

Capturing God's Heart

Volumes 1 - 20



"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up,
just as you have been doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

<http://capturingcourage.org>
cyndy@capturingcourage.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS		PAGE
1.	Anointed	3
2.	Faithfulness	6
3.	Forgiveness	10
4.	Compassion	14
5.	Leadership	16
6.	Freedom	19
7.	Redemption	22
8.	Promotion	24
9.	Servants	26
10.	Difficulty	28
11.	Overwhelmed	31
12.	Women	33
13.	Trusting with Little	36
14.	Relationship	38
15.	Faith	40
16.	Grown Up	43
17.	Prophetic Lives	46
18.	Life	48
19.	The Great Expectation	50
20.	Our Journey	52

Volume One: Anointed

The Holy Spirit has been bringing to my heart and mind thoughts of our authority in God, about being anointed and the mark of God upon our lives; about the oil of His Spirit.

“Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed” Psalm 20:6

Now we all know, that oil softens the skin. It makes sore muscles relax, gives shine to our hair and heals parched, cracked skin.

Our physical bodies are soothed and comforted and healed by oil. It is the same for our spirit.

Oil is the mark of God’s grace, where hard heart places are made soft.
God’s oil is the mark put upon his servants, those marked out for his service.

**“Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of our Lord”
James 5:14**

Oil in God’s kingdom is a sign of consecration, of being set-apart and reserved for a particular work.

“...and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests” Exodus 28:41

For those set apart and reserved there is a specific role to play and a job to do.

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him... and the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward” I Samuel 16:13

Even Jesus was anointed. Mary carried that privilege. Imagine the authority she carried in order to anoint the Son of God.

“It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment” John 11:2

Anointing is done through the authority given us by God, whereby we then pass that authority to others.

Authority and anointing is for blessing and releasing, for empowering and healing.

Anointing marks us for God.

“But the anointing that you received from him abides in you” I John 2:27

Anointing then releases us to heal. Consider this call to heal and to lead found in Isaiah.

“For a man will take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying: ‘You have a cloak; you shall be our leader, and this heap of ruins shall be under your rule’; in that day he will speak out, saying: ‘I will not be a healer, in my house there is neither bread nor cloak; you shall not make me the leader of the people.’” Isaiah 3:6-7

It is interesting to note that healing and leading go hand in hand. There is not one without the other in the Kingdom of God.

But in order to heal, we must first be healed. Part of our ministry before God and before those we serve, is to first make ourselves available for God's healing in our own lives.

As leaders, as healers, as anointed, we must first know our own needy place before the Lord.

“O Lord my God, I cried to you for help and you healed me.” Psalm 30:2

And we must know our sin.

“As for me, I said, ‘O Lord be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you.’ Psalm 41:4

It is God's favour that reveals to us our sin. How many times does it say in his word that God hardened hearts and blinded understanding so that sin could not be perceived and hearts could not turn to him.

Be glad, very glad for the understanding and deep repentance of your sin. It is a gift from God. Once we know our sin, compassion is close at hand.

“And he (Jesus) had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Matthew 14:14

Compassion is the emotional labour necessary to heal.

Whether we are healing hearts or bodies, healing does not happen without emotional labour.

It takes great inner energy to move towards others, to weep as they weep, to feel their pain on their behalf – but this is the only way we heal.

It was said of Jesus that he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

“He was... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” Isaiah 53:3

It is through the compassion of the Father towards us that Jesus even came to earth. It was the compassion of the Father that clothed Adam and Eve when they had sinned and were naked and ashamed.

“And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them.” Genesis 3:21

Think about it, in one mighty act of compassion and in the midst of profound disappointment, God the giver of life, killed so that Adam and Eve might be clothed.

Jesus Christ carried on this work of compassion, and we have opportunity to do the same.

It begins with ourselves. Our first job is to view ourselves with God's compassion. We then receive his compassion unto ourselves, letting it sink deeply into the fibres of our being.

“For it is by grace that we have been saved.” Ephesians 2:8

Once we know God's grace (and not before), we can give it out to others.

We therefore engage the emotional labour to know our own sin & our own need of God.

We then let down our defences in order to receive his compassion and grace.

And in this touch of God we are all transformed.

We are healed.

This then is our role as leaders in the Kingdom of God.

Priests, taking grace from God the Father, bearing it in ourselves, giving it out to others.

Reading again in Isaiah 3, we find what happens when we refuse the role of leader and healer.

“For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, because their speech and their deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence.” Isaiah 3:8

When we do not receive God's compassion and his grace we defy his glorious presence.

And from there, things go from bad to worse... “stumbling, falling, speech and deeds against the Lord.

“This heap of ruins shall be under your rule.” Isaiah 3:6

Not very glamorous, and not very encouraging, to have a heap of ruins under our rule. In our own strength we are simply overwhelmed by the needs and destruction all around us in the hearts and lives of God's people.

We are all human, and humanity is messy.

Yet as pastors and leaders in the Kingdom of God we are uniquely equipped to make a difference in the mess of humanity. Not because of who we are, but because of who God is.

God is big enough for all the messy places of our lives and those we serve.

As summary, we find God big enough, as we:

- 1. Accept God's anointing and call**
- 2. Give ourselves over to the work asked of us**
- 3. Understand that leading means healing**
- 4. Know our own need before God**
- 5. Allow God's compassion and grace into our own life**

6. Allow God to clothe us with himself

A prayer to speak aloud today:

“Today I come to you God in the name and blood of my Living Lord Jesus Christ. I know that you have called me, and I thank-you. I commit this day to the your work in me and through me to others. I acknowledge that as you have called me to lead you have called me to heal. In myself, I am ill-equipped for this. I cannot heal. But you can.

Therefore today, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I take unto myself your healing power. That from the inside out I may know your grace and compassion deep within myself. I give to you my self-trying, and I receive into myself your work of forgiveness and salvation as the gift that it is.

Teach me in the way of compassion both towards myself and others. I clothe myself in your grace and love. All this I declare this day in the name and blood of my living Lord Jesus Christ. With all glory and honour to you Father. Amen”

I leave you with a benediction from God’s heart to yours: **READ Isaiah 42:5-9**

Volume Two: Faithfulness

I have been reminded of God’s faithfulness and of the opportunity that we have to be faithful to God.

I’ve been reminded that even in the midst of life and the struggles we have, that God looks to our hearts. There will always be struggles and challenges, but regardless of difficulties, we can still respond to God in faithfulness.

Let’s begin by looking at God’s faithfulness to us. It is fabulous to read in 2 Peter 1:3, how God has granted us all things by which we may succeed with him:

**“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”
2 Peter 1:3**

The call to walk with God begins in our hearts alongside his heart. Sometimes we think we need to have more of this or more of that before we come to God. Sometimes we think we need to be great or better or... something. But the Bible is pretty clear that we do not need much to serve God, other than a willing heart.

The boy in the book of John had five loaves and two fish, and this was used in a mighty way.

“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish,” John 6:9

Reading all of John 6:1-8 we find the full story. Of how over 5000 people were fed from that five loaves and two fish.

In another passage we read that the widow with her two small coins was said to have much faith.

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said,

“Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” Luke 21:1-4

Quite profoundly, it is important to know that we do not need to wait until we have ‘more’ before we can be used by God.

We do not need more, we must simply walk in faithfulness.

In whatever we have been given the question becomes, have we been faithful?

In Matthew we read of the man who buried his talent in the ground only to find the displeasure of the Master.

“I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant!’” Matthew 25:25-26

I suggest you read all of **Matthew 25:14-30**

Again: We are simply asked to be faithful with what we have been given.

Examples of the kinds of things we may have been given:

- physical: home, belongings, food, land
- emotional: mercy, compassion, understanding
- community: influence, leadership, wisdom
- intellectually: intelligence, understanding, knowledge
- church: worship, encouragement, organization, service
- legacy: those things handed down from our parents, family traits that bless others

It does not matter what we have been given. There is no one thing that is better than any other. The key is that we are faithful with it before God.

What is God asking of us in this area? How might I serve God with this?

When we are faithful with the little, we find we will be trusted with much.

“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” Matthew 25:21

As we are faithful we will find that our territory of influence increases.

In Isaiah we are told to enlarge our tent, for God is expanding our territory:

“Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left.” Isaiah 54:2-3

In faithfulness we sense the pleasure of the Father.

Whatever we have been given, faithfulness is the key. God looks past our circumstances and past all the good and bad of our lives and looks at our hearts.

“For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7

It is important to note that what have we been given is unique to each of us. We have all been gifted differently, and so we are called to walk a unique and very personal walk with the Lord.

It is therefore good to remember to leave space for others to respond in faithfulness to God, as God is asking it of them.

The conversation of faithfulness takes us before the throne of God, one to one. One day

God will ask what we did with what he gave us, and each one of us will personally have to answer to the God of this universe.

Listing What You Have Been Given:

- Take some minutes to list the things that God has given to you.
- First invite God’s revelation. Then in the quiet of your heart and mind wait for the Holy Spirit to highlight and show you what you have been given.
- Write the things down as they come to you. Take as much time as you need.
- Think about how you impact people, the things you are able to do, the effect you leave behind...

When looking at our lives we find that faithfulness operates as past, present and future. All through our lives we have had opportunity to faithfulness:

PAST

As youngsters it was about chores and schooling and in obedient response to whomever was raising us. As we grew we took on more responsibility and thereby greater opportunity to faithfulness.

Our faithfulness muscles grew. We become stronger before God and community. Others begin to notice our faithfulness and remark on it. Favour and open doors came our way, and we moved into larger responsibility.

Sometimes we have to go back and apologize for areas where we were not faithful. But even then, regardless of our past, it is never too late to begin in faithfulness today.

PRESENT

The present is all we have. So our primary focus is always what is before us at this time.

Every day we have opportunity to increase in faithfulness. A few questions to consider:

What am I being asked to be faithful to today?

- What is in my immediate area of control?
- What and who am I responsible for?
- What are the tasks and people that I impact the most?
- Where do I make a difference?
- Am I being faithful today?
- And, how does faithfulness show up for me: In tasks, in the hearts of people, in the community at large?

KEY to this discussion: Where have I already been faithful?

Make a list of the things you have been faithful with:

Take your time, allow the holy spirit to show you, to give you pictures or words that highlight your faithfulness.

Let God affirm you and commend you, in your heart and in your spirit for your faithfulness already demonstrated.

“Well done good and faithful servant”

FUTURE

While our primary focus is always the present, we must also be faithful to what God tells us is coming and where he is leading our life.

It is our privilege to cooperate with the visions and prophecies that God reveals to us of our lives. These things speak of God's heart for us and others, and ask a certain response of agreement and our efforts towards the same.

A few questions to consider as we look to the future:

- What are the prophecies over your life?
- How might you cooperate with God's vision for your life?
- Expecting your territory to expand, how might you prepare for that?

In Summary:

Faithfulness to God's spoken word over our lives results in larger territories. When we have been faithful in little we are given much.

Faithfulness is always walked out one step at a time.

Faithfulness is a personal journey with the Lord and cannot be compared to another.

Our gifts are different and our callings unique, therefore faithfulness shows up in different ways in each of our lives.

We will answer to God one day for what we have done with what he has given us.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Most of all we must remember that God is faithful to us. He is the model and the initiator of faithfulness. And it is by his power that we are sustained in faithfulness ourselves.

As we walk with him, we learn faithfulness and we are brought to expansive places where he leads and has fellowship with us:

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” I Corinthians 1: 4-9

Blessings and God's abundance over you this day. May you know how very much God loves you, and may you increase in faithfulness before him this day.

Volume Three: Forgiveness

Today I am writing about God's forgiveness and how it is a free gift, how we immediately receive it when we accept Jesus gift of salvation, and how it frees us to get on with living.

Be blessed today.

It is the most amazing thing to be covered by the Lord Jesus Christ. To be forgiven and able to have fellowship with God is a profound gift.

Because of the work of Jesus Christ, we are a forgiven people.

Now we know that the wages of sin is death:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23

Jesus Christ, God coming in the form of a man, paid the price of our sin.

We are told that Jesus came born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was both man and God. And because he was fully God he was without sin. Because he was fully man he could stand in the gap for man's sin.

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). Matthew 1:23

Jesus came to set things right, and that is exactly what he did.

Dying a criminal's death when he was without sin, we are told that Jesus despised the shame. He came intent on bringing life where there had been death. He became the sacrificial lamb that paid for our sins.

“...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

In Exodus we see a beautiful picture of this on the last night of the Israelites sojourn in Egypt. The instructions from God were to kill a lamb and to smear its blood on the doorposts of their homes and when the angel of death came that night it would 'pass-over' the homes where this blood was.

“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it... For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn of the land of Egypt, both man and beast... The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you.” Exodus 12: 7-13

The blood created a covering, a protection that marked these people as God's and therefore death passed over. The Israelites Passover was a sign of things to come in the form of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ died and was raised to life to cover us, to bring us from a life of death to a life of real living.

“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

And with this came the forgiveness of sins. Sins are covered over. God sees us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

He does not see us in our natural state, he sees us in light of what Jesus did for us. We are made new creatures in Christ and we therefore have communion and fellowship with God.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

God offers us opportunity to focus on Him and to forget our sin.

When we accept Jesus Christ as Saviour, the work done to cover our sin by Jesus over 2000 years ago, comes forward through time and covers us now. We are new creatures in Christ.

The act of Jesus Christ in dying and then rising from the dead works across time.

The payment for sin and the resulting forgiveness was applied back through time and then forward through time.

The writer of Psalms, long before Jesus' coming, knew of the Lord's forgiveness:

“But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.” Psalm 130:4

Daniel proclaimed:

“To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him” Daniel 9:8-10

The work of Jesus Christ on the cross is not bound by time. It is a continuous present tense occurrence.

We do not have to work for our forgiveness. We cannot work for our forgiveness.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with us. We cannot create it, make it more or less, or manage it.

Forgiveness is a gift.

“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything...” Acts 13:38-39

We either receive it or we push it away.

Having said that, receiving forgiveness can be hard work. Because it is not about us.

In order to receive forgiveness we must put ourselves aside.

We must lay down our pride and accept that there is something that we cannot manage or make happen for ourselves.

Forgiveness is based on the character and work of God and God alone. Forgiveness is not based on us.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

Because forgiveness is based on the character of God and not us, it is always present. It is always there. It is always available and in fact we are covered in forgiveness immediately upon accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

The moment we say, "Jesus I am a sinner, and I need your life, I accept your gift of life" We are forgiven.

We barely need ask for forgiveness, rather we simply receive it for God has already provided it. We must allow forgiveness to soak into our entire being; into our hearts and minds and spirits and bodies even.

Allowing and inviting God's forgiveness to permeate our lives is our only work. Although it is not really work, it is almost more an absence of work, because the work has been done by Jesus Christ.

We set aside our pride (the part of us that likes to take care of business), and we let this business be taken care of by the Lord.

**"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him."
Ecclesiastes 3:14**

He has done this work. We merely rest in it. We say 'Thank-you' Father for forgiveness.

It is a work that was assigned to Jesus Christ, a work that He carried out to completion, and a work that we simply accept and receive as done on our behalf.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16

And then we let that work of forgiveness and covering and life soak into our beings. We receive it as the gift that it is. We set aside our pride that screams, 'I am not worthy' and we simply say 'thank-you'.

We get on with living.

We get on with serving.

We get on with loving the Lord our God.

"Father thank-you so much for making a way for us. For saving us from our sins, for covering us with the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. I receive this covering today and declare myself covered in the blood of the lamb.

I receive your forgiveness deep into every part of my being. May it soak into my very bones, into my emotions, my mind and the way I go about life. May I be marked by you and your grace and love and forgiveness.

We bless you today God, in the name and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Volume Four: Compassion

God has been bringing Compassion to mind. I've not always been a compassionate person myself. Years back I was rather intolerant of people. Yet the Lord is faithful to do a work in our hearts and minds. It is the Lord's grace that teaches us compassion. Let's see what the Bible has to say about this.

For starters, the Bible is pretty clear that the only way we come to know God is because of his compassion extended to us. We find a picture of the Father's compassionate heart in Hosea,

**“I led them with cords of kindness, with bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws and I bent down to them and fed them.”
Hosea 11:4**

A beautiful picture of compassion that 'bends down' to serve and to free.

We are only a changed people because of compassion. There are other ways to motivate and try to change people, such as criticizing, condemning, and manipulating, but these do not create lasting change. Only the compassion of God creates a work in our lives that cannot be undone.

Compassion is the heart of God and compassion is the hard emotional work where miracles happen.

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Matthew 14:13-15

Compassion steps us into another person's experience and from their point of view we gain bigger perspective. When we do not run from the hurts of others, we are exhibiting compassion.

The thing is, we can know all sorts of things, be wise in all measure, have education and knowledge in great ways, but without compassion all of this is a waste. It means nothing, if we cannot connect with others hearts and lives.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” 1 Corinthians 13:1

Compassion is hard because it requires that we set our own needs aside. It is the language of the heart, not the mind. It is a learned skill to see others with God's heart and not through our own code of right and wrong.

But the Bible is pretty clear that compassion covers over a multitude of sins. Compassion understands that we are human and that we have sin. Every one of us.

“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offences.” Proverbs 10:12

Compassion demands that we leave our judgements and condemnations behind.

Compassion has no room for such.

In the professional development world we talk about the difference between force and power. How force is used by those who have no real power. Force demands and threatens others to our way of right and wrong, good and bad.

Force may feel good for a short period of time, but it does not create long-lasting results. In fact, force does just the opposite. Force undermines and destroys. It destroys trust, it destroys affections, and it destroys influence and relationships.

Force is the opposite of compassion and we get a good picture of the effects of this lack of compassion and the use of force in Ezekiel 34.

“... you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts.” Ezekiel 34:4-5

Real power, on the other hand, is like a whisper. Have you ever been in a crowd that has been noisy and needed to get someone’s attention? Have you ever tried yelling but found no response, but then tried a whisper and were able to be heard despite the noise?

Compassion exhibits this kind of power.

In I Kings we have a beautiful passage about the Lord as he reveals himself to Elijah:

“And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.”

Consider next Jesus’ response to the woman caught in adultery; a fabulous example of the power of compassion.

The ‘law-keepers’ had found this woman and had brought her to Jesus. The Jewish law at the time stated that the punishment was to be death by stoning.

We find the story in John 8:

“Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?”

.... Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be

the first to throw a stone at her.” And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground.

But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and from now on sin no more.” John 8: 1-11

Compassion ruled the day. And compassion brings from each of us our best. It does not force, it does not demand, and it does not condemn.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” Colossians 3:12-13

Compassion opens our hearts and enables us to see each other and our communities with God’s heart and God’s eyes.

At the same time compassion is a work of our hearts that we cannot manufacture ourselves. We cannot make our selfish narrow minded hearts expand, only God can do this.

So we ask him for expanded hearts, we ask for compassion to flood through us, and we step into God’s compassion for us. When we know God’s compassion personally, we can then give it out.

Father God, we come to you today in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We clearly see that we cannot make compassion happen inside of ourselves. This is a work that only you can do, and we are dependent on your doing this in our lives. Please bring your compassion into my life.

Help me to see others with eyes of compassion. Help me to act with compassion.

I welcome your compassion to flood my being, heart, mind, spirit and body. Thank-you for your compassion. Thank-you that in compassion you sent your son Jesus Christ to die for my sin and everyone’s sin. Thank-you for extending to us fellowship of compassion with each other. I receive you and your compassion this day in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, with all glory to you Father, Amen.

Volume Five: Leadership

This volume we are going to look a bit at leadership and how we mature in Christ.

As leaders we must always be developing and growing ourselves.

We cannot lead others in ways that we ourselves have not matured.

And maturing takes time. The development of character takes some work and some focus and a lot of asking the Lord to grow us.

Maturity does not happen by accident.

We must allow and invite change in the way we see and do life.

God wants this for us also.

In 2 Peter 1:2-8 we find a progression of maturing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Peter starts off by imparting a blessing,

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” 2 Peter 1:2

And then the passage goes on to outline how God has provided for us, in the knowledge of His Holy Spirit, everything we need, and how it is ours to now bring into our daily lives.

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

For this reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:3-8

First off, we see that God has granted us the ability to have all of these things not because of who we are but because of who God is. It is God that works these things in us.

**“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
Philippians 2:13**

1. We start off with faith, that place where we simply say, “Yes Jesus Christ, I see that I am a sinner and I accept your gift of forgiveness and welcome you into my life. Become my Savior today, thank-you.” We rest in God’s gift and receive His peace into our lives.

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1

Then, as 2 Peter continues, we ‘make every effort to add to our faith with virtue’.

2. Virtue has been translated two different ways through the centuries. The first and older meaning was in the sense of ‘power’ and a ‘miraculous energy or influence’. The modern and ordinary

meaning is that of 'moral goodness'. Both make sense, because it is the power of God that enables us to be dead to sin and alive to Christ, resulting in God's touch through our lives.

“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” Acts 4:33

3. Knowledge is what we add to virtue. Knowledge is mentioned in the Bible alongside wisdom and a fear of God. Knowledge becomes ours when we have a right understanding of how big God is, how mighty God is and how good it is to really understand his holiness and righteousness as compared to our sinfulness.

“for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you desire cannot compare with her. I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.” Proverbs 8:11-13

4. Self-control comes next. It is a natural outflow of being in relationship with God. Self-control is the ability to self-regulate. It is where we restrain ourselves and choose our reactions and actions. Self-control is where we take responsibility for our decisions and actions and the way we are in the world.

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” Proverbs 25:28

5. Steadfastness is a combination of perseverance and stability. It is the result of habits of self-control and faith through difficulties. Where through time and years we have increased in character qualities that reflect God, and as a result others can count on us and the way we are in the world.

“For you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:3-4

6. Godliness (as described in Nave's topical Bible) “supposes knowledge, veneration, affection, dependence, submission, gratitude, and obedience.”

“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” 1 Timothy 3:16

7. Brotherly Affection gives us a picture of affection between brothers, between those who have common parentage. In the company of Christians this picture extends to all those who call God Father. We then come to understand that all people, every single person, male or female, young or old, friend or enemy, slave or free, is made in the image of God, and therefore worthy of respect and love and honour.

“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.” Romans 12:9-10

9. Love tops it all off and wraps it all up. There is so much we can say of love, but for today let's just say that Love always reveals the true living God, and proves our relationship with him.

**“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”
Galatians 5:22-23**

To repeat Peter's words:

“For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 2:8

‘Lord God we are desperate and needing your deep work in our beings. We declare and invite your moving through our hearts and minds and lives. We welcome you to increase the qualities of faith and virtue, knowledge and self-control, of steadfastness and Godliness, and brotherly affection and love. We ask this in the name and the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wrap us in your transforming power. We thank-you and bless you and worship you today. Amen’

I pray these for each of you, may you know God's deep love and grace and movement in each of your lives. We are indeed desperate for God to change and transform us!

Volume Six: Freedom

Today I share what I have found to be a simple yet profound process of bringing the freedom of the Lord into very specific areas of our lives.

Receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour is the first step towards this freedom. And then as we continue to walk with Him we can begin to bring His freedom into very specific areas of our life, increasing His light within our own hearts and lives, experiencing freedom and the lightness of the Lord in increasing measure.

Freedom in any area of life comes about through a process before the Lord.

We start with **1) Confession**. Confession is where we say “I did it”. Confession admits to something that has gone wrong, and by our own heart and hand.

The ability to confess comes when we see clearly our sin. Those things that offend, deny, or outright attack the character of God.

“I did it”

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” James 5:16

The next part of freedom comes when we are repentant. When our hearts find remorse and sorrow for our sin. Repentance comes as a gift from the Father. The Bible is pretty clear that

without the revelation of the Holy Spirit over our hearts we will not understand or even see a need for repentance.

2) Repentance is the place where we declare our sorrow over actions, thoughts, words, whatever it may be, that contradicts the glory and nature of God.

"I am so sorry"

It is quite possible to have confession, "I did it", without repentance, "I am so sorry". But to have full freedom we must have both. First the acknowledgment of wrong-doing, and then the grief and sorrow regarding that.

**"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret"
2 Corinthians 7:10**

Next comes **3) Renouncing**. This is where we declare, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I say NO to this in my life."

"I renounce (the name of the specific sin) in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ."

This is where we hold our hand out so to speak, against the sin, against the stronghold, and declare "No More!"

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" Titus 2:11-12

After 1) Confession, 2) Repentance and 3) Renouncing, we then **4) Break the hold of the sin** upon us.

This, all of this, can only be accomplished in our lives because of the work of Jesus Christ on the cross some 2000 years ago. He did the work, we merely bring it specifically into and over our lives. Breaking the hold of the sins over us goes something like this:

"I (name of self), stand in the name and the blood of my Lord Jesus Christ and I declare the stronghold of (the specific sin) broken off of my life. Where it has woven itself into my life, today I say 'no more' in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. I remove its grip from my life, I break its hold, I sever its grasp, all in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ."

Breaking the sin, using whatever picture the Holy Spirit gives us, can only be done through the authority of Jesus. It is why we keep saying His name so many times. ONLY the name of

Jesus Christ has any power to break us free from sin's death grip.

**"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"
Isaiah 58:5-7**

Once we have broken the specific grip of sin off of us, we can then **5) Cancel** the accompanying things of the enemy, that most likely have come along because of the sin.

For instance, when we sin we agree with the enemies plans over our life. When we sin we enter into an agreement with Satan. This is like a legal document in the spirit realm, that then plays out in life-debilitating ways. Cancelling the assignments and curses and authority of the enemy is as simple as declaring it so.

“I (insert your own name) stand in the name of my Living Lord Jesus Christ declaring that all assignments, authority and curses of the enemy be cancelled this day. I declare all things of the enemy in relation to this sin silenced and bound to ineffectiveness, No More! Today I declare a new contract written, this one unto the Lord with all glory and honour to him, all in the name and the blood of my Living Lord Jesus Christ.”

“God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Colossians 2:13-14

6) Claiming comes next. It is the place where we receive from God’s heart and hand that which replaces the sin.

*If there were something to replace the sin in your life, what might it be? (remember, forgiveness is already a given based on the work of Jesus Christ). Here we receive into our lives all that is beneficial, to replace the stronghold of sin that is now cancelled. We then give God the thanks.

“In the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, I receive _____ from the heart of the Father. Thank-you God for this gift. I press it through my whole being, heart, mind, spirit and body in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Thank-you for making a way for me to glorify You God.”

**“Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant,”
2 Corinthians 3:5-6**

Once we have 1) Confessed, 2) Repented, 3) Renounced, 4) Broken, 5) Cancelled and 6) Claimed we now 7) Seal this work. Covering it and protecting it with the presence of the Lord, sealing ensures that the enemy cannot muck about with the work done. It claims the work as part of the Glory of God and not anyone else.

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I declare this work sealed and kept for the glory of God and God alone.”

Language is powerful, and speaking God’s heart into our lives is powerful. Speaking and declaring in the Name and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is powerful.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

It is because of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ that we can stand in the same authority and declare freedom. We do this verbally, out loud for ourselves.

“Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

This has been but a short summary of the process of bringing specific freedom into specific areas of our lives. We can do this because of the authority given us in Jesus Christ when we believe on Him. And when we do this for ourselves, out loud with our own mouths, we participate in the power of the Kingdom of God come to earth.

Volume Seven: Redemption

Redemption

That place where God comes down and makes everything right

That place where we are redeemed.

In the old Testament we find redemption in the book of Ruth

The story of Naomi and Ruth is a beautiful story. One woman was older and the mother of sons, the other younger and married to one of her sons.

And the sons die, leaving no recourse for the women.

In that day and time if a husband died the woman would become the wife of the next son, but in this case all of the sons had died, and Naomi was a foreigner in the land, and therefore there was no husband for Ruth.

This meant destitution. No way to make a living, no hope to raise a family.

Because of the sorrow and the life change thrust upon these women by grief and loss, Naomi travels back to her original country, and Ruth goes with her.

To eat Ruth goes out each day into the neighbouring fields, picking up the leftovers after the threshers had gone through the field.

Though there were a number of fields, she found favour in the field of Boaz.

As it turns out Boaz was a distant relative to Naomi, and therefore able to redeem the situation

Boaz had the authority and opportunity to make something right that had gone terribly wrong.

The hopes of these women lay in the hope of family. When family had died, so had hope.

Only a kinsmen redeemer could make it right. And this turned out to be Boaz.

So through the proper course of action, according to the protocol of the day, Boaz married Ruth, redeeming her.

“Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!’” Ruth 4:14

The kinsmen redeemer.

God is our Kinsmen redeemer.

**“Our Redeemer – the LORD of hosts is his name – is the Holy One of Israel.”
Isaiah 47:4**

When we are without hope, God has the authority to make it right.

We must simply put ourselves at his feet and ask.

**“They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer.”
Psalm 78:35**

It is an interesting part of the story of Ruth that by the advice of Naomi, she one night came and laid herself at the feet of Boaz. A provocative act, an act of humility, this action stated loud and clear, “you may have your way with me”

And this is our opportunity with God. He is our kinsmen redeemer. He is the only one with the authority to make right, in our lives, in our communities, and in our nation, what has gone very wrong. Are we allowing God to have his way with our lives?

“For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.” Isaiah 54:5

We simply bring ourselves to his feet. We in essence lay at his feet, declaring that we are his.

We declare our dependence on him, we say, “Would you redeem us?”

“He said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.’” Ruth 3:9

We are told that at the end of the age Jesus Christ will return to redeem his bride.

Those who have made him their bridegroom, will find themselves caught up in the skies with him.

**“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.”
Job 19:25**

Because Jesus Christ established himself through death and resurrection as our redeemer, and since we have received him as our personal redeemer, we take up the cause of redemption alongside him.

Privileged to know him we now take on redeeming the things around us. We are called to be redeemers of what has gone wrong around us.

We enter into the work of healing people, relationships, and the systems of this world.

**“Thus says the LORD, you Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.’”
Isaiah 48:16-18**

God as our Redeemer took on the responsibility to redeem, and we have opportunity and privilege of the same.

Just maybe God has established you as a Redeemer for a part of your world.

God’s way is to respond to the needs of the world through His people.

“I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt. This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ – this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years” Acts 7:34-36

How might you enter into God’s redemptive work today?

Volume Eight: Promotion

The book of Daniel is rich in wisdom and modelling of how to walk in integrity, how to focus and hold our ground, how to honour others, and most of all, how to advance through the Kingdom of God.

In the first chapter of Daniel we find Daniel holding his ground. He and three of his friends had been among the Israelite captives taken into exile to Babylon.

They were to be served the food from the King’s own table. But we read Daniel’s resolution in Daniel 1:8-15

“But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the King.” Daniel 1:8

We read on about how he found a way to stay true to his convictions and how he negotiated with those in charge, a compromise and a test. Holding his ground took some effort and some wisdom, but he was well rewarded and was able to maintain the standards by which he wanted to live.

I. We clearly see the FIRST Criteria of being promoted: Standing our ground and in our convictions.

In the second chapter of Daniel we find Daniel seeking the Lord.

“That night the secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven.” Daniel 2:19

2. The SECOND Criteria of being promoted in the Kingdom of God: Seeking the Lord in all things.

We continue reading to find that Daniel gives all of the credit for this revelation to God and God alone. This is what he says to the King,

“But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future.” Daniel 2:27

3 The THIRD Criteria in order to be promoted in the Spirit Realm, is to ALWAYS give all of the credit to our Living God.

All the glory goes to him, we take none of it for ourselves.

In Chapter 4 of Daniel we find that the influence of holding his ground, seeking his God, and giving all the glory back to God, results in great influence on those around him. We find King Nebuchadnezzar himself praising the Living God and declaring Him through the Kingdom.

“Peace and prosperity to you! I want you all to know about the miraculous signs and wonders the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how powerful his wonders! His kingdom will last forever, his rule through all generations.” Daniel 4:2-3

We continue reading as the king continues to give testimony to a dream the king had, the interpretation of Daniel, but most importantly, the compassion and care that Daniel had for the king.

“Beltshazzar (Daniel) replied, ‘I wish the events foreshadowed in this dream would happen to your enemies, my lord, and not to you!’ Daniel 4:19b

Daniel had been so long in the service of the king that he no longer considered or knew the king to be any kind of enemy, but rather someone he cared for and worked alongside.

And because Daniel proved himself a friend of the King, he was trusted and moved to speak truth at great risk. In Daniel 4:27 we find him pleading with the king:

“King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper.” Daniel 4:27

4. The FOURTH Criteria to be promoted in the Spirit Realm, is to become a friend of The King.

Coming to understand the heart of God proves us faithful with His heart, and gives us ground for speaking plainly and with influence.

We go on to read in Daniel 6 this testimony of Daniel:

“Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel’s great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.” Daniel 6:3

Daniel held his ground (1), sought God (2), gave all the glory to God (3), proved himself a friend of the king (4), and was therefore given authority and opportunity.

Daniel had made himself highly useful to the king. We have opportunity to do the same with The King of this Universe.

As we seek Him, give Him the glory, prove ourselves a friend of God, we will be given more and more responsibility amongst God’s people, and more authority in the Kingdom of God.

None of these things happen right away. Rather, they are the product of time and of our faithfulness over time. Proving ourselves requires guts and stamina and faithfulness.

Day after day we can prove ourselves to be aligned with the King. Seeking His heart, following His lead, brings us into our own positions of leadership within His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

“God, we come before you today seeking your face. Thank-you for your affirmations of our lives in you today. We seek to make ourselves even more useful to you and your plans on this earth. Please teach us faithfulness, teach us to have compassion and to honor your heart. Teach us to speak life to others. Teach us your heart. We want to become your friend and know your heart more and more every day. Thank-you for your heart given to us. We love you.”

God’s best over each of you.

Volume Nine: Servants

About 700 years before Jesus was born, an amazing prophet named Isaiah lived in Israel.

God gave Isaiah many prophecies about Jesus.

One of the titles for Jesus appears in Isaiah 42. God said, **“Look at my servant – He is my chosen one.” (42:1)**

So Jesus is the “chosen servant”. We know Jesus is God, yet the Father chose him to be a servant. What can be more amazing? If God is willing to serve so should we.

It is an honor to be a servant alongside Jesus.

Just as a farmer uses a yoke to harness two oxen or buffalo together, Jesus invites us to get into a yoke with him. When you have accepted Jesus, he does not ask you to serve alone.

Hear Jesus words:

“Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden you share with me is light. (Matthew 11:29-30)

Isaiah learns more about Jesus. **“I have put my Spirit upon him,” God says. (Isaiah 42:1)**

The Holy Spirit walking with Jesus strengthened his desire to serve. When we accept Jesus, we naturally find we have a desire to serve.

We ask, “How do I find where I should serve?” We are all surrounded with needs. Many we cannot afford but there are many that cost us nothing other than time.

Let’s just open our eyes and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. As Christians, serving others brings us great joy and satisfaction. This pleases God which only adds to our joy.

In God’s kingdom, the way up is down. If you are embarrassed to serve in some simple way, God will not lift you up to do greater tasks.

So imitate Jesus: he did the job of a slave by washing his disciples feet. He then said,

**“You call me teacher and Lord. You are right, for that is what I am. If I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you should also wash one another’s feet.”
John 13:13-14**

We have made feet washing into a ceremony, but Jesus had in mind a lot more than that.

Jesus simply did the normal job of a slave: to wash the guests feet when they came in off the dirty village streets. In the upper room with his disciples there were no slaves.

Jesus took on the task of washing the disciples. He modelled that there is not any of us too high or mighty to do the ordinary tasks that are a part of every day. Jesus Christ led the way, showing us how to serve.

How might we serve today? Who might we serve today?

NOTE: A Special Thanks to Art Coombes who wrote this Bible Study.

In the words of the writer of Hebrews, **“Now may the God of peace... may He equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.” Hebrews 13:20 -21**

Volume Ten: Difficulty

Today I am sharing about Difficulty, and some of what I have come to find about the Lord through the hard things of our lives.

We all have trouble in this life. Each of us experience things that are simply difficult. In fact the Bible speaks quite a bit to difficulty. Jesus said this:

**“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”
John 16:33**

I used to think that God was going to fix all my difficulty. That the overcoming that Christ spoke of was to do with the stuff of this world. That God was simply magic applied to my life. That I could pray and all of a sudden the hard stuff would go away.

I have found that this is not so.

I have learned that God does not fix our lives so much as He wants to walk alongside us in our lives.

The overcoming of the world that Christ speaks of is the process of finding God in the midst of the worst things, and in turn finding our strength from the inside out.

“The Lord is a shelter for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.” Psalm 9:9

Will our lives get better and better with God in the mix, for sure.

Will all our troubles go away? No, they won't.

Difficulties are the refining fire that proves our love for God, proves our walk alongside

Him, and establishes us as trustworthy in His kingdom.

The pressures of life test and prove what we have inside us.

“He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord.” Malachi 3:3

Are we interested in God because he is going to help us, or are we interested in God because we love him and want to be in his company, and to serve in His kingdom?

The Levites were the priests of the Lord. Chosen by Him to serve Him in the temple. Today we are all priests. Chosen by God, cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and it is the difficulties that purify us.

Difficulty purifies our motives.

Difficulty also strengthens us.

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” Romans 5:3-5

Like carrying a load of wood or jugs of water, we start off with our small muscles and can only carry so much.

But then we are able to carry more. Our muscles are stronger. Our strength is increased.

This is what difficulties do for us. They grow our inner muscles. Difficulties grow our character and our wisdom and our resilience.

Difficulties are not something that happens to us, but rather they are for us.

“Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us.” Ecclesiastes 7:3

God uses difficulties to prepare you and I for the assignments in His kingdom.

There is no way around difficulty.

Each of us must travel through the various difficulties that have come to us.

For sure many of our troubles are our own doing, but many of them are not. And it doesn't even matter as much as we think, for God will use the difficulties to do a work in our life.

“You have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but you will restore me to life again and lift me up from the depths of the earth.” Psalm 71:20

Once we have faced difficulties we are stronger. Once we have faced the worst things and found God in the midst of it all, we are not so afraid of difficulties anymore.

The thing is, difficulties never go away. Even when we reach success, success brings its own set of difficulty.

There will always be hard things. And we have a choice to either fight God in the midst of our trouble or to grow and mature under the hard things.

“In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind.” 2 Corinthians 6:4

Unfortunately some of us take our difficulties to others. We want someone to save us and to make it better.

Or we take our frustration and anger out on those closest to us, hurting others as a result.

None of this grows the fruit that we want. We want inner strength, not destroyed relationships. We want maturity and integrity, not child-like frustrations thrown on other people. Each of us are responsible for our own lives. And this starts in the inner place between ourselves and God. That place where we take the difficulties and we work them through with God.

Where we find His strength in the midst of our weakness.

“So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for he will never fail you.”

1 Peter 4:19

Once we stop fighting difficulty, we become better equipped to deal with them well; to grow in wisdom and knowledge, to add to our faith with understanding and a bigger perspective.

Most important we find God in new and fresh ways when in the midst of difficulty.

“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.” Isaiah 43:2 NLT

Will life get better and better as we walk with Him? Yes it will.

But not because life changes necessarily (although it will by and by), but more importantly because we change. And when we change, everything changes.

Thanking God for our difficulties is the starting place. Where we give a sacrifice of praise even in the difficulty, we are most blessed.

“Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.” Colossians 2:7

God responds to this kind of faith and heart. Our lives will not be the same.

“Thank-you God for our troubles. Thank-you for bringing us difficulty that refines us and purifies our hearts before you. We are glad that you have trusted us with hard things, knowing that we are equipped and strengthened in this. We trust you with the hardships of our lives. We invite your hand into our troubles, but just as much we ask that you would teach us everything we need to know as we face our difficulties. May we see the hard stuff as opportunities to come to know you more. Thank-you Father that you walk alongside us through the middle of all our trouble. We bless your name today. Amen”

Troubles in one shape or another will always be with us. Today lets dedicate our lives to God regardless of our circumstances and difficulty.

Regardless of the trouble we praise you Lord!

God’s grace and peace over you in the midst of all your lives.

Volume Eleven: Overwhelmed

We are all overwhelmed at one time or another. Life has many dynamics to it, and we are often stretched beyond what we think we can do and beyond who we are.

And this is certainly true in ministry, where others are looking to us for answers and solutions and wisdom. In those times we are vulnerable to discouragement.

But I've discovered six principles that have helped to frame the challenges of our days and I want to share them with you.

I. LEAD WITH GENEROSITY

History has shown that those who position themselves to bless others are leaders in the land. A opportunity that is open to any one of us at any time.

“They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.” 2 Corinthians 8:2

Generosity comes from the outflow of our relationship with the Lord and is based on who He is rather than our circumstances.

Generosity is a hearts attitude that seeks to bless others. It is a way of being in the world that is a blessing that honors and pours over others.

How might you lead in generosity today?

2. CONFESS FEAR

There are many things to be afraid of and many times we are frightened and shrinking back in fear.

Being afraid and fearful is normal. There are so many verses in the Bible about ‘do not fear’ that we see fear to be a pretty normal problem for all of us in our humanity.

Yet just as many times we find these words, “Do not fear”, and in John we find Jesus saying this,

“I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.” John 14:27

The way to access the peace of Jesus Christ is to simply confess our fear, “*God I am afraid.*”

Rather than trying to not be afraid, “I will not be afraid, I will not be afraid, I will not...” which never works by the way (we cannot talk ourselves out of fear), open honesty about our fear secures us in the covering of God and submits our reality to him.

When we are afraid we simply confess, “God I am afraid” and the peace of Christ can takes its place in our lives.

3. ONE DAY AT A TIME

We can only live one day at a time, and it is important to discipline our minds and hearts to remain in that 'one day at a time'. In Proverbs we find good advice about staying in today and not living forward into tomorrow with pride,

**“Don’t brag about tomorrow, since you don’t know what the day will bring.”
Proverbs 27:1**

And in Matthew we find the same kind of advice but this time about worry,

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

Both of these verses tell us to simply live in today. The tasks for today are enough for today.

The blessings of today are enough for today. And all we need for today we have today.

The grace for tomorrow we do not have yet, for it is not yet tomorrow.

We simply live in today – One day at a time.

4. DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE

While it is easy to think that we need this or must have more of that thing etc, we can in fact move forward with the present reality and resources more than we believe.

While there are certainly times of preparation and waiting on the timing of God, when it comes time to move forward or to stretch into that next thing, we do so regardless of what we think might be missing.

'Doing with what we have' works two ways.

One, we put to rest the reasoning that we cannot do such and such until we have this or that. We simply get on with the work regardless.

And two, we experience today in all its fullness. What we need we have, and what we have we fully utilize. No longer do we live out in the future when such and such will come to be.

Rather we find gratefulness and fulfillment in the here and now.

Doing with what we have is the secret to joy and contentment in the here and now. And we find this truth,

“And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.” 2 Corinthians 9:8

5. BE POURED OUT

The needs of hearts and souls around us are many. Oftentimes we are insufficient for them, but in the knowledge of God and of who he is, and because we have found him in our own lives, we can follow His lead and give of ourselves.

“So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.” Ephesians 1:6

Because of God’s pouring into us, we can pour into others. Much like a healthy stream of water that comes from one place and goes to another, the act of being poured out ensures that there is a flowing spring of the spirit through our beings.

We take in the grace of God and we pour it out to others.

6. IT’S NOT OUR WORK

We come to see that as we minister to others that it is not our work. We simply show up, and the Spirit works through us.

We therefore do not need allow overwhelm to stop us, or fear to hold us back. Rather, we can boldly love and speak and minister because it is really the work of God that makes the difference. We simply offer our lives to God’s touch. He does the rest.

**“There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.”
I Corinthians 12:5-6**

CONCLUSION:

These six things, 1. Lead in Generosity, 2. Confess Fear, 3. One Day at a Time, 4. Do with What we Have, 5. Be Poured Out, and 6. It’s Not Our Work, provide a framework that gives strength to our days and direction for how we might be in the world.

The influence of our lives has little to do with us, and it has everything to do with God. As we live out of who God is, rather than our circumstances, we will find strength and encouragement in our days. God bless each of you mightily, may you know him a little better today.

Volume Twelve: Women

It is pressing upon me to today take a look at what the Bible says about women. There is much assumed and categorized when it comes to women. Much that is not in line with the heart of God, and while there is not time or space to look at everything we might discuss about women, we will look at a just a couple of thoughts today.

The Bible begins with the creation of the world, (and as John and Stasi Eldredge brought to our attention in their book, Captivating), we see that creation begins with wide swaths. Like a giant brush painting a large picture, a grand work of art, the first strokes lay out the background and the vistas of creation; light and dark, land and sea and sky.

Creation continues with God filling in the details. Plants and trees, animals and birds, fish and creatures of the sea, are added. Then comes mankind. A stunning representation of God himself. Mirroring both male and female God makes mankind.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27

With mankind we find the finesse and attention to detail a wonderful thing to behold.

Breathed through with the breath of God mankind carries a spirit that is more complex and specialized than any other creature on earth.

And with one final sweep of creative energy, the soaring finale to creation, woman arrives on the scene. She is the glory added right at the end. Like a shining pinnacle of a grand mountain, woman adds the finishing touches to creation. Simply by who she is, woman reflects the glory of God in spectacular wonder.

Women are born and bred to carry the glory of God; to reflect God’s stunning beauty.

Women give testimony of the majesty of our creator.

But Satan was the original one who was most beautiful, something he lost, something that woman gained.

Ever since Satan has hated SHE.

And ever since there has been unprecedented attacks and confounding over women for centuries upon centuries. Over no other people group have the oppressions been so profound and long-lasting.

And the Bible has a few things to say about this. We read first of all in Galatians that there is no male or female in the body of Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28

Paul had written here a short list of all the ways we discriminate as human beings. At the time of this writing a common way to discriminate was to hate Jews if one was Greek, and to hate Greeks if one was a Jew. Then there was the discrimination around those who are slaves or those who are free, and that we still have to this day in many places, then, into the conversation another discrimination: that of being male or female.

It is no secret that world over, that still today, male babies are considered the better of the species, and that men are superior to women. Even today there are babies aborted because they are female. Even today there are new-born baby girls killed simply because they are female. Even today, we have much prejudice and discrimination in the world over women, simply because they are female.

Yet, "In Christ Jesus there is no male or female, we are all one"

What difference does this verse make to you?

How might this change the way we do life in our families and work places?

In Peter we find this,

"Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." 1 Peter 3:7

This verse has been misapplied time and again. We miss that the 'weakness' of women as described here is about the body (the vessel). It is a woman's body that is weaker than a man's body. Having only two layers of muscle where men have three layers of muscle, a woman's body is literally not as physically strong as a man's body.

And therefore Peter gives a few explicit directions.

1. 'Live with your wives in an understanding way.' In other words, get it that your wife is not as physically strong as you are. She cannot do as much hard labor as you are capable of.

In terms of how this might play out in life, there are numerous applications depending on culture and circumstances of life. Yet regardless of each scenario, it sounds to me that Peter is saying to men, "Serve your wife. Make life a little easier for her, knowing that she is not as physically capable of hard work as you are."

Peter is also making a case here for being gentle with women. Where two men might literally wrestle or physically fight over a disagreement, Peter is saying to understand that because of the weaker nature of a woman's body, she should never be physically hit or fought with. She is not on-par with a man in this way, she is the physically weaker vessel, and therefore physical violence is not the way to act with her.

Violence has no place in a marriage, if for no other reason than the woman is not as physically strong. Violence is an injustice to women.

2. 'Showing honor' The definition of honor is, "To regard or treat with honor, esteem, or respect; to revere; to treat with deference and submission."

I don't know how it is in other parts of the world, but in North America men show honor to women in a number of ways; things like holding open doors for women, giving women the best

places to sit, carrying the heavy things so that women are spared the weight and strain on their bodies.

Within individual cultures, it comes down to a man simply asking the Holy Spirit for direction, “How might I honor my wife today?”

3. This is all very important so that, “Your prayers may not be hindered.” I Peter 3:7

Peter is making a pretty strong case for being understanding and honoring one’s wife, declaring even that if a man does not honor his wife his prayers will go unanswered. That is pretty strong language, and pretty profound consequences.

We all need our prayers answered. Simple as that.

“God we come before you today simply requesting your mercy. All of us (women included) have been part of the enemies attack over women. We have abused and discredited a most important part of your creation. We have taken for granted the beauty that you have given us in women. We have heaped piles of responsibility and hardship on women. God have mercy on us.

Please teach us to honor women. Help us to deeply love and care for the women you have placed in our lives. May we be conduits of your love and respect and honor to women. Thank-you for the women in my life; my Mom, my Sisters, my Aunts and my Wife.”

How might you honor your wife today?

Volume Thirteen: Trusting with Little

The journey with our God is an interesting one.

We quickly learn that God’s timing is not our timing, and that God’s ways are not our ways.

In fact, there are many times when God simply says ‘No’ or ‘Not this way’. It is at times like this that our motives and heart are tested and tried.

We tend to make Plan A with God. We come up with our best scenario, and then we invite God into it. But Plan A is usually not the best plan. For the first plan we think of is usually the easiest, and with the least amount of risk.

Much like Gideon in the Old Testament, we want surety and guaranteed success.

“But Lord,” Gideon replied, “how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family!” Judges 6:15

But much like the story of Gideon, God comes along and says, “No you can do with less. For I will be with you.”

The Lord said to him, “I will be with you. And you will destroy the Midianites as if you were fighting against one man.” Judges 6:16

And in the process God tests our resolve and our faith.

Do we really believe in him? Do we really trust him? Are we able to walk his way?

Do we really get it that ‘God With Us’ is all that is needed?

The Lord said to Gideon, “You have too many warriors with you. If I let all of you fight the Midianites, the Israelites will boast to me that they saved themselves by their own strength. Therefore, tell the people, ‘Whoever is timid or afraid may leave this mountain and go home.’” So 22,000 of them went home, leaving only 10,000 who were willing to fight.” Judges 7:2-3

Or do we insist on our own way, demanding from God our plan and our way?

Fact is, God’s ways are better than our ways. And Plan B is always a better plan. For Plan B comes with much risk, and demands more from us internally.

“But the Lord told Gideon, “There are still too many! Bring them down to the spring, and I will test them to determine who will go with you and who will not.” When Gideon took his warriors down to the water, the Lord told him, “Divide the men into two groups. In one group put all those who cup water in their hands and lap it up with their tongues like dogs. In the other group put all those who kneel down and drink with their mouths in the stream.” Only 300 of the men drank from their hands. All the others got down on their knees and drank with their mouths in the stream.” Judges 7:4-6

Our hearts must engage in greater measure with the real plans of God.

Our faith is exercises beyond the normal and beyond what our minds can comprehend, and what makes sense to us.

“The Lord told Gideon, “With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home.” So Gideon collected the provisions and rams’ horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him.” Judges 7:7

God will always decrease our provision until we get it that with him we have everything.

That with him we have all we need. And that with him all things are possible.

It is a tricky balance to be sure. Too easily we begin to trust in the ‘greatness’ of numbers or of those around us, when really, all we are to get is the ability to really trust God himself, and no other.

God will come through for us, but not how we are expecting, and usually not how we would like. But like Gideon we can make a shift in our being, and allow the living God to show up on His terms and in his way.

Then, and only then, will we experience and witness the glory of God.

“That is the story of how the people of Israel defeated Midian, which never recovered. Throughout the rest of Gideon’s lifetime—about forty years—there was peace in the land.” Judges 8:28

What are you wrestling through today? Where are you needing a miracle of the Lord?

Perhaps while you are thinking, “We need more.” He is saying, “No, you actually need less.”

And like the Lord told Gideon right at the beginning, “Go with the strength you have.”

“Then the Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel from the Midianites. I am sending you!’” Judges 6:14

God shows up through our present circumstances and strength. Our strengths and circumstances are sufficient for the task, because of who God is, not because of who we are. Will you trust him?

Volume Fourteen: Relationship

Living the Christian life is not about formula. It is not about rules or procedures, it is not about right or wrong even. Christianity is about a living relationship with God, with Jesus Christ, and with our Holy Spirit.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Romans 10:4

“But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.” Galatians 5:18

Living the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with God, growing in that relationship, and finding out what our new friend (God) likes or doesn’t like.

Moving with God we come to find out what offends and what gladdens the heart of God.

For instance we read in Proverbs a few of what offends God and then how he prefers to act.

“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run haste to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.” Proverbs 6:16-19

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in his steadfast love.” Micah 7:18

We in turn, begin to naturally live out our lives in accordance with God’s standards, because we want to please God, because we have got it that God LOVES us.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

God’s love comes first.

Our desire for God comes next.

Holiness alongside God is next.

Then working for God naturally flows.

To often in our churches and our Christian communities we stress #3 and head right into #4, before we understand or experience #1 or #2.

When we preach Holiness before someone even knows who God is, or of God’s great love, we put the cart before the horse, and the plow before the oxen. We end up hurting others and doing the exact opposite of what God does. For as we read in Micah, God pardons iniquity and covers over transgressions.

The Bible is very clear. Love comes first, and out of love all things flow, and love then wraps it all up.

**“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”
1 Peter 4:8**

Holiness that comes out of a pure desire and love for God, is a different product than an attempt at holiness that comes out of a view of God as a harsh and strict taskmaster.

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6

Holiness that comes from our relationship with God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, made possible in the blood of Jesus Christ, is something very different to behold.

This kind of holiness shines and is settled and pure. This kind of holiness is kept by God himself, and is the source of great joy and acts as a profound offering of our lives back to God.

“For it is God who works in you... that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” Philippians 2:13 & 15

It is only in love that we are saved, and only in the knowledge of God’s love are we inspired and enabled to live lives unto God.

God initiates love to us
We respond

God convicts of what diminishes our lives
We respond

God rescues us from ourselves
We respond

God keeps us and protects us
We respond

God gives us work in the Kingdom of God
We respond

This is a living breathing relationship. God initiates, we respond.

How are you responding today?

And how is God initiating in your life today?

Take time to thank God for that today.

Volume Fifteen: Faith

When we start off in the Christian life we are concerned with the laws of God, of pleasing him and about what is right and wrong.

As we grow we find that things of God and of our lives are not so obvious as we once believed.

There are a lot of unknowns as we live our lives. And as we mature we find that God speaks to all of us in different ways about various things.

While there are many specifics about a lot of things, there is also a lot of room for a relationship with God that is unique to us.

The Law was given by God to create parameters from the outside in, over our lives. They showed the best way to life and godliness, to increase and to prosper in all areas of life.

The law though, couldn't change what is in our hearts. That is why Jesus came, to change us from the inside out. Because of Jesus we are born to freedom, freedom to:

“Act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

The law was not the final solution to our lives. Much like rules we give to children, law only works at us from the outside in. And God has made it very clear that it is not what is outside us that brings sin, but what is inside us.

“Why then was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed only until the coming of the child who was promised.” Galatians 3:19

So the law is ineffective for helping us from the inside out. The law was a hedge or protection of sorts, but law will never solve anything.

“This way of faith is very different from the way of law which says, ‘It is through obeying the law that a person has life. But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.’ Galatians 3:12-13

The real solution is Jesus Christ. When Jesus came he does away with the law, because he fulfilled the requirements of the law.

“Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.” Galatians 3:24-25

The coming of Jesus Christ became the doing away of the law. Because of Christ we are now dead to the law and alive in Christ.

“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, I will be their God and they will be my people.” Hebrews 8:13

Alive to Christ, we come to live by the Spirit, from the inside out we have strength and ability to live holy lives, righteous and pleasing to our God.

The Bible is pretty clear that freedom from the laws and freedom to the Spirit is the Gospel message and is the Good News for our lives.

“But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.” Galatians 5:18

And yet we may find ourselves adding law back into our lives. We as human beings like rules, because rules tell us what to do and what not to do, as though we are children. But without rules, and in freedom to the Spirit, we are in relationship and we are no longer told what to do, and yet we are responsible.

Are we living for the Spirit?

God wants us to grow into maturity and into relationship with him.

He wants us to look to him and not to the rules. We do not live our Christian lives in relationship with rules or law, rather we walk in relationship with the person of God.

“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Romans 14:17

A living relationship where we live by the Spirit is in us, once we have accepted Jesus as Lord and as the one who covers over our sin. The Spirit convicts us and guides us. And in quite some number of areas, the Spirit guides each of us a bit differently.

“Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.” Galatians 5:25

And in this, because we like rules, we tend to take the convictions of the Holy Spirit over us and make them into law or rules for others.

“For the law was not intended for people who do what is right. It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy.” 1 Timothy 1:9

Here we see that law is not for those living by the Spirit. But still within our churches and congregations we like to take our relationship with the Spirit, and turn it into law for others. Paul was very angry about this, calling it sin to add law once more to the gospel of Christ.

When we reinstate rule and law in our lives, or over the lives of others, we are putting Christ back onto the cross once more.

“For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God’s grace.” Galatians 5:4

When we reinstate rules and law in our congregations, we deny the work of the cross.

“I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down.” Galatians 2:18

The cross came to give us freedom from law. But also freedom to live by the Spirit.

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Galatians 2:20

Therefore we do not use our freedom to sin, but to live righteous and in a manner that pleases God.

And we leave room for others to build their own relationships with the Holy Spirit.

“Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don’t argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. For instance, one person believe it’s all right to eat anything But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who

don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. Who are you to condemn someone else's servants?" Romans 14:1-4

As soon as we tell others how to live, adding rule to their life, we take away life in the Spirit. May we never be a people who do this. May we always be a people who give room for God to build relationships with others as he sees fit, and in accordance with each person's faith.

"Blessed are those who don't feel guilty for doing something they have decided is right. But if you have doubts about whether or not you eat something, you are sinning if you go ahead and do it. For you are not following your convictions. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning." Romans 14:22-23

We are not to be the Holy Spirit in each others lives, rather, we walk alongside each other in grace and room to grow our own convictions.

"You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, 'Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!?' Such rules are mere human teaching about things that deteriorate when we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong self devotion, pious self-denial, and sever bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires." Colossians 2:20-23

"Timothy, guard what God has entrusted to you. Avoid godless, foolish discussions with those who oppose you with their so-called knowledge. Some people have wandered from the faith by following such nonsense. May God's grace be with you all." 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Rather, walk in a way that puts all law to shame.

"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Make allowance for each others faults, and forgive anyone who offends you... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts." Colossians 3:12-15

Volume Sixteen: Grown Up

There are numerous ways that we gauge the person of Christ. We look at the things of the Spirit and ask things like, "Does this person have an anointing of God?"

What are the fruits of this persons ministry? Are others encouraged and empowered by this person? Is the word of God preached with understanding given by the Holy Spirit?

It is very easy in the church to look only at the anointing of the Spirit, to gauge the maturity of the person. But we perceive that anointing is only one piece of our walk with

God and of our new nature in Christ.

Anointing is only one part of our ministry and influence on this earth. In the church we tend to believe that the anointing of God is an endorsement of our character. But this simply isn't so. What we miss, is that God anoints, because God anoints.

We read in the Old Testament of Samson, who was mightily anointed by God. He had great strength and performed many miraculous events, and yet we also read that he was a womanizer, and lacked a depth of character.

Read Judges 14-16 for the full story.

Samson plainly shows us that God anoints because God anoints, not because we are all good and fine.

It is quite possible, after all, to have a profound anointing of God over our ministries, but to be lacking in character, in emotional health, and in leadership ability.

The anointing of God, does not ensure that we have good character, or holiness, or a gracious ability with people. The anointing of God does not mean that we are approved in everything we are doing, the ways we carry on 'church', the means by which we make money, or the doctrine that comes from our pulpits.

The anointing of God comes because of who God is. Not because of who we are.

“But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvellous grace. Then it pleased him to reveal his Son to me so that I would proclaim the Good News about Jesus.” Galatians 1:15

And we read that at the end times when we stand before God, that there will be those who claim to have access to heaven because they did miraculous works. But that God will say to them, 'I never knew you.'

“On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name. But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’” Matthew 7:22

Let me suggest that there are four pillars of our inner beings, that hold so to speak, the spiritual works and the anointing of our lives. They are:

- Character Development,
- Emotional Maturity
- Spiritual Freedom
- Leadership Ability

All of these must be looked for and worked towards. None of these happen automatically in our lives.

It is quite possible to know Jesus Christ and to be anointed in the Spirit and to lack in Character Development.

It is quite possible to walk in signs and wonders and to be emotionally immature.
It is quite possible to preach amazing sermons and have little wisdom or leadership ability.
And it is quite possible to pray prayers over others, and yet have little spiritual freedom oneself.

The evident anointing of the Spirit does not mean that we are mature and healthy. The evident anointing of the Spirit means that God is gracious and he anoints because he is God.

It is our responsibility to go after health and maturity, to learn how to be good leaders, to increase in character strengths and in integrity and holiness.

“We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” Romans 5:3-5

While God is the one who anoints, it is up to us to Grow-Up into that anointing.

And we do this by becoming people of character and of integrity. We learn honesty and reject lies and manipulations. We learn to trust God and refuse to ‘make our own way’. We increase in wisdom and come to understand how much we still have to learn.

**“Until the time came to fulfill his dreams, the LORD tested Joseph’s character.”
Psalm 105:19**

We grow-up by seeking emotional health and maturity. We learn to become responsible for our feelings and for our frustrations. We do not put our emotional needs onto others, expecting others to fix our bad spots. We learn to be gracious through frustration, We get help to deal with our past problems, and we learn to honor our little girl or boy and the hurts and harms that came to us as children.

“When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.” I Corinthians 13:11

To grow in Spiritual Freedom we look to the Lord for help with our selfishness, our hatred, our anger, and a host of other things. We also look to the body of Christ. Everything that leads to life and Godliness works out through the Body of Christ. We cannot be free by ourselves. And those who live in a way that excludes others, will never be completely free.

So we learn to ask others to pray for us. We confess our sins to one another. We live authentically and honestly before all peoples. And we allow the deep work of the cross of Christ to circumcise our hearts.

“Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” James 5:6

And we enter into specific training and learning about being leaders. We find mentors and those whose lives we want to learn from. We take instruction and correction. We welcome feed-back on how we are doing. And we live a life of learning and seeking more of God and how to be like him as we lead.

“And Solomon, my son, learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately. Worship and serve him with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the LORD sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you seek him, you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.” 1 Chronicles 28:9

And as we invest in these pillars of our inner being, we become a people who are ready and able to carry the great works of the Lord and the anointing he calls us to. Before these sorts of works of Character, and Emotions, our Spiritual Self and as Leaders, we are not really ready. Although, in the mercy of God, he continues to anoint us and to reveal himself through us. Because of who he is, not because of who we are.

“And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires. In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God’s promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:4-8

Volume Seventeen: Prophetic Lives

In Job 9:33 we read, **“If only there were a mediator between us, someone who could bring us together.”**

Job had been talking about the utter lost-ness of his position. That no matter how much he tried, no matter how well he kept the law, no matter how perfect he could manage to live (and he did live an innocent life before God), it didn’t bridge that gap between him and God. We find Job’s heart crying out for a mediator between himself and God.

Read all of Job 9.

What is so amazing is that Job had lost everything a person could possibly lose. His family was completely gone, his business and all of his finances had been completely destroyed and then finally he lost his health as well.

And in the midst of this he desired to draw near to God. He wasn’t rejecting God or angry with God. Rather, he looked to see how he might draw near to God in the very midst of his pain and sorrow.

We see in Job's life a type of prophetic authority that embodied in his life a specific message of God. In his pain he speaks prophetically about a Savior to come. Many, many years later Christ would indeed be that mediator that Job so longed for.

In Job's struggle despite doing everything right, we are privileged to see a message and prophetic work that is stronger than words. This message of our desperate need for a Savior is poured through the very life of Job and was in fact proven-up in his responses in the midst.

Our own lives can also carry prophetic messages, that something of God that shows through and speaks loud and clear of God in some way.

This was the way with many of the prophets of the Old Testament.

In Hosea 1:2 we find Hosea instructed by the Lord to carry out a message of God through his very life.

Then the Lord said to me, "Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the Lord still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them." Hosea 1:2

Ezekiel also acted out a message of God. This was his prophetic assignment:

"Now lie on your left side and place the sins of Israel on yourself. You are to bear their sins for the number of days you lie there on your side. I am requiring you to bear Israel's sin for 390 days – one day for each year of their sin. After that, turn over and lie on your right side for 40 days – one day for each year of Judah's sin." Ezekiel 4:4-6

These are strange assignments. They don't really make sense and they go against our better judgements. The lesson of Job's life is the same.

Job revealed a heart's automatic response to God in the hardest of times. Even though life became inconceivably broken and devastated he responded authentically and genuinely toward God. And in this he carried a prophetic message. He revealed a part of God that was given to him to reveal.

This is the same of others throughout scripture. Read about:

- **Daniel – Daniel chapters 1-9**
- **Esther – the book of Esther**
- **Noah – Genesis 6**

They lived lives in the day to day, the experience of such, that would seem confusing and certainly not of God.

Our lives are often the same. It takes faith to look to God in the difficulties and the unexpected. It takes faith to open up the camera lens on our lives so that we can see the big picture.

"And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we

know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.” Romans 5:4-6

It takes living a life that doesn't always make sense and a courage to find and have this kind of life that carries a unique expression of God.

Walking with the Spirit means that we are open to things beyond ourselves. That we exhibit wisdom in the face of the unaccountable. And that we do not ascribe to Satan what is of God.

“...but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven. This is a sin with eternal consequences.” Mark 3:29

When we walk our days in genuine affection for the Lord, when we walk in obedience to the leading of the Spirit and when we worship the Lord regardless of our days, we have a recipe for carrying out that unique prophetic message that is ours to bear.

Thing is, walking with God in an intuitive fashion is a life lived beyond our understanding and beyond what we can make happen.

The prophetic messages of our lives happen when we simply give over our life to him. Total and complete surrender has the Lord's finger in the mix of our days, taking what feels oh so very ordinary to what is completely extraordinary.

Praise be to our Lord and King.

“Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heaven! Praise him for his mighty works; praise his unequalled greatness! Praise him with a blast of the ram's horn; praise him with the lyre and harp!” Psalm 150

“God we ask today for eyes that see your mix in our days. We ask for understanding and wisdom from you. Most of all we ask for courage to walk as you would have us walk, and for patience and understanding and a vision that sees beyond our own experiences. We invite you Jesus into our very lives. We invite you Holy Spirit to refresh us and guide us. Thank-You God.”

Volume Eighteen: Life

Today is a new day. It is a day of expectation and a holy hush about all that will take place.

There is excitement in heaven over this day and every day. For every single day is a gift.

“Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!” Genesis 1:31

Life is something to be celebrated, welcomed and fully enjoyed. Like a savory meal or a cool drink on a hot day, like a beautiful flower in the midst of a dull landscape and like the rainbow in the sky after a storm, every single day is to be relished and enjoyed to the full.

Too often in this life we get stuck on all the bad and wrong of the world. We take on a viewpoint of judgment and condemnation. The problem with this is that our own hearts become dirty.

**“So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.”
Romans 14:10**

When we begin to carry a spirit of condemnation, we ourselves come under judgment, and life loses its flavor and its joy.

But this was never the way it was meant to be. Life is meant to be a joy and a delight.

We find this joy by walking closely with the Lord's heart. By standing tucked into God's heart we find companionship, we find compassion, we find camaraderie and life.

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your hearts desires.” Psalm 37:4

When we bring him our dirty hearts, when we stand open about our jumbled thoughts, as we are honest about our worries and our fears, the breath of God sweeps into these places within our being bringing light and life.

“Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!” Psalm 32:2

Offering our worst to God, he takes all of it and transforms it into something new and fresh. The disappointments of our lives turn into encouragement for others. The heartache of loss and sorrow become reservoirs of living water for others.

“I trust in you for salvation, O Lord!” Genesis 49:18

Everything about who we are, about our past life, about our present and as we go forward into our future, all comes together into one mighty act of praise before our God.

God wants to leverage your life for the Kingdom of God. God has made a way for you through Jesus, to enter into the presence of The King and to be welcomed and accepted and loved on.

And the Holy Spirit stands at the ready to help and assist and to enter into the passions laid upon your heart. As Paul in the book of Romans declares,

“I bring you the Good News so that I might present you as an acceptable offering to God, made holy by the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:16

Go after God and we find life abundant and magnificent.

Sure we will have sorrow and trouble. A lot of it too. Yet even sorrow and trouble can be taken and offered to God as a sacrifice of praise. In this God is exalted and we find ourselves lifted from the hard places of our hearts.

And as we read of Jehoiachin in 2 Kings we are given a place at the Kings table,

“He supplied Jehoiachin with new clothes to replace his prison garb and allowed him to dine in the King’s presence for the rest of his life.” 2 Kings 25:29

“Thank-You God that you have entered into our life so that we can celebrate living alongside you. May we never reject life. May we never forget how wonderful it is to be alive. Thank-you for life. Teach us this day to see life as you see it. May we have your eyes, your heart, your spirit. We welcome you Jesus. We invite you Holy Spirit. We love you Father God. Reign in us.”

Volume 19: The Great Expectation

It’s that time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6

It is soon Christmas. We’ve all been getting ready. Shopping. Decorating. Meals with Friends and Families. Expecting.

And what is all this expecting about? Why do we expect at Christmas?

Because Christmas is the story of the one great expectation, the expectation of a baby born over 2000 years ago.

This story of Christ at Christmas is a simple one. It goes like this.

Long ago the world was created out of the loving heart and hand of God the Father. A God who wanted relationship, friendship, partnership with others who could love back, who could understand back, who could relate right back at him. That’s when we came on the scene, made to be friends with God.

But stuff got in the way. Lies. Pride. Selfishness. Fear. Blaming... you know, the kind of stuff that can get between any relationship and mess it up big time.

The thing is, that God is so loving, honoring and good, that anything that smacks of non-love, non-honoring, and non-good offends him very deeply.

Offends in the same way as someone coming into your home and robbing from you, a co-worker spreading false and nasty rumors about you at work, a friend gossiping about you on facebook, or extended family that shares a meal only to be belligerent and rude.

We all have things that are offensive to us. Each one of us have limits on what we will put up with and the kinds of people we will do life with. We each have particular priorities and values that must be respected in order for relationship to happen. And so does God.

Now the 'stuff' that came between God and the first human beings is the same kind of stuff that comes between us and God today. You see, we carry the blood of the generations before us... right back to the beginning of time, we carry offence-blood within us. Meaning, we can never get away from the tendency to pride and selfishness, to fear and blaming, and more. You know what I mean.

We've all got it.

“And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't.” Romans 7:18

Not a lot different than having Uncle's genius for mechanical things, or Great Aunt's artistic flair, or Great, Great-Grandma's gifting for... we all carry the blood-genes of those gone before, the stuff we want, and quite often the stuff we don't want as well.

Because we carry this offence-blood in us, God could not and cannot have relationship with us, nor us with Him. Because we carry offence quite naturally, and because God does not, it is plain to see the difficulty towards relationship.

Imagine the person that rubs you the wrong way the most, that is so offensive to you that you cannot eat a meal with him or her, perhaps you would never have that one in your home, perhaps you don't even speak to that one. This is because they are offensive to you in some way... offensiveness has caused a fracture and removed any possibility of real relationship.

Well, with the offence-blood that we all have, we have broken relationship with God. In his goodness, and honor, and purity he simply cannot eat with us, walk with us, or honor us.

And his heart breaks over this. He misses you and I. So he made a plan.

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’” Jeremiah 29:11

God decided that he would send a part of himself (the son part) to earth to be born as a baby, to grow into a man, to die in order to give his life-blood in exchange for our offence-blood, (because bad blood must be gotten rid of or we die).

Years and years ago they used leaches to suck out the bad blood from people... yet people died from this medical treatment. We know today that we cannot just get rid of our bad blood without replacing it. And we also know that if our blood needs changing over that we want clean blood, good blood, not the kind that makes us even more sick.

So if we've all got the same offence-blood, how can we help each other, how can we get life-blood into our lives and heart and spirits? We can't, we can't help ourselves, and we can't help each other. But God can. Jesus has the good blood. Kind blood. Gracious blood. Royal blood.

“And so dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of the blood of Jesus.” Hebrews 10:19

Christmas is the simple story of Jesus come to earth as a baby, making a way for us to have relationship with God once more. Since He had no offence-blood in him, he could give his life-blood

in exchange for our sick blood... extending to us a chance at a blood transfusion so to speak. The great exchange. A transfusion of the highest order.

“God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace.” 1 Peter 1:2

Jesus brought with him fresh blood for our old blood. And all we have to do to get this blood is say, “Sure, that would be great. My bloodline has far too much wrong with it, and though I’ve given it a good shot to make it better, I would be delighted to do this in community with God himself. Jesus, will you take my old dead-offence-blood and give me your new fresh-life-blood. Thank-You.”

And He does, just like that! And the spiritual part of who we are comes to life, we understand things we never understood before, we know deep peace that was previously elusive, we find purposes that were hidden. With fresh blood in our beings our eyes see clearer, our ears hear better, our legs walk stronger, and our hearts are lighter and freer.

“And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.” Romans 5:9

And we find we can walk with God, talk with God, sup with God, and He with us.

This is the story of Christmas. It all started with a little baby boy born in Bethlehem. It is called the Good News Story. It is why we celebrate. Pretty simple to see why.

“So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends with God.” Romans 5:11

Expectation that does not disappoint!

Volume Twenty: Our Journey

This journey of walking with God is not always smooth. We experience a lot of hurdles and bumps in the road.

There are times of confusion and disappointment. There are times of frustration and upset.

These are really normal. They are part of our experience as human beings.

Sometimes, especially when we are young in the Lord, we expect God to make everything great.

We think that if we walk with God then everything will go how we want it to go.

But this is rarely the case. Using God in this way simply reveals us as children and God as something we would like to use.

God does not fix everything for us. And the path he has us walk is not always smooth. It is how we learn after all and how we come to rely on him.

“Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.” Psalm 23:4

As we walk with God there are a few things we can do to come to greater understanding of God’s leading and guiding of us.

I. One is to have a bigger perspective than normal. With God we are able to step back from our own experience and lives and look at things from God’s angle.

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts”, says the Lord, “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.” Isaiah 55:8

How does he see this situation? How might God be leading me through this difficulty?

What might I learn from this?

“Joyful are those you discipline, Lord, those you teach with your instructions.” Psalm 94:12

There is not one wasted experience or situation in the Kingdom of God.

Everything is for our benefit and for our development. God is continually growing us and shaping us so that we can reflect Him more accurately and come to understand how much we are loved.

2. The second thing is to allow options in our thinking. We need bigger thinking. Life

is not all one way or another. Often the Lord leads us in one way of thinking simply to get us to another spot.

God meets us where we are at and leads us from there. He knows that we cannot make leaps in growth or understanding.

“Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding” Isaiah 40:28

And so while we may think that ‘A’ is the answer, he knows that ‘F’ is really the solution. He takes us on journey’s of thought and practice to get us from ‘A’ (our thinking) to ‘F’ (his best solution).

This can be a disheartening journey. Often we don’t really understand where he is taking us.

But that is okay.

“Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser. Teach the righteous and they will learn even more.” Proverbs 9:9

While his leading is not a guarantee of our best wishes, he knows better than us what we need and is intent on getting us there.

God has our best interest at heart.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord, “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

3. In this process he tests us again and again by having us lay down our desires. Just like Abraham laying down his son’s life on the altar, we are tested the same.

Though we have good desires and pray for outcomes that will bring glory to God he sets up situations where time after time our motives are tested.

“Put me on trial, Lord, and cross-examine me. Test my motives and my heart.” Psalm 26:2

Do we really want prayers answered for Him or for us? Are we looking to the best interest of others, or of ourselves?

God brings hurdles and roadblocks to our lives to test us this way. For he knows that with the wrong motives everything will come to an end.

“Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, to find out whether or not you would obey his commands.” Deuteronomy 8:2

Our reasons for praying for this or for going after that must be refined and proven solid.

Only then is He glorified and do our lives have real satisfaction.

Through all of these things, 1) Learning to have bigger perspective, 2) Bigger thinking, and 3) Testing of our Motives, we mature and grow up.

Rather than little children who demand this or that, who cry out ‘But you said!’ we enter into a true partnership with the Lord.

“God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says, and he has invited you into partnership with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:9

We are wiser, we think differently, we pray differently, and we act differently. God is in the people development business. God is intent on growing us up into spiritual adults.

We welcome your growth in us Lord. Thank-You.