoice in what you've done until you've done what was required of you. It's His show. He establishes the price to enjoy it.

Make the Effort To Be Your Best Self

Acts 24:16—And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.

If you are anything like me, you have to work at not offending God and, especially, people. God is not as easily offended as are humans. God knows our frame—He knows we are dust—but He also reminds us that He has given us all we need to be like Him.

Most humans have either not read or understood the message of Psalm 119:165: “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.” An offense is a stumbling block to others. We need to keep our consciences clear as to what we say and do that could cause others to stumble. God isn’t going to fall off His throne over what we do. However, each of us is to train oneself and strive to have a conscience, which means a moral co-perception, that does not offend.

Are we faultless before God and man? I am sure God had a reason for leaving us in these human bodies following our new birth experience, but some of us are amazed to find ourselves still challenged by certain things. It’s not the challenge that we fear; it’s the possibility that we may yield to it. It takes effort not to offend God or man. It is not automatic.

The thought of disappointing God does not always prevent me from sinning, but it certainly does act as a strong deterrent. A choice to sin is always one’s own choice, and those of us who are serious about a life with the Lord quickly repent and stop ourselves from allowing the human side of us to dominate for a moment.

I shudder to think what terrible things I would be capable of without my ever-present desire to please Him. Please don’t become discouraged with yourself. The devil would like nothing better than for us to give up on ourselves. He knows God won’t do that, so he’ll try to get us to quit. Refuse to cooperate with him. Reunite with God, and operate in the ways that will cause you to do what is right before God and man.

My children may say and do things that disappoint me at times, and vice versa. But they’re still my children, and I’m still their mother. Could God do less for us?

Begin to be your best self. The more you do it, the easier it will become.

Hearing They Will Not Hear

Proverbs 23:9 (NKJV)—*Do not speak in the hearing of a fool for he will despise the wisdom of your words.*

We would like to believe that the truth from God's Word and the wisdom He imparts through us will be received by everyone who hears, but we have learned that this is not so. Do you stop sharing? Decidedly not! Like panning for gold, you deal with a lot of dirt before the first nugget appears. But are you looking for dirt or are you looking for gold? Never allow yourself to become discouraged because it appears that what you are saying or doing is not bearing fruit. Remember that your responsibility is to sow, and sow you must. The condition of the soil and the intention of God will determine the fruit, not you.

Once in a while, it is good for you not to see instant success with what you are doing. If everything you attempted came to pass without a glitch or a delay, you'd never cultivate the strong character that comes from developing in perseverance or growing in patience. Life is filled with people full of potential but because they lack stamina of character, they remain trapped in mediocrity and they don't realize their potential. They may have started out well, but when opposition or difficulties came (and it will come), they faltered and failed because they didn't find the easy success and instant answers they expected. Clinton used to call it the "Victims of Instant Answers" syndrome.

I will only get credit for doing what is asked of me and for fulfilling my assignment—that is all. At times, that will require me to persevere in the face of great obstacles or disappointments. I must proclaim God's truth if no one listens. I must declare His wisdom if no one receives it and many walk away. No one belongs to us, not even the children we give birth to. All fruit belongs to God; therefore, He is the One who must convince people. He does it by His Word and His power according to what He has already decided. How wonderfully reassuring to know that God doesn't need to "go back to the drawing board" to change anything He has already said and planned. His will is established, and the wise will receive and rejoice; and fools will be foolish until they choose God's way.

What Has He Spoken to You?

Hebrews 11:11 (NKJV)—*By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*

Jesus said in John 6:63 (KJV), “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” Please reread this verse over and over until what Jesus is saying sinks into your spirit. When God speaks something specific to you, the contrary conditions in your life no longer matter. If you will dare to judge faithful the One who promised, God’s Word to you will come to pass.

God was very specific in His Word to Sarah. He said, “This set time next year I will establish my covenant with Isaac,” who was to be born to Abraham’s wife Sarah (Genesis 17:21). The Word spoken to Abraham was confirmed by the Angel of the Lord when he came asking for Sarah (Genesis 18:10). Sarah overheard the conversation and laughed like so many of us do when the seemingly ridiculous and impossible is presented to us.

We need to ask ourselves, “Is anything too hard for God?” One of the most valuable lessons that I have learned in life is when the Lord has spoken something to me, I do not have to “do” anything except “judge Him faithful who promised.” I declare to you this day that every single thing the Lord has ever spoken to me has come to pass. His words to me concerning others are still in progress because their fulfillment involves other humans and their wills. In both cases, I “judge Him faithful who promised.”

Stop trying to believe for everything you want and desire. Believe first for what God has spoken to you. This will increase your faith in His faithfulness to you to fulfill what He has promised. You can then begin to exercise faith for what you would like to have. I found that some of the things I desired were not God’s best for me, so I stopped asking for anything that was not His plan and will for my life. I can tell you that as a result of that, I have become a happy camper with His desires for me.

Sarah received strength to conceive seed because a baby was promised to her. Receive strength to receive your promise. Nothing is impossible to Him who promised. Doubt, however, will delay the arrival of the promise.

Fine-Tuned and Focused

Following after your five physical senses will cause you to operate in a limited way. Submitting to the leading of the Spirit, however, will enable you to see clearly and in focus. Just as a jeweler's loop reveals in a diamond the carbon and defects that would not be perceptible to the naked eye, the re-created human spirit has the ability to focus and make clear godly wisdom and truth in any given situation—truth that would not be perceptible to your physical senses alone.

Never purchase a diamond based on its appearance to the naked eye or simply because you like it. Diamonds, like people, are not always as they appear. Quality, both in diamonds and in life, is not superficial; it is discovered beneath the surface. Value and worth are determined by what you cannot see, not by what initially appears. Your re-created spirit, much like a jeweler's loop, provides discernment and focus.

Do everything necessary to clear away any debris (wrong thinking and sin) that would produce static in your life and hinder the reception of your spiritual antenna. See to it that your spiritual antenna is fine-tuned and in focus enough to receive the signal from heaven to your spirit. This is accomplished by allowing your spirit to tune in to God's Spirit and to stay focused on His ways. Staying focused will keep you on the right path because your attention will be on the One who knows the plan from beginning to end.

Focused saints know what is required of them and others and never adjust the rules for either side. No one benefits from not playing by the rules or working according to guidelines already written. Changing the rules is unlawful and God does not wink at that which is not honest. Be faithful to require of others what He requires of all; otherwise you will be enabling people in their wrongdoing. Unless and until you establish your identity in Christ who strengthens you, unless and until you see yourself as more than a conqueror through Him and not through other means, you have not become focused and you will flounder. God wants to equip you with His Word and with His power to gather in the harvest. Get focused.

Judgment Without Regret

2 Corinthians 5:10—*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

Either I have a different Bible than many Christians, or they don't believe what they read. First Peter 4:17 says that judgment will begin with the family of God.

"Judgment" is a decision, or the function, or the effect, against crime.

The time is coming soon when God will say, "Enough! It is time." At that moment, Jesus will return for His church, and final judgment will begin. God will not judge the wickedness and the sins of those outside His Son's body until His Son has judged His body.

We, the body of Christ, must stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due for everything done while in the body—whether good or bad. None of us will be exempt from this appointment.

Jesus is the Judge, and the day of judgment is when He comes for us. Some of us will be embarrassed when He comes. Some will experience a consuming fire of our whole life's work.

Nothing will remain hidden during that judgment. We will be accountable for our faithfulness or our unfaithfulness. Our actions, our opportunities, and our use of God's gift of understanding to us will be judged. What did we do with what we had to work with?

We are absolutely forgiven for our sins when we confess them, but according to the Bible Jesus is coming with rewards and repayment for both the good and the bad that we do while in the body of Christ. Because of this, it is high time for us to make the choice to get it right, do it right, and live it right.

As long as we listen to our flesh and obey its impulses, we risk condemnation. We have our example in Jesus, so we have no excuse. If He could live right as a man in the earth, we His body can do the same thing.

The judgment seat of Christ can be a place of joy, or it can be a place of regret. Since we know we're going there, let's begin to prepare for it to be the happiest event of our lives.

Patience Is Not Inactivity

Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)—*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us.*

Patience is not sitting still and just waiting for a certain thing to happen. Patience is knowing that God has entered us in a race. Our challenge as Christians has been our failure to understand that we are already qualified to run, for endurance is part of the fruit of the Spirit. We are not lacking in or void of patience. However, we have not understood how it works.

First, make sure that you have done the will of God or that what you are pursuing is His will for your life. Second, set aside anyone or anything slowing you down. We can run together, but we are not able to carry anyone. That is not a human assignment; that is the task of the Holy Spirit. The sin that hinders our progress is the arrogance to think that we don't need the Lord in and for everything. Nothing will weigh us down or hamper our hope like trying to endure without His help. What qualifies us to run His race is our refusal to surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial.

What is the race we must run? It is mastery over strife, contention, struggles, and any contest that the enemy of our souls presents to challenge us.

Yes, our confidence in our relationship with God encourages us at times to be still, and that certainly suggest strength of character; but that is not the only way to demonstrate this special relationship with God. What about the choice to go on with the show when your tears blur the lights on the stage and the faces of the audience? How about risking loving again when the love of your life has left you for someone else or even in death?

The good news is that others have gone on before, walking in the shoes of faith, and mastered our seemingly impossible moments. They are not so silently cheering us on. Never let the noise of the voice of defeat all around you prevent you from listening for the sound of the victors of the past. They are fulfilling their final assignment to remind us that our present was once theirs also. They won, and so will you.

Choose Today

Psalm 1:6 (NIV)—*For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Happiness and prosperity will be ours if we will not listen to the advice or purpose of the ungodly—those morally wrong and actively bad. When we refuse to abide in morally wrong and actively bad things, our happiness and prosperity are positively affected.

When I learned that prosperity included but was not limited to money, my entire life changed. I know financially-sound people who are not prosperous. They participate in and condone what is morally wrong. Consequently, they are unhappy.

I am neither to dwell nor to remain with those who speak words that are foreign to my spirit and contrary to the purpose of God for me. I am to willingly desire, have pleasure in, incline my ear to, and bend myself in the direction of the law of the Lord. I am to meditate (ponder and mutter) His words day and night so that I become stable and confident to bring forth a full reward (in my season) continually.

My increase will not fall away, faint, nor appear foolish. There will be no dishonor or disgrace to my increase. It will not come to naught. Whatever I do will push forward, break out, go over mightily, be good, and be profitable. It will affect others and other things. The ungodly and the sinners will not stand when the favorable verdict is pronounced. The ceremony of the privileged, the divine decree, will not be favorable for them. Their way will negatively cross over; it is transitory; it will perish. God knows, however, the way of His children and rewards them accordingly.

The more we know the way of God, the more He knows our way. We know His way by meditating on His Word day and night. He knows our way by observing us day and night. Righteousness, happiness, increase, prosperity, reward, and advance are the promises and provision for us, the children of God. Not so for sinning, wicked, ungodly, morally wrong, and actively bad people. Their lives are fruitless and a waste. They are unhappy and bring misery to others.

Today, if you have not previously made the choice to go with Jesus, I strongly encourage you to do so now.

Your Call

1 Corinthians 12:28 (NKJV)—*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*

It is so sad to see the body of Christ struggling with the same issues that confuse the world. We are to know what we are called to do. Many Christians wish they could do what someone else is called to do. They minimize the gift, talent, and call that God has given them. Imitation is not the best form of flattery, unless you are imitating the nature, and character of Jesus. I don't want others to imitate me, unless they are imitating Christ and the Spirit of God in my life.

Don't bother putting on that outfit that looks like the one you saw your pastor or pastor's wife wearing, especially if you don't bother to put on the robe of righteousness and the garment of praise with it.

You are not God's first mistake. He had an original thought in mind when He made you from the foundation of the world. Imagine that: God planned your life before He created the world! Thank God we do not all have the

**Thank God we do not all
have the same gifts and talents.
How limited we would be!**

same gifts and talents. How limited we would be!

Make no mistake about it, there are times that I'd be willing to give almost anything to be able to sing and play like Clinton. I don't know if I'd ever be quiet. While I wish I had his gift, I never take for granted or despise the gift God has given to me.

When you start to appreciate yourself and your own uniqueness, the world around you is not going to thank you. Instead, they will probably call you strange, weird, and even self-centered. Do it anyway; they'll get over it. Besides, they need the unique gift of God's grace that you are called to express.

I know my call and the One who called me, and I'll never get over that.

God Knows Best

Daniel 10:12 (NLT)—*Then he said, "Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer."*

What thrills me about this verse is that the angel gave a pattern for you and me to follow in order for our prayers to be heard. Knowing that I am heard comforts me and encourages me to believe that my heard prayer is also my answered prayer.

Even when the answer may be different than what I had hoped for, that does not bother me. If God does not answer my prayers in the way I wanted, that simply says to me that He knows something about the situation that I don't know. Or that what I am asking for, if answered that way, could limit His plan for my life. His plan is always better than what I can see or know.

What I have learned is that God's plan and thoughts for me are often higher and better than what I thought possible, so I have chosen to pray to understand what God knows is best.

That is how I humble myself. I used to think I knew everything that would make me happy. Now I rest in His setting the pace and the goal.

David sang a song of victory to the Lord when He delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, including Saul (2 Samuel 22:1). I have made the next two verses from that chapter my confession for the present and the future, and I believe and act like they are mine now. David essentially said of the Lord, "He is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer; in Him will I trust. He is my shield, the arm of my salvation, my high tower, my refuge, my Savior, and my rescuer from violence" (2 Samuel 22:2-3).

Daniel prayed in humility for understanding, and God heard him immediately. I believe that my prayer of thanksgiving for the manifestation of God's presence in my life is mine now by faith in what He has already done.

Please join me in believing and trusting in the one true God who wants only His best for you.

Go To the Word First

1 John 5:14-15 (NKJV)—*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

No one wants to be rejected when making a request. Yet most, if not all, of us have never received all that we have petitioned of God.

What is the solution? First, we must find out what God's will is. And we find it in His Word. Second, we must know beyond a shadow of doubt that God never denies Himself.

The Father never says "no" to Jesus because Jesus never asks anything not in accordance with the will of God. We need to learn this principle to receive our desires from God. Knowing this provides us with an assurance, a confidence, and an elimination of doubt.

Third, we must rest in the fact that requests according to God's will always get God's attention. Fourth, because we do not doubt that He hears us when we ask of Him what He has already willed, we confidently know that what we requested is on its way to us. Our Father never denies Himself.

One of the wisest choices I ever made was to stop going to God with every little thing that came to mind. Most of it was never realized, and it was affecting my faith. I thought, "Surely if I cannot get Him to give me the little stuff, there is no chance that He will give me the big request." With that kind of attitude, one could find oneself no longer making petitions. The devil knows that when we don't ask God, He is probably not going to sovereignly give us what we don't ask for.

The key for me in changing this attitude was to go first to the Word of God, locate His will regarding what I desired, and then boldly march into the throne room as a child of the King and say, "You said when we as natural parents are reminded of what we said, we seldom, if ever, do not honor our word. Father, I know You always honor Your word, so I thank You in advance for giving me what I need."

Gratitude Is an Act of Worship

Ephesians 5:20—*Giving thanks always for all things...*

1 Thessalonians 5:18—*In every thing give thanks.*

God is not asking us to worship Him for all the bad things that come our way. He does not do bad things to His people, and the time has not come for His wrath to be released against the wicked of the world. He wants so much for as many as will receive His Son to do so before the opportunity is shut down and His irreversible decision on their behalf is released.

God wants to find His people in an attitude of gratitude that says, “Regardless of the adversities, circumstances, and conditions pressing me beyond belief, I choose to allow my words to be a grateful language as an act of worship to Him.”

Once you know the nature of God and His will for humankind, and once you know that the reason the devil has not been able to eliminate you is that God is on your side, you begin to praise Him in everything, not for everything.

Another way to look at life’s negatives is to say, “Father, though You did not cause or create that awful thing in my life, I want to thank You for allowing it to take place. Because of it, I have learned a new level of endurance and perseverance that I never knew before.”

A grateful language is one of the greatest weapons we can have for both offense and defense. A Spirit-controlled, Spirit-directed life is priceless because it declares His divine influence upon our hearts and His reflection in our lives.

Dear Father God, in Jesus’ name, I want to say thank You for every experience and every exposure that I have had. Each one has either drawn or pushed me closer to You. It has helped me to learn Your plan for my life and that I can rest in my relationship with You as I move about my daily tasks.

You have not assigned more to me than You have provided grace and strength for me to perform them in excellence, with integrity, by the power working in me—Your love. May I never attempt to achieve or accomplish anything ever again without Your love as the motivation.

Boast in God

Psalm 44:6-7 (NIV)—*I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame.*

Years ago when we moved into a secluded location, occasionally when I was home alone, fear and a runaway imagination would attempt to take over my usual confident self. That's when I began to practice the presence of the Lord and rehearse what I might do in the middle of the worst scenario possible.

My head would say, "Arm yourself with a weapon or some means of protection." My heart would simply ask, "Did God give you this home? Would you harm another person to protect stuff and things? Are you and all that you have in the hands of the Lord? Will you fear what man can do to you when your Father has promised to never leave or forsake you?"

When I realized that my flesh wanted me to trust in my own abilities, and not in God, I knew the Lord was showing me an area I needed help in. I needed to submit all to Him and begin to ask Him for the grace to not disappoint Him or damage my Christian witness.

This is not a one-time choice. It is a daily consecration of submission to His care and His keeping. I confess that I do not trust in my bow, my sword, or any other carnal weapon because victory for me will never come from them. I must continually remind myself that victory over the enemy, the adversary, is a gift from My Father that I must receive and enjoy all the time. The enemy may have superior carnal weapons, but He cannot defeat me when I use the love of God and trust in Him to bring to me victory in every situation.

We all must learn to say, "In God I make my boast all day long, and I will praise Your name forever."

Dear Father, Creator of my life, help me return to You everything that You have provided for my pleasure and my comfort. I will not assume the responsibility of protecting anyone or anything. I desire to enjoy all that You bless me with but to keep my attention and affection on You. I trust You because I have seen Your manifested glory and power. Thank You, in Jesus' name.

His People Are Covered

Romans 14:9 (NLT)—*Christ died and rose again for this very purpose, so that he might be Lord of those who are alive and of those who have died.*

Most of us like to believe that what we are doing is pleasing to God and “If you are not doing what I am doing, then one of us is wrong.” What narrow thinking! Our concern about what others are doing should never result in our criticizing them. The place of power and victory for us is to make sure we are doing what we have heard Him speak to us.

We all have to work at not being critical of others. Paul said, “Accept Christians who are weak in faith, and don’t argue with them about what they think is right or wrong” (Romans 14:1). We have been taught to have great faith, strong faith, and mountain-moving faith, and there is nothing wrong with that. But we are also taught to increase our faith, which implies that everyone’s faith is not at the same level.

Some of us have selective faith. We can effectively use our faith to believe God will raise the dead and give life and wholeness, but please don’t ask us to fly or to cruise on a luxury liner! Some have knocked the devil in the head when it comes to believing for finances, but don’t even suggest that they go up in a New York City high rise building! Some have faith for building huge edifices and properties, but healing is a subject to be avoided.

Christ died and rose again to be the Lord over those who died in Him as well as those living for Him. When I discovered this, it was a shock. I always thought that He, like His Father, was the God of the living and not the God of the dead. If you are His, you are covered.

Father, I desire to develop more concern and interest in knowing what I am supposed to be doing. Then I want to do it all to Your glory. I ask for understanding of what others are involved in that is uniquely different from what is required of me. I repent for comparing myself to others, and I move forward in a deeper commitment and conviction of what was made available for me as a result of Christ’s dying and rising again for both the living and the dead. In Jesus’ name I pray.

The Wonder of Wisdom

Proverbs 8:14 (NKJV)—*Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength.*

Wisdom is not a new thing; it is as old as God Himself. Wisdom declares, "I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth" (Proverbs 8:23). Long before man was created, wisdom was in on the decision process of creating man and all that would be needed to keep him functioning. Wisdom accompanied by knowledge hates evil. It is wisdom that causes kings to reign and rulers to decree justice. Wisdom loves those who love her and allows herself to be revealed when she is diligently pursued. Wealth and recognition are with her. Enduring riches and right living are her rewards. The fruit of wisdom and her revenue are superior to gold and even choice silver. She, Wisdom, causes those who love her to inherit wealth so that she can fill their treasuries.

Ask your heavenly Father for wisdom.

Wisdom watched as God brought forth water when no

water was in the ocean. When the mountains and the hills were jostling for space, Wisdom looked on. Imagine watching God the Creator form the earth and the fields. Have you ever seen dust made? Wisdom has. With His finger, God drew a circle and commanded water not to go beyond the circle. Wisdom saw that take place, along with the establishing of the clouds for their intended purpose. Wisdom stood beside God as a Master Craftsman, daily, His delight.

I have pursued wisdom all my life since I was twelve years old. I did not understand all that wisdom represented but my spirit inside me knew that all I would ever need would be found in her.

Evaluate where you are at this very moment. Surely you must recognize that all the skill, talent, and gifts you may possess are futile without the wisdom to understand how to use them. You have not because you ask not. Ask your heavenly Father for wisdom. He will give it to you because He wants you to succeed. And, without wisdom, there is no success.

You and Me, Lord

Hebrews 12:13—*And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

Does the path you are on sometimes seem barren? Stop looking for a crowd to join you on your journey. Jesus ministered to multitudes, as well as individuals. The Lord spoke to me one morning and said, "It is not so much the direction that you are going; it is being on the right path."

Your right path may take you in many directions, but it will always lead you to where you are supposed to go. There have always been those on assignment from God to do the unique and unusual. We never know if and when we are to step out into a path never before trodden. Safety is not in many numbers; it is two in one: God in you.

There is nothing worse than trying to include in your call someone who is not assigned. God has never needed crowds to fulfill His plan. John the Baptist was the only one on assignment to be the voice crying in the wilderness with the message "Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight." Yes, Jesus worked with the disciples, but John was the only one assigned to get the ball rolling.

Most people would rather be echoes than a voice. However, moving forward with God may mean taking a different track than those around you do. Frances Roberts was divinely inspired to write, "Others may actually be going forward on the very path that would be for thee a retreat. They are not responsible to give me the kind of service I ask of thee."

To some, it would seem that you are in a rut. I pray that you are because this course of conduct is so superior to what the masses are doing. Please don't imitate what others are doing because it appears to be popular for the moment. For you it could be compromise. Never let the lack of a crowd sway you from the path that God has chosen for you. For you it is not lonely; it is simply uncrowded. Learn to be grateful to the Lord for helping you to see that at times it will simply be "You and me, Lord. You and me."

Gifts With Strings Attached

Psalm 103:3 (NLT)—*He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.*

Forgiveness and healing are gifts. God does not give cheap or defective gifts. He paid a high price for each of them, and they are lasting, effective, and full of power. They are valuable.

All of us know that there are certain things money cannot buy. These gifts, especially forgiveness and healing, have no price tags for us. Why? It's because once something is purchased, the price tag is removed and it is no longer for sale.

Our forgiveness and our healing are no longer for sale. They were bought with such a high price that only God could afford it. Through Jesus, God bought them, removed the price tag, and gave them as gifts to all who receive eternal life by accepting His beloved Son (John 3:16).

I don't ever recall questioning my salvation. Oh, how I needed to believe that I was saved because I had been such a first-class sinner. Therefore, I readily accepted that I was a cleaned-up, forgiven offspring of God.

When I later understood that the same price was paid for my healing as was paid for my salvation, I became blessed to live in divine health without question or doubt. I have continued to live in health for more than thirty years.

I do not doubt my healing any more than I would doubt my salvation. However, if the voice of the Lord said to me to go for medical assistance and I knew it was He who said it, I would confer with no one and obey the word to seek out help. Once you understand that it is Jesus who forgives and heals, you are not concerned about how He does it. The important thing in all of this is to become so familiar with His voice that all doubt and concern are immediately eliminated as you follow the plan of God for your life.

God has strings attached to His gifts. Yes, He gives to us freely all things. But He requires us to abide in Him as He abides in us. Our obedience to abide in Him is the string to His promises.

Obey God, and accept your healthy and eternal life today.

Don't Run—Put the Devil Out

Mark 5:40 (NKJV)—*And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying.*

Jesus was at Jairus' home to heal his daughter. He wasn't going to be distracted by ridicule. He was there to bring glory to God and to demonstrate the devil's defeat.

What assignment are you on for the benefit of others and for the glory of God? Often, as we find ourselves on our way to do what is good, right, and pleasing to God, we discover that the enemy is present, scoffing at what we are there to do. But if we will do what Jesus did, we will have the same results.

We cannot stop people from ridiculing us. However, we can choose to put them outside—in the spirit, if not in the natural. How? We do so with our attitude and by our spiritual maturity.

A man who left the scene of an accident he caused was asked why he left. He stated, "I had to." When pressed further, he said that the female driver of the car he bumped became irate and was cussing and threatening him. He concluded that it would be best to leave before reacting violently to her behavior because he had been challenged by anger issues in the past.

He made the wrong choice. He was behaving as much in the flesh as she was. He thought he had been delivered from anger, but God allowed this to take place so that he could see that, though he had given mental assent to being anger-free, his actions revealed the monster still alive in him.

When we are truly free of our past weaknesses, we respond spiritually rather than physically remove ourselves from problems. As Christians, we are expected to love, do good to, bless, and pray for those who despitely use us (Luke 6:27-28).

Have we missed a great opportunity to obey? Anyone can remove oneself from a negative situation. As believers, however, we are to learn and practice using the fruit of the Spirit, as directed by the Holy Spirit, to confront the difficult situations in our lives.

Make the choice today to stay and not leave the scene of a challenge. If you don't, it will be waiting for you at your next destination.

Without Permission or Promise

Matthew 4:22—*And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

When Jesus told James and John to follow Him, He was truly testing their loyalty. Sons didn't just walk away from their fathers to go with anyone in those days. And the ship they sat in with their father represented their livelihood and their future. But there is nothing quite like hearing the voice of the Lord for yourself to cause you to make out-of-the-ordinary, culturally incorrect choices!

Notice that Jesus made no promise of what He would do for James and John. Neither did they ask their dad's permission to go. Likewise, there must come a point in your life that you take that step of faith, unconcerned about another's permission or promises.

No one can tell you when it is right to obey. You just know you can't do anything else until you have obeyed. That kind of obedience and trust draws you into the inner circle with Jesus. When God speaks, there are no alternatives.

In Genesis 12 we read that Abram, fearing Egyptians would kill him if they knew beautiful Sarai were his wife, asked her to tell the Egyptians she was his sister. Sarai didn't need to lie to save the man to whom God had already promised his best! Genesis 12:17 says the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house because of Sarai. God already had a plan for what He would do if someone blessed or cursed Abram.

Like Abram, how quickly we forget! Look around you! Has God spoken a word to you? Are you following it, or is your emotional involvement influencing your choice and then are you justifying it in the name of the Lord?

Yes, you may appear cold and indifferent to others when you obey God, but that goes with the territory. Is it better to do it God's way or to lean to your own understanding?

God so looks forward to His children trusting Him beyond any doubt. Today, examine your choices. Have you held on to things and people that you were to leave behind? Don't try to rationalize your disobedience. God is not interested or impressed. Lying is the result of failing to follow God's message in the first place. Fix it before it's too late.

Never Confuse Mercy With Disobedience

1 Kings 2:36 (NKJV)—*Then the king sent and called for Shemei, and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and dwell there, and do not go out from there anywhere."*

Some people find it hard to stay focused on what is ultimately best for them. Shemei had cursed David and David agreed not to kill him by the sword. He did, however, assign his son Solomon to deal with the situation in his own way and in his own time. King Solomon's wisdom extended mercy to Shemei, giving him explicit instructions not to ever leave town or he would die. For three years, Shemei complied. But when two of his slaves ran away, Shemei pursued them and lost his life because he failed to hold to the agreement that would have preserved his life if he continued to abide by its guidelines.

Is anything or anyone so important to you that you'd risk losing your life to retain or retrieve them? Why are you running after things God has asked you to give up or leave behind? God is so gracious that He shares with us the consequences of disobedience. That is nothing but mercy. The devil never tells us the price we will pay when we allow ourselves to be enticed by him. Then, when we bite his bait, he'll gloat over our fall and failure.

Shemei should have been grateful not only that the king was merciful enough not to execute him, but also that he was in a position to have slaves instead of being one himself. Instead of staying focused, grateful, and obedient, Shemei gambled with his life and lost.

Again I ask you: Is anything or anyone worth losing your life to retain? Your answer should be no. You may be at a crossroad, waffling in your commitment and about to falter in your obedience. Don't take God's mercy and longsuffering for granted. Are you willing to risk losing everything because of that person or thing you want to pursue? Think about it. Life is all you have. Obedience to the Word of God and to the voice of the Spirit will extend your life and give you peace. Pay close attention to what is spoken to you in the Word and by the Spirit. Everything you have can be replaced, but not your life. Choose wisely. Your life depends on it.

The Most Valuable Inheritance

Psalm 119:111 (NLT)—*Your decrees are my treasure; they are truly my heart's delight.*

What has been passed down to you? What have you collected that you consider valuable? What deposits are you making? What are you leaving to others? What will you be remembered for?

These are all questions we should ask ourselves. Hopefully they will stimulate us to reevaluate our lives and make the necessary corrections or adjustments.

My mother did not do everything right when I was a child, but one of the best and most perfect things she did was to make sure that my brother and I attended Sunday school and church every Sunday, even when she was unable to attend. A love for God's Word was made real to me, and at seven years of age I became born again.

I did not always live the life of a Christian, but the Spirit in me kept drawing me back to Him until that relationship became the necessary part of my life.

Movies, television, and magazines caused me to want to have "stuff;" so I began my quest to acquire things. Love for Jesus and God's Word, however, never allowed me to be satisfied with my material acquisitions for more than a moment.

When I yielded to the fact that I could do without everything and everyone except Jesus, I became secure and peaceful. Time with Him was the most valuable thing I had, and I could not get enough. There was no end to my desire to be with Him through His Word. I learned about Him and about myself because of time in His Word.

Those not interested in God's Word will find me uninteresting and boring. Every opportunity I have, I want to share about the goodness of the Lord—especially in the middle of a person's chaos. My heart longs for Truth found only in the Bible, and I devour it as often and as much as I can.

When I recently updated my will, I realized how much God has blessed me. The most valuable thing I have to leave, however, will not be found in a safe: it will be on the tapes from sermons I preached and in these devotionals I have been privileged to write.

Glad-Hearted Givers

2 Chronicles 24:10 (NIV)—*All the officials and all the people brought their contributions gladly, dropping them into the chest until it was full.*

The only way financing of the work of the Lord will take place is, first, through joyful, happy people who willingly bring or send in their gifts to the Lord. Both the leaders and the laymen alike must give with glad hearts.

If you are concerned about how much you are giving, you are delighting in your gift. When you compare your giving to others', you will lose your joy.

A glad-hearted giver never focuses on the gift. A glad-hearted giver rejoices that God has abundantly blessed him to be in a position to be a blessing to others. A glad-hearted giver is willing to give until the chest is full, until there is no more room to receive additional gifts. A glad-hearted giver does not even focus on the return for the gift. The glad-hearted giver may have a desired harvest for the seed but is more focused on sowing than on reaping. A glad-hearted giver rests in the truth that the One who provided the gift already knows what the harvest should be.

I do not personally believe that people should give until it hurts. I believe that the Spirit of God should inspire giving, and each glad-hearted giver should respond in obedience to that inspiration which causes one's hearts to be glad.

When I suspect that I have done something that the Spirit has inspired me to do, there are no regrets, concerns, or doubts about it. The joy of pleasing my Father God far outweighs any thought of loss from the separation of my seed. In fact, when I gladly give, the necessary forces are put in motion to ensure that my seed and I are never going to be separated. When I cheerfully lay my treasure up in heaven, I rejoice that moth, rust, and corruption can never contaminate it.

So today, Father, I thank You that You have taught me the thrill of giving with a glad heart. I commit to keep on bringing Your blessings to the chest, until it is full and overflowing. Even then, my gifts will never compare with Your gift to me at Calvary.

Conditional Blessings

1 Kings 8:23 (NKJV)—*And he said; "Lord God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts."*

God has no favorites and He withholds no good thing from those who walk upright before Him. Evidently, walking upright before Him is the same as walking before Him with all your heart. Going to church, reading your Bible, and praying are all good things to do, but God is far more pleased to bless us when we simply obey His voice and His Word.

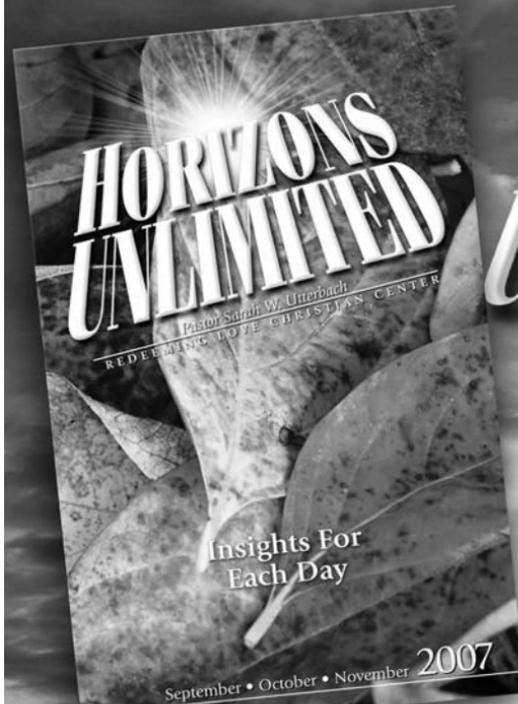
"Walking upright" before Him is our practical application of His Word to daily living. How we treat others, not just how we respond

God's mercy is always greater than your challenge.

to God, is a clear revealer of our heart. "With all your heart" is an expansive statement that explains why some walk in the blessings of God and why others are constantly struggling. God keeps His covenant toward His servants who walk before Him without reservation or trepidation in their hearts. This "walking before Him" with all your heart guarantees His mercy in your behalf. And, His mercy is always greater than your challenge.

Mercy may not be needed every minute of the day, but it certainly is reassuring to know that mercy is available when we need it. My Mother used to say, "Mercy suits your situation." In other words, whatever you may encounter, the Father's mercy will fit perfectly like a handmade garment. If you walk before Him, single minded in your heart, then you can expect His mercy to manifest whenever it is needed.

At the close of a prayer meeting, one of our deacons made the statement, "Walking in the wisdom of God ensures living in His victory." I believe that. Seeking the wisdom of God is to be the primary pursuit of our lives. But while we are seeking wisdom, we must seek understanding also. Understanding teaches us how to apply wisdom to every situation in life. Without question, you will live in victory when you approach every situation with godly wisdom and understanding.



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Only For Him

Joshua 22:5 (TM)—*Be vigilant in keeping the commandment and the revelation that Moses the servant of God laid on you: Love God, your God, walk in all His ways, obey Him, embrace Him and serve Him with everything you are and have.*

Finally, the people of God possessed what He had promised many years earlier. The promise was made to their ancestors, who never saw or profited from the promise themselves. Here we observe the faithfulness of God to always provide what He promised.

Those to whom the promise was made failed to keep God's commandments. His Law was not respected and adhered to. Love for God was limited. They were too busy pursuing their plans and ways of doing things to do things *His* way. Obedience only occurred when they hit a "brick wall." They neglected to embrace Him. Serving Him was more lip service than an activity performed from the heart.

In spite of all that, God's love was forever committed to them, yet the requirements for His blessing never changed. As a result of both — His faithfulness and the requirements He set forth — it was the next generation, their offspring, who finally possessed the inheritance.

We experience and enjoy a great deal today that never would have been possible if Jesus had not been obedient to go to Calvary. It's nice to enjoy those things, but are we ever going to get it straight that personal pursuits and agendas are such a distraction and waste of our real purpose?

We exist only for Him. He must, therefore, become and remain our focus and our future. We can do nothing apart from Him; He doesn't want to do anything apart from us. We are loved. We are blessed. We are set apart from all the rest. He is looking to the day that He becomes our affection and the only reason for our being. We must live and move and have our being in Him, *period* — the end.

A Witness Between Us

Joshua 22:34 (NLT)—*The people of Rueben and Gad named the altar "Witness," for they said, "It is a witness between us and them that the Lord is our God, too."*

When God alone is your God, you want to make sure others understand that although you may attend a different assembly or conduct your services a bit differently, God alone is God. There is no one building that can accommodate all the people of God to gather and worship Him, so it is necessary to gather in buildings of assorted size and design. But what difference does that make, since we agree that God is too big for one building?

We have learned that God compacts Himself to fit comfortably within us. And it is His Spirit *within* us that is the witness *between* us. Culture and tradition often keep us separated. It is okay to be separated as

long as we are not divided. Satan would like to have us focus on what seem to be our differences so that he can "divide and

We have learned that God compacts Himself to fit comfortably within us. And it is His Spirit within us that is the witness between us.

conquer." He is a liar. We separate to accommodate the number of God's people. We separate to increase and encourage one another to keep up the good work.

Division as directed by the devil is always designed to defeat and destroy. When you find yourself focusing too much on differences, do a reality check. Train yourself to understand and appreciate the separation. It's a sign that each is being so abundantly blessed that the Lord can't provide for you in one place. Did not Abram and Lot have to separate? Yet they were not divided, because they were family. We also are not divided, because we are family. So don't listen to Satan's lies. We need each other, and we should love one another. Furthermore, we have the same Father, who has only one family in Heaven and on earth.

The Roster of the Righteous

Revelation 3:5 (NKJV)—*He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life....*

On *The Choice is Yours*, the radio broadcast I host weekly, I am often asked, “Can a believer lose his or her salvation?” or, “If I sin, will I not make Heaven?” While I know it is a lot harder to lose salvation than to get it, it is not impossible to get left out once you opted in. Revelation 3:5 says, “...and I will not blot out his name from the book of life....” It appears that God keeps a census of who are His, just as cities and nations have kept records of its citizens throughout history.

According to the Greek lexicon, the Book of Life is designated as the book in which the names of the redeemed are written. The

blotting out of some of these names strongly suggests that the names that remain are the redeemed, remaining after God Himself has erased the unbelievers. The Book of Life is a roster of the righteous who are to inherit eternal life. The saved will not be blotted or erased from it.

**The Book of Life is a
roster of the righteous
who are to inherit
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I do not know the sins that can cause a name to be blotted out, so I’ve taken the position that it’s smart to discontinue the sinning, and if I do miss the mark to quickly confess it and obtain forgiveness. I shutter to try and imagine once having my name written on God’s roster and then having Him personally erase it because I would not live for Him.

Obviously, there is a Book of Life, and it’s real. So why not live in such a way that God would have no reason to remove your name from His book? Won’t you plan to practice being an overcomer of all sins and hindrances that could result in evidence against you when blotting time comes?

He Does What He Says

Genesis 21:1 (NKJV)—*The Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken.*

April 24, 2006, was a Monday. For the middle of spring, the weather was bleak in New York. It was cold and rainy, but my heart was bubbly and very light. Had I been operating in the flesh, on a scale from 1 to 10, I could have been a minus 1! But I was operating in the Spirit, and I felt more like a 15.

My husband, one of the ministry's three directors, had been asleep in Jesus slightly more than a year. The ministry's administrator, who was another one of three, was relocating after more than 25 years. I could have allowed myself to feel down and unsettled. Yet my spirit was soaring, and I felt that I could run through hoops and even leap a few walls!

How come? The Lord had visited me as He had said, and He was doing everything for me that He had spoken to me. As I approached His Word earlier, I had asked the Lord to reveal more of Himself to me. And did He ever!

Although this verse was spoken concerning the wife of Abraham, the Holy Spirit illumined it to me, and I took it as a personal message. Everything around me became bright and beautiful.

How's your day going? I offer this word to you as a way to take back control of what's going on in your life. I never once asked God to change or fix anything or anyone. I simply asked Him to make me more sensitive to what He was doing for the day, and He granted my request. He loves it when we show interest in Him and not just in what He can do for us.

Although this verse was spoken concerning the wife of Abraham, the Holy Spirit illumined it to me, and I took it as a personal message. Everything around me became bright and beautiful.

Don't Deny the Facts: Believe God's Promise

The book of Proverbs communicates many scriptures concerning people who pretend that what *is* doesn't really exist for them. To deny the facts is so wrong. In fact, it is foolishness and fallacy. However, a choice to place the promise of God alongside the fact, or circumstance, will negate and defuse that circumstance on your behalf every time. God is God all by Himself, and He does not need His children to deny what is occurring in their lives. In everything, He just wants them to believe and say what He has already said about it.

Doubt and unbelief are weapons the adversary has used for ages to hinder people's faith. He knows that he cannot prevent you from believing, so he tries to cause you to doubt and then condemns you for doubting. Don't deny that you struggle at times with doubt and unbelief. Instead of struggling and then denying it, bring your struggles to the One who will aid you in entering into peace and rest. Andrew Murray once wrote, in effect, "So come with every temptation you feel in yourself, every memory of unwillingness, unwatchfulness, unfaithfulness, and all that causes your uncaring condemnation. Put your powerlessness in God's almighty power, and find in waiting on God your deliverance."

It's time for us to cease our questioning of the Lord.

Thomas doubted that Jesus rose from the dead. Mary Magdalene needed Jesus to appear to her before she recognized the One she so dearly loved. And although the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, announcing that the Lord was with him and calling him a mighty warrior, he still needed God to prove Himself to him. It's time for us to cease our questioning of the Lord. Jesus said to Thomas that he believed because he saw, but that those who would believe *without seeing* would be truly happy (John 20:29). I have never knowingly seen the Lord, but I believe, anyway, because the just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38). I never deny the facts as being nonexistent. I simply place God's promise next to them and watch faith come.

It's Through and By Him

Acts 13:38-39—...through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

From the Garden of Eden, and through no fault of our own, we were plunged so deep into sin that we were without hope except for a redeemer. Only One qualified. So, at a very high cost, God sent His Son Jesus Christ to restore us to unity with Him. Why was unity with Him so valuable? God's master plan for mankind was always unity with Him. Jesus understood that, which is why He prayed in John 17 that we be one with the Father as He was one with the Father. The only way this could be was through and by Him.

Through Him, we obtained forgiveness of sin, having heard Him preached. By Him, believing what we heard preached about Him, we were justified and made right in God's sight — as though Adam never plunged us into the depths of such filth and ugliness.

There was a Law that Moses gave to the people of Israel, but it could never justify them and us before God from all the things we were guilty of. But through Jesus and by Him, we Gentiles were able also to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to become right and to live right before the Lord. We are without excuse as to a lifestyle of sin, because the Holy Spirit is both in us and upon us, individually and collectively. He cleans us up internally and empowers us externally to do that which is pleasing to God.

**Be about your
Father's business.**

Today I challenge you, if you have not invited Jesus to be your Savior and Lord, do so by praying the prayer on page 2. Believe that you receive Him; then immediately share your decision with someone else. If you are already saved, ask the Holy Spirit to give you the opportunity and the boldness to share your experience with one in need. Be about your Father's business.

Whose Increase Are You Experiencing?

Luke 12:48 (NLT)—...*Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given.*

When you understand that God increases us in every area of our lives because He has something in store for both us and for others, it should cause you to stop and ponder your motives for desiring divine increase. God wants us to find and appropriate the provision and the privileges that He has made available, but His reasoning for such is to make us channels He

Quite often, childhood dreams and promises become a reality for us when God knows that we are mature enough to handle them.

can work through on behalf of others. Quite often, childhood dreams and promises become a reality for us when God knows that we are mature enough to handle them. He

loves us too much to permit that which will destroy us to happen, so He observes how we handle certain things before He manifests those dreams in our lives.

When we are unwilling to wait on the Lord for what we desire, and we make it happen because we *want it when we want it*, it could appear to be a divine blessing. But don't ever say, "The Lord blessed me with it." When the Lord has blessed me with a thing, I don't usually have to make monthly payments on it. Anyone with a job can make those things happen.

Certainly, God gives us the job that earns us the money we use for the payments, but God's blessings for me come in the form of gifts. And when He has blessed me with something, He can then require me to give it to another, because freely I have received, so freely I can give. When I am making payments, it is not mine to give until I have paid the last payment.

I much prefer God's increase. It comes without interest and without obligation to anyone but Him. So whose increase are you experiencing — yours or God's?

Mansion or Manger — It Matters Not to God

Luke 2:12 (NLT)—*“And this is how you will recognize him: You will find a baby lying in a manger, wrapped snugly in strips of cloth!”*

Would you have left the splendor and glory of a mansion to go live in a manger? When you know who you are, it matters not where you live. Jesus left His mansion in glory to come to earth and teach us how to be content with Him wherever we live. He was to be recognized, not by His regal, royal robes, but by the strips of cloth that covered Him. Yet upon His resurrection, when the disciples came to the empty tomb, Jesus was recognized by the fact that no body was found with the strips of cloth that remained.

Strips of cloth — like the cloth that once covered Him upon His entering our world — still identified the Savior Jesus Christ at His departure. But it identified the *risen* Christ! The abandoned strips of cloth told the disciples that He had been raised from death *just as He said He would*.

Jesus left His mansion in Heaven to come to earth’s manger, and He was found in that manger wrapped snugly with strips of cloth. He did it so that He could one day return to the Father to prepare our mansions — minus the strips of cloth! Jesus went from a mansion to a manger so that we could one day go from “manger” to our mansion in Heaven. Man prepared our manger, but only Jesus can prepare for us the mansions that our lives here on the earth warrant.

God does not care if, while we are here on earth, we go from mansion to manger or vice versa, as long as His plan for mankind is fulfilled. So let us put off anything else that hinders our walk with the Lord. Let us recognize Him for who He is, not what He has covering Him. He is our covering, guaranteeing for us a covenant that will be in place forevermore. Whether I was born in a mansion or in a manger — *or in a shack beside the train track* — it matters not to God. It’s recognizing His Son as my Savior that provides for me a mansion in glory, where He is.

Step Out of the Boat – Shore Is Nearby

John 21:8 (NCV)—...*they were not very far from shore, only about a hundred yards....*

How often have our provisions been so close, but we missed them because we would not get out of the security and comfort of our boat? After fishing in the flesh, the disciples caught nothing. But Jesus told them what to do, and the fish heard His voice and swam to get into their net! Jesus did not have to wait for their catch; He showed them that He was able to provide for them regardless. There is no indication that Jesus had anything to fish with, yet the disciples saw fish cooking over the fire once they got out of the boat.

Once we stop dwelling on our past failures and mistakes and continue with the Lord in what we know to do, we'll reach Him. The object is Jesus and being in His Presence by whatever means works for us to achieve that goal.

Too many times, we fail to see what the Lord has for us because we neglect to come ashore to be with Him. Peter became so excited when he heard it was the Lord, he jumped overboard and swam to Him.

He remembered that walking on water had not completely worked for him, so he did what he knew to do: *swim*. Once we stop dwelling on our past failures and mistakes and continue with the Lord in what we know to do, we'll reach Him. The object is Jesus and being in His Presence by whatever means works for us to achieve that goal.

Never permit your boat to get so comfortable that you miss what the Lord is saying to you. He may ask you to go fishing for a season. However, at some point, He is expecting you to get out of the boat and come ashore. How else can He show you how He wants to reward your obedience? Going fishing is a test. Shore is nearby, and the blessing is there awaiting your arrival.

Admission Granted

Ephesians 2:18—*For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

The shed blood of Jesus Christ has become my admission slip to the Father God. It is because His Spirit summoned me toward Him that I now have permission to approach Him. This same faith that justified me and gave me peace through my Lord Jesus also provided access, or admission, to His grace.

In His grace, I experience His divine influence upon my heart and its reflection into my life. His favor and benefit package is found in His grace. His joy, His liberality, and His pleasure are all found in His grace. God by His Spirit is wooing us to Him.

Before Christ abolished in His flesh the commandments and requirements that distinguished the Jew from the Gentile, I had no permission or access to God. Nothing you and I had or could do would qualify us to be admitted to the presence of God, where everything we wanted or needed awaited us.

But once His shed blood provided for us His grace and favor, we could with confi-

dence access Him and His benefits. Drawing near to the Creator of the universe as His child will cause your head to tilt but your spirit to rejoice.

Does approaching God with confidence, as Ephesians 3:12 suggests, seem far out? It should not stagger us at all. After all, the same Spirit wooing us to Himself is also sustaining us by giving us the spirit to trust Him. We can't trust God and His promises without His giving us His spirit of faith. Without that fruit of the Spirit we would be lost and without hope. Because we have access by faith into this grace, we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Father, for whom Your whole family is named, thank You for providing us with admission to You through Jesus. Our hope is in Your glory being manifested. For this we shout hallelujah. Our hope in You will not be ashamed or disappointed because this access is ultimately to Your love, which is spread throughout our hearts by Your Spirit.

Without that fruit of the Spirit we would be lost and without hope.

The Principal Meal

Revelation 3:20—*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

I believe the Lord is saying, “My desire is to sup with you—to provide you with nourishment to which no natural food can compare. You simply must invite Me in. While hurts, doubts, or fears may have you opposed to letting anyone else in, I can enter even through an opening as small as a needle’s eye.

“I cannot speak to the world except through you. I only talk to My sheep. What My sheep hear from Me must then be shared with the world. You see, the world cannot hear or understand Me, but you are able to receive from the supernatural and translate it to the natural.

“Think this not strange. Did not My Father send Me to the earth in the form of flesh so that those open to Him would hear about Him through Me? Though I have returned to be at the Father’s side, I am still in the earth in the form of flesh in you, My body.

“Listen, My beloved. I am bringing to you fresh wisdom and understanding so that you can impart to those who are unable to hear My voice. But I must have a portal to enter; and when you allow Me in, your spirit will flourish and burst forth with insight that will alter circumstances and situations in your life and in the lives of those around you. I am waiting with the principal meal for the day when you will partake and share with others. Invite Me in.

“I will also hear what you have to say. Your praise is your supping with Me. My wisdom is My supping with you. Understand, My child, that this is part of your laboring together with Me. I cannot reach the lost without you, and you must not go to them without first hearing from Me. So here I am rapping at the portal of your heart, waiting for your sensitivity to My voice and the invitation to enter with the meal and message for today. Never serve anyone without first having dialogue with Me.

“Be still. Listen. Hear. Obey. For through you, My child, I have so very much to say.”

Apply the Principle, Reap the Reward

2 Peter 1:5 (NLT)—So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better.

God has done His part in our development and growth as Christians. Now we are to make every effort to apply what has been decreed and established. We need to add more to each of the virtues we have in Christ.

When we apply God's principles and promises to our lives, He produces excellence in us. This is just the beginning of what we are to put into our growth. A life of obedience and moral excellence will enable us to get to know God better. Knowing God better allows us to control ourselves. This leads to patient endurance, which leads to godliness. Godliness leads first to love for other believers and, finally, to love and compassion for God's creation.

A life of obedience and moral excellence will enable us to get to know God better.

The purpose for all of this increased input is to make us more productive and useful in our knowledge of Jesus. If we neglect to develop these benefits and promises, we become blind or near-sighted regarding what is truly valuable and important in God's scheme of things; we forget that God has cleansed us from our old life and nature of sin.

Ridding ourselves of sin and increasing God's gifts in us leads to a life of holiness and attracts others to the same life. People are looking for leaders who have found their place in life and appear to be happy enough with it to make outsiders envious.

Seeking to live out God's promises is about being so like God that those without Him are attracted to Him in us. Why would I want to follow someone who has lost his own grip on life? I want a tried, true, and proven vessel to follow when I am facing challenges finding my own way.

Dealing With Satanic Rage

1 Samuel 19:15 (NKJV)—*Then Saul sent the messenger back to see David, saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may kill him."*

Saul's feelings toward David went far beyond a mere dislike. Saul was enraged against David with a hatred fueled by jealousy, envy, and fear. Saul wanted to kill David for primarily three reasons: (1) God was no longer with Saul (1 Samuel 18:12), (2) God was with David, and he was highly favored by the people (1 Samuel 18:14,16), and (3) Saul's daughter loved David although her father intended for her to be a snare or entrapment to him (1 Samuel 18:21).

The people and Saul's servants loved David. Even Saul's son, Jonathan knew that God had appointed David to be king, and he relinquished his own succession to the throne by giving David his garments and weapons, symbols that represented Jonathan's right to be king.

David behaved wisely in all the dealings of life, for the Lord was with him. David proved himself to be skillful in many ways. He was qualified to lead any army and, as a musician, he was skillful enough to play music so anointed that it comforted the king whenever Saul would yield to a depressing spirit. Saul was so angry with David's progress that Saul wanted David killed and removed to prevent him from ascending to what was his God-ordained position. That is a joke; and not a very funny one.

Anyone who is called and anointed of God can ignore the attacks and lies of the enemy. God will protect His people, especially His called-out ones. God needed to be with David. Saul was out of the will of God and would often yield to satanic rage where David was concerned. The fact that God is with you and has called you to His service may be the very cause of satanic rage against you from those you love because the Spirit of God is no longer with them. Go on with the Lord and trust Him to help those you love play catch up and get in line with the will of God. Wait for no one except the Lord. You may find you are carrying weight that was not assigned to you. Trust me, that that is too heavy a load for anyone to carry.

Unauthorized Vengeance Will Destroy You

Psalm 137:8 (NLT)—*O Babylon, you will be destroyed. Happy is the one who pays you back for what you have done to us.*

A natural human reaction is to be appalled at inhumane acts against anyone; such acts go crosswise to our spirits. When these things happen, our pain is real and what we feel is not wrong. We must be sure, however, that when we call out to God for His will to be done, we leave the weapon of revenge to Him to wield.

A person may have been highly trained in the martial arts. Another person may have awards for being a sharp shooter. No one, however, has been trained by the Spirit of God to wield the weapon of vengeance.

God fulfilled the prophecy of Babylon's destruction because of His vengeance on behalf of His covenant people. However, Calvary and the shed blood of Jesus are the new prophecy that we are to experience.

I don't like violent acts and pain any more than anyone else, but I dislike hatred, bitterness, and anger even more. I don't believe I have the right to ask God to destroy anyone. I do believe, however, that I have the right to request His defense and protection.

How He defeats the work of the enemy is none of my business. I just know that He will make everything right. My prayer is for His grace and mercy to sustain me as I wait on Him to fix everything for me. We don't have to pray for the wicked to be punished; God has already promised that. He will be happy to pay the wicked back for what they have done to us. I am willing to be happy with what makes Him happy. He will do what is just for all concerned.

Thank God that we have not been given weapons of revenge to use against anyone. Unauthorized vengeance will cost us dearly. Just look at the conclusion of those who threw the three Hebrew boys in the furnace, and the final punishment of Daniel's enemies.

Put down any tool that is not going to dispense God's love, for it will ultimately destroy you also.

He's the One

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NLT)—*“Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord is the one who goes before you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor forsake you.”*

What a promise we find in this verse! Moses knew that his time of service was over. He understood that he was no longer able to lead. Instead of feeling that he was being cast aside or abandoned after many years of obedience to the Lord and service to the Israelites, he accepted the fact that his season had come to an end.

At this transitional stage in his life, Moses was even willing to encourage the hearts of others about the days to come. He spoke for God because he had heard from Him. He shared what the Lord would do concerning the land and also what God expected them to do in order to possess it.

God laid out a specific list of “If you’s” to be followed before He said, “I will.” We can relate this to a will. An heir does not automatically gain an inheritance upon a person’s death. Rather, the heir must check out the “If you’s” before spending or borrowing against the inheritance. Too often, uninformed people think it is just a matter of someone writing out a check free and clear to them and off they go to the mall, Las Vegas, or Atlantic City. Unfortunately, they forget about inheritance tax and satisfying debts and liens against the property of the deceased.

Moses clarified to Joshua what God said to expect in His “will.” Then Moses encouraged him to stay with it and hang in there because the Lord was going before him. God was Joshua’s constant companion; He was the victor; and He was totally committed to His people.

You are facing a lot right now. God did not design your calling and your specific path to overwhelm you or defeat you. God’s gifts carry no grief with them. You are who you are and can be what God had in mind for you to be before you were born. However, He will not address fear in you; neither will He eliminate the spirit of discouragement that seeks to torment you. You must resist it. You are a winner, an overcomer, and a victor in His Word, which abides in you. Now get up and go to possess what He has promised you, because He’s the One on your side.

A Scorecard Is Not Kept

Psalm 130:3—*If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*

If God kept scorecards or regarded our moral evils and personal faults, He would not be the God, Creator of the universe. He wouldn't qualify, because that is exactly what humans do to each other.

If God were to look narrowly on our shortcomings, our future would be about as certain as that of a snowball in hell. But instead, He awaits the sounds of our voices lifted up to Him in true repentance, asking Him to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We never have to ask God to forget what we have done. He automatically does that when we request forgiveness. That is what makes Him God.

Humans forgive also, but seldom do they forget the negative deeds others do to them. Therefore, I never ask or expect anyone to forget the wrong I have done the them. I only ask their forgiveness because I know that only God can and will forget. Only He has no record or scorecard against me. This is not all bad because it has made me recognize the long-lasting effect my negative tone, deed, or attitude can have on another. It has helped me assess what I am about to say or do so that even an innocent observer will not have to see me in a negative light forever.

Stop trying to force people to forget the wrongs you committed against them. They can't. The best you can hope for is that they will forgive you. Let it be consolation enough for you that your Father's forgiving and forgetful love has provided an avenue of escape from condemnation and guilt. Because of Jesus, you have been made free and your record has been swept clean!

Stop trying to force people to forget the wrongs you committed against them. They can't. The best you can hope for is that they will forgive you.

Nothing Is Out of God's Reach

Obadiah 1:4 (NKJV)—Though you ascend as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down.

When life is being kind to you, rather than allowing the abundance to pull you away from God, you should see it as an opportunity to draw closer. God is looking for intimacy with us—regardless of our station in life.

God is looking for intimacy with us—regardless of our station in life.

Whether or not we are at the top or at the bottom of the barrel does not move God. He is neither impressed nor affected in His love and plan for our lives.

If today it appears that God does not know or even care what is happening to you, read Jeremiah 29:11-14. You can rest

in confident trust that not only does God have a plan and a hope for you, but also He is waiting for you to call upon Him so that He can answer you. The key is to search for Him with all your heart. God is not hiding. He wants to be found so that He can bring you back to Him from whatever captivity has held you bound.

I believe God is saying, "What you have been going through was allowed by Me to get your attention. It appears that you forgot who I was in the midst of your success. However, if you will humble yourself and return to Me for who I am and not what I can provide for you, then you will enjoy what I have prepared for you before the foundation of the world long before you were formed in your mother's womb. Failure is not a part of My scheduled plan for you. Failing in the eyes of man does not compare with failing to please Me and doing that which is right in My eyes. I never called you to compete with others. I have made you complete in my Son, Christ Jesus. What could be better? Cut your losses and rejoin Me with your heart before the things you have been doing strangle you. Feed My sheep and feed My lambs. That is all I have asked of you, and nothing else will be accounted to you for righteousness." Selah. Pause and calmly think of that.

Divine Response

Romans 11:14 (NAS)—*But what is the divine response to him? "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."*

Paul sought to reassure the people that although Israel had repeatedly rejected the Lord and His ultimate plan for them, it was not a total rejection. Elijah said, "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

Anytime we think we are walking this walk alone, we are probably observing the circumstances around us which most likely will not be the most encouraging of conditions. God has and always will have a people who would rather die than to abandon Him.

Try to imagine what it would be like to live in the world today without the Lord in your life. It terrifies me to think about it. What is going on in the world does not disturb me; I see it as the Bible being fulfilled in my lifetime. But the thought of being left here void of His presence, His Spirit, and His Word is frightening.

God has and always will have a people who would rather die than to abandon Him.

Whenever you find yourself questioning the Lord's presence, think about the "Divine Response," which will only emanate from the "Divine One." In fact, it is His guaranteed presence with us that should cause us to declare boldly that we are not abandoned.

As a little girl, when others would attempt to intimidate me, I may have felt my knees knocking but if my mother was present I took on a totally different attitude. I knew that my mother would not allow anyone to hurt "her baby." If I could feel that confident because of a human who loved me, how much more can I trust in the Father to provide for and to protect me?

Today when faced with life's unique moments, I believe for the grace of God to remind me of His "Divine Response." What peace, what comfort I experience when what He has already said comes to mind. We are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. It is required of us as stewards to be found faithful. Let your faithfulness be your reply to God's "Divine Response" to you.

Make Prison Productive

Genesis 39:21—*But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

Are you in prison? Know that you are loved of God and special to Him. Consider this: He allowed you to be caught because the path you were on was leading to disappointment, depression, despair, destruction, and possibly death and your temporary layover in prison can cause you to become productive.

Prisoners are in good company. Joseph, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus were each in jail. The apostles Paul, Peter, and Silas were also prisoners with a purpose. All of these biblical people were innocent of the charges that caused them to be imprisoned. However, instead of griping and complaining, they decided to make their time in prison productive. In Acts 16:25-32, we see that Paul and Silas praised God in prison until the power of God descended and not only loosed their chains, but also those of the prisoners around them.

Choose today to become productive. Declare yourself a prisoner with a purpose.

We have the freedom to make choices about what we do wherever we are. Some prisoners may be innocent. They may have just been in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong people.

Since their steps are ordered of God and He promised to uphold them with the right hand of His righteousness, their prison uniforms only cover their outer beings and will be discarded one day. But while in jail, they can become robed in His righteousness.

Prisoners can choose to make their jail time misery, or they can decide to make it meaningful. Since all of us have the same twenty-four hours seven days a week, what we choose to do with them determines the effect of every experience.

Today you may be in a prison of some sort, with no end in view. While in that prison, you can't change anything or anyone except yourself. You can make prison life a lifestyle or a learning experience. The choice is yours. Choose today to become productive. Declare yourself a prisoner with a purpose.

Liberty Requires Me to Love

1 Corinthians 8:2-3 (NLT)—*Anyone who claims to know all the answers doesn't really know very much. But the person who loves God is the one God knows and cares for.*

I used to think my liberty in Christ Jesus was the ultimate success. I thought I could do anything I wanted to that was according to God's will and Word, and I had no responsibility to those still in bondage.

That's how I lived until I read this chapter. Verse 6 says, "But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life."

Verses 7-9 say, "However, not all Christians realize this. Some are accustomed to thinking of idols as being real, so when they eat food that has been offered to idols, they think of it as the worship of real gods, and their weak consciences are violated. It's true that we can't win God's approval by what we eat or avoid eating, but you must be careful with this freedom of yours. Do not cause a brother or sister with a weaker conscience to stumble."

When I found out that I was responsible for others in the body of Christ, I suddenly remembered the day I looked at our month-old son many years ago and realized that he had the potential of being a six-foot-tall, two hundred-pound human, and I was going to be largely responsible for how he developed!

While we are responsible for the development of every child given to us—spiritually and naturally speaking—at some point, regardless of what we have said or done, they have to assume responsibility for their actions. We can only trust that what we have trained them to do will continue to guide them in the future.

Never allow your knowledge to cause a weak Christian for whom Christ died to be destroyed. When we fail to focus our liberty properly for the freedom of other believers, we sin against Christ.

Today, thank God for your liberty, your life of freedom, and your knowledge. Then, thank Him for His love at work in you. Ask for His wisdom to both enjoy it as well as disperse it to other believers.

Don't Fleece My Sheep— Feed Them

John 21:17—...*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? ...Feed my sheep.*

Peter responded to Jesus' question, "Lovest thou me?" by saying, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" because he was grieved that the Lord questioned him a third time about his love. Then Jesus told Peter what constituted love to *Him*.

You see, Jesus is not at all interested in our emotional attitudes toward Him. He has a very simple way for us to demonstrate our love for Him: "*Feed my sheep.*" The Greek word for "feed" here means *to pasture; to fodder; to graze; to keep*. The word for "sheep" means *something that walks forward*.

Our Lord never intended for His people to retreat. He also understood that true sheep would have to be kept, so He provided shepherds. Then He told the shepherds and His disciples to pasture them with the food He had already supplied—His Word, the only thing that would keep them moving forward. All other food constitutes the doctrines of men and, therefore, produces bondage—and bondage never allows anyone to move forward.

Every leader on assignment to feed God's people must understand the difference between financing the kingdom and lining his or her own pockets.

It grieves my heart to hear of the Lord's sheep being fleeced instead of being fed. I am all for prosperity. Money is needed to finance the kingdom, and people should live as comfortably as they can. However, our Savior never intended His abundant provision to take

on the appearance and arrogance of greed. Every leader on assignment to feed God's people must understand the difference between financing the kingdom and lining his or her own pockets.

Above all else, we are to honor Jesus and feed His sheep. As we do, we will watch Him fulfill every promise in the Word to us because He loves us so!

No One Can Be God But God

2 Peter 2:7 (NLT)—*But at the same time, God rescued Lot out of Sodom because he was a good man who was sick of all the immorality and wickedness around him.*

In Genesis 19 we find a disturbing story. Two angels come to Lot's home to save him and his family from the destruction of Sodom, but the perverse men of the city try to force Lot to send his male guests out so they can sexually violate them. For a long time I was mad at Lot because he offered his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom.

The Holy Spirit had to help me with this one. I believe the Spirit said to me, "It was not that he thought so little of his daughters. On the contrary, it was that he had such high regard for the messengers from God that he offered his best to ensure their safety and well-being."

Lot was sick of the immorality and wickedness all around him. That must have counted for much because Lot didn't seem to have much else going for him. He was not called; he clung to Uncle Abe's covenant coat tail. He lived off of Uncle Abe for a long time, then disrespected him when choosing his homeland by making the first choice, though he was younger. He did not confer with God about his choice, but took the land richest in soil but most destitute morally. He is not listed in the faith hall of fame as a pilgrim. Nowhere have I found that Lot prayed for the city of Sodom or its people. His choices cost him everything except his daughters' lives; yet, their time in Sodom most likely influenced their shameful acts with their father.

Yet Peter said God rescued Lot because he was good. Verses like this help me understand why no one can be God but God. While my flesh wants to revisit Lot's faults and weaknesses, my spirit reminds me how he respected God's servants and was grieved at the sin in the city. With that in mind, there is hope for you and me, but not an excuse or license to not work at being better. If that was all Lot needed to do to be received as good, we just might make it.

The Wait Will Be Worth It

Habakkuk 2:3 (NLT)—*But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.*

No promise of God has ever been late. God has used this verse to stabilize me over the many years that I have had to exercise my faith for various things. I don't recall exercising my faith for personal things, but God has had to remind me of this verse for the work He has called me to.

Everything God has planned for you will not occur instantly, but it will not be delayed or denied. His is a good plan for you, and good things take time sometimes. As the *King James Version* says, "Though it tarry, wait for it."

The waiting will be worth it. Each day of your life, you are closer to this promise to you and His plan for you. It may seem as if the winter of your life is longer than usual, but it is not. It is simply an opportunity for you to enjoy the diamond ice and the ermine snow of this season that is covering your springtime fulfillment of tomorrow.

God would not have promised you something that He did not plan to fulfill for you. Wait. Did it ever occur to you that the slow, steady, and sure work that is taking time is not being performed on the plan but on you? Wait. God cannot waste the vision by giving it to you too soon. You must be ready to receive it when it arrives. Wait. It will surely come, and it will not be behind time.

Stop watching the clock, the hands will appear to never move. Stop staring at the pot, a watched pot never boils. Focus your eyes on Jesus.

Remember where you were; then look at where you are. You are being positioned so smoothly that you are not aware of the gradual change that has already occurred. As you submit yourself to His schedule and patiently wait for the fulfillment of His plan, you will find that you are closer than when you first began. His promise to you will never be late. Wait.

Do Your Own Praying

Psalm 34:4—*I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.*

Most Christians are shocked to hear that they have a personal line to God and it's never busy. Some denominations and ministers are guilty of keeping the people in their congregations infants. They are afraid they'll be out of work if the people learn to pray and hear from God for themselves. Those ministers are hirelings. They are people pleasers. They never rock the boat because of fear.

Fearing the people you are sent to lead will forfeit your right to lead them. Stop asking others to pray for you. When the Bible says, "Pray one for another" (James 5:16), it does not mean you're to ask others to do it. It means that the Spirit will prompt them or lead them to pray for you, and you for them.

David said, "I sought the Lord..." (that's the first step) "...and He heard me" (that's God's part). My part is to believe He heard me when I sought Him and delivered me from all my fears.

**Prayer is not about
the eloquence of speech.**

The reason God delivers you from all your fears is that anyone truly seeking the Lord must do so in faith. Faith and fear cannot exist in the same heart at the same time. He does not deliver us from all our fears because we're perfect. He delivers us because we sought Him and believed He heard us.

Grow up and begin to trust the One who loves you more than your own parents, companions, and children do. It's okay to ask others to get in agreement with you for what you have sought and believed for, but do your own praying.

Prayer is not about the eloquence of speech. It is about a sincere heart moving toward God with His Word as the vehicle doing the transporting. Failure to rock boats will hinder you from walking on water.

Give God His Dime and You'll Have Plenty To Spare

2 Chronicles 31:10 (NIV)—“Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the Lord has blessed his people, and this great amount is left over.”

I often share with people who are challenged with tithing that it would be foolish to walk up to me, stick a gun in my ribs, rob me, and then ask me to bless them. Yet people do this to God all the time. Most of the time the reason these people come to me for advice is that they want God to wave some magic wand and make their poverty go away.

I explain to them that failure to give God His dime on every dollar (not just salary), is equivalent to robbing God. Most of them see what I am saying and recognize that the lack in their lives is not God's will, but unless they sow what already belongs to God, their harvest is blocked. The measure we sow is the measure we will reap.

God does not even extract our seed: He gives us seed to sow, then gives us bread to eat (2 Corinthians 9:10). Too many of God's children are eating the seed along with the bread. Never eat your seed, especially the last of your seed. When God's children bring their contribution to the temple, these verses say there will be enough to eat with plenty—not just a little, but plenty—to spare. Why? Because God blesses seed brought to the temple as well as the carrier of the seed. In fact, He blesses them to such a degree that great amounts will be left over.

Join me today in a commitment to obey what God requires of His children. Then watch Him do what He loves to do most, which is to manifest Himself to us in the form of continued blessings to us. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father above (James 1:17).

Make a decision to stop robbing God. Give Him His dime, and watch your ninety cents go further and last longer. It works, but it starts with a commitment. I encourage you to make that commitment today so you can cross the line of having enough and move over into the position of having plenty to spare. Give God His dime and you'll get there.

Almost

Psalm 119:87 (NLT)—*They almost finished me off, but I refused to abandon your commandments.*

Almost is not a word to be used when we trust God and His Word. It is not to be a part of our identity as Christians. When on assignment from God, almost is unacceptable. However, when it comes to any attack of the enemy, almost is a sound of victory for anyone who refuses to abandon the precepts of God.

When the devil assaults you as a child of God, his plan is never to just upset or disturb you; his intentions are always to destroy and eliminate you. When he comes to steal from you, he wants all that you have. When he comes to kill you, a temporary incident or an accident is not his plan for the day; he wants you finished.

As long as you are able to say, "They almost finished me off," the devil has been defeated in your life. Just make sure that you stay in a position to say, "They almost...."

How can you be sure that almost will be your declaration of his defeat? Refuse to abandon God's commandments. Anyone who stays with the promises, requirements, and principles of God's Word will be able to say of satan, "He almost finished me off."

You don't want to say, "Jesus almost saved me" or "He almost healed me." But when speaking of the devil, "He almost" is a statement of victory and is usually heard coming from the mouths of God's children who understand their covenant rights.

If today it appears that there is not victory in sight and the prognosis and diagnosis are not favorable, what does the Word of God say? If the devil could have destroyed and finished you off, he would have already. The fact that you are still standing—even if you are in a leaning position—means that he has not caused you to quit, which is the only way on earth that he can be successful.

Your decision to take God at His Word is the devil's greatest fear. Even if your strength and resolve have weakened to the point that your departure is imminent, he still cannot finish you off. As God's offspring, you are homeward bound and the devil can't prevent that.

Keep your house in order, refuse to abandon God's Word, and see what the Lord will do.

Is It by Lineage or the Anointing of God?

1 Samuel 10:12 (NKJV)—*Then a man from there answered and said, "But who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"*

Evaluating a person's qualifications for leadership based on natural lineage instead of according to divine authorization does more harm than good. The fivefold ministry gifts are given by the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus, as it suits Him. They are not passed down to generations through one's natural parents, as some would believe.

People questioned Saul's background to stand in the ministry when the hand of God was upon him. God had given Saul another heart. It had nothing to do with who his natural parents were.

It is time for parents to stop selecting the office or position their grown children should function in. It is time for children to stop looking at the ministry of the parent and deciding that they would rather be the heir apparent than trust the Lord to position them where He wants them. When Jesus makes the selection and anoints you in a an office, it is beneficial to the body of Christ "for the equipping of the Saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).

God will allow modern day dynasties to fail and their leaders to fall so He can bring them into alignment with His plan for their lives. It matters not what family you were born into. What matters most is the anointing, as given by the Anointed One.

I know of a sister in Christ who can teach and preach circles around her father and her brother but because she is female "the board" is not ready to allow her to be the leader of the ministry. I am so glad that God does not make His selections according to "the board." When Clinton and I were still working secular jobs, we were doing the work of the ministry and seeing miracles. God never considered our lineage when He anointed and called us.

Are you being used of the Lord where you are? Then you have all you need to continue. Don't be concerned about your lineage. When it is time for you to take the lead, opposition will either agree or be removed. What God has assigned to you cannot belong to another.

Delivered But Not Rescued

Daniel 6:27—*He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.*

God does not always remove us from the circumstances and conditions that we feel are our problem.

Men put Daniel in the den of lions, and men had to remove him. Though everyone was focused on the den, the den was not the problem. God promises to make our enemies be at peace with us. Therefore, the lions became God's problem, not Daniel's. Daniel only had to be innocent and continually trust, or believe in, his God (Daniel 6:23).

There have been times I wanted God to rescue me from certain pits, but He didn't. He wanted me to learn that His grace was sufficient in the pit and that He would give me peace in the presence of enemy forces. God wants His children to recognize His presence with them when they are scraping the bottom of the barrel and everything around them smells of destruction and defeat. The question is never *What will God do when it appears that my number is up?* The question is *What will I do?*

While I may not be able to escape the pit, I can believe in my God in the midst of it. I may not be able to conquer the lions in my life, but I don't have to. My job is to be innocent and to continually serve my God. I may not be able to stop legislation from being enacted against me, but I can kneel in prayer and thanksgiving before my God, regardless.

We need to stop exhausting ourselves by fighting the enemy and conditions around us. They are too many. Because of our position with God, we need to enter into His rest, worship Him, and be innocent of all charges hurled at us. I don't need to be rescued from the enemy, because Jesus has already rescued me from his power (verse 27).

God didn't rescue Daniel from the pit; He delivered him from the power of the enemy in the pit. Notice that the enemy was still in the pit when Daniel was removed, and the lion's power was still present to destroy those later thrown in. Yet, they had no power over Daniel.

Daniel went on to prosper. How much more are we to advance in the kingdom of God?

And So He Prospered

2 Chronicles 31:21 (NIV)—*In everything that he [Hezekiah] undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.*

Prosperity is available to all as a gift from God. However, its manifestation in the lives of believers is not automatic with salvation. It is available but not automatic.

Several things took place when the Old Testament King Hezekiah was declared prosperous:

1. He did what was right and faithful before the Lord his God (2 Chronicles 31:20).
2. He sought his God in everything he did concerning the temple.
3. He sought the Lord and then obeyed the law and the commands of God.
4. He worked wholeheartedly as he sought the Lord.

These verses share a valuable lesson: Doing what is good and right, being faithful before the Lord, and seeking Him concerning everything leads to prosperity for His children.

Serve, obey, and seek the Lord without compromise or concern. Single-mindedly work toward the plan of the Lord. When you do these things, the byproduct, prosperity, is yours.

God is still rewarding those who diligently seek Him. His eyes are still roaming to and fro throughout the whole earth, seeking whom He can bless. Those faithful to His cause and obedient to His laws and commands will receive that blessing. It's a waste of time to seek prosperity if your primary motive is not to please the One who provides the prosperity.

Prosperity is good, and it is right when we as children of God draw nigh to Him for who He is—not for what we are expecting Him to do for us. When we draw nigh to Him for the right reason, He will draw nigh to us—and all that He is capable of comes with Him. I assure you, the mere residue of His blessing is more than sufficient for us.

One of the ways for God to know that we are serious about Him is to see us obeying Him. God loves consistency and commitment. Whatever I give to Him and His work, I should dedicate for that purpose and that purpose only, in the precious name of Jesus.

Serve God Regardless

2 Corinthians 6:8 (NLT)—*We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors.*

Paul's concern was not to be liked or popular. He wanted to live in such a way that no one would be hindered from finding the Lord Jesus by the way he acted. All of what he did was to show that he was a true minister of God.

The more you serve the Lord and show the true colors of a God-appointed minister of Jesus Christ, the more you will be despised, slandered, beaten, put in jail, sent before angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, made to endure sleepless nights, and starved. It is your purity, understanding, patience, kindness, sincere love, and the power of the Holy Spirit that will prove you.

Have you forgotten what you were like before submitting to the Holy Spirit's training? I remember my former state, and I am more grateful than ever for being introduced to Him.

Self-called ministers serve only themselves. A true minister of God will always want to demonstrate the Lord Jesus and please His Father. A self-called minister will never be able to consistently endure hardship such as Paul experienced. Self-called ministers always want the best and the blessed, but they never want to endure the mess to pass the test.

God allows His children to be tested.

Life's tests are not always easy and comfortable, but neither are they impossible. God allows His children to be tested. He does not test us, because as with Job, He is already confident of what we will do in every situation. He allows the test because sometimes we don't know for certain what our choices will be.

Reflection can be a good thing when we recall how impossible life once seemed. Reflection is a balm to future projections, especially when we recall how easy something was in the past compared to what we feared it would be.

As a true minister of God, you will probably endure a few lumps, bumps, knocks, and stumbling blocks. Don't try to avoid them. They are merely tests to see if you will continue to serve God regardless.

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