

Capturing God's Heart

Volumes 1 - 45



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

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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.” 1 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.

Volume Twenty-One: Scandalous Love

God's ways are not our ways.

It takes many years to really come to understand the heart of God.

Even though we have been given the Bible (God's love letter to mankind), we tend to read the Bible through our own cultures, the lies and hurts that have been laid on us through the years as well as our own developmental process.

So our understanding of God's ways are often inaccurate. We grow and move in understanding God in the same way we grow and understand ourselves and life.

When Jesus was on earth he met and spoke to people within their current understanding of life. God is still doing this today in and through and for all of us.

All of the stories of the Bible for instance, are told within the context of the time in which it was told and written. This means that to really understand the story's of the Bible, to understand God's heart, we must first understand the context.

Let's look at the story of the Prodigal Son for instance.

Take the time to read **Luke 15:11-32**.

Let's look at just one part of that story today. When those of us in the west read this story we do not understand the significance of the father running to greet the son in verse 20.

“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.” Luke 15:20

It is very easy for us in the west to skip over this, for in the west father's run towards and with and for their children all the time.

But in the east the culture is that fathers and important figures never run. In fact the more important the person the slower they walk.

When I was in Uganda I witnessed this very slow walking, and it helped me to understand the Bible and this story even more. Context is everything.

Here in this story, and for the people of that time, Jesus turned their expectations of God the Father upside down.

This was a shocking story that Jesus told.

For instance, not only did the father run to meet his son, but to do so he would have had to lift the hem of his robe that he was wearing.

This would have revealed his ankles. Something that was also never done at that time. And even today there are many cultures the same.

Yet essentially, Jesus was telling us through this story, that God loves us so much that he leaves off his 'importance' in order to run to meet us, he doesn't worry about what people 'might think' as he comes near, and that all 'correctness' and 'decency' is cast aside in his love for us.

How might this change how you view God today?

How might this change the way you interact with others?

Thing is, God does this all the time. God meets us within the context of our lives, and then shows himself so much different than what our understanding would allow.

The many people around us also have their own context of living. They have the culture, the expectations, the hurts of their lives as well as being in their own developmental process.

Learning from God's example, how might we meet people where they are?

How might we be shocking in our love for others?

How might we leaves off our 'importance' in order to run towards others?

How might we cast aside the worry of what people 'might think' in order to come near?

And how might we choose something even better than 'correctness' and 'decency' as we seek to love others?

Simply put, are we able to put aside our ideas about life so that we can meet people where they are at, in the context of their lives?

Context is everything. By understanding context we can meet people in a way that our rules and our expectations will never manage.

“This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another.” Zechariah 7:9

Like God we enter into service of others. We ministers to hearts and lives in unique and possible frowned upon ways.

**“Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.”
Romans 3:24**

All I have to say is to be bold in this. Meet others where they are at. Love them without your agenda of changing them or making them 'better'.

“We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love.” 2 Corinthians 6:6

Remember the parable of the father and the son – the father ran towards the son even before he knew if his son was sorry or not or wanting to change or not. He went towards him just because he loved him.

But that we would be the same.

It is not our job to fix people. It is not our job to change people. It is our job to love people. To express our own passionate gladness of who they are. The Father running towards his son reveals no agenda except to love.

“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Oh that we might have the same freedom of heart and spirit.

“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” 2 Corinthians 3:17

As we meet others in the context of their lives, we live from compassion and gladness and we are all simply changed.

Volume Twenty-Two: Faith

I’ve had a request to write about Faith. When I think about faith I think about our hearts.

The core of our lives comes from our hearts. Our hearts experience many things. It is with our hearts that we feel and decide and go forward in life.

It is also in our hearts that we find darkness and lies and fear.

In essence life springs from our hearts. We read, **“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” Proverbs 4:23**

Every part of our lives is an outworking of our hearts. It is why it is so important that we get our hearts right with God. That we align our hearts with God’s heart.

The Psalmist says it well, **“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.” Psalms 119:2**

It is in pretence that we come to God with only part of our hearts. For we are told over and over that to really walk with God we must do so with our Whole Hearts.

In fact, in Mark 12:33 we are told that even when we make sacrifice and offerings if these things are not done in whole-hearted love for the Lord they mean nothing.

“And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Mark 12:33

Earlier in this same chapter of Mark we read that the greatest commandment of all is,

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Mark 12:30

Sometimes when we have known about God for a long time, we can think that to bring a part of ourselves is okay and that we can get away with a half-hearted life. But this doesn’t work.

And so we also find in the Bible many promises of God to help us with our hearts. For instance in Jeremiah we read this,

“I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” Jeremiah 24:7

Faith then is simply giving over our whole hearts to God, accepting the love of Jesus Christ to change our hearts, and then living out the truths about God through our hearts and lives.

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

In Ezekiel we read a great verse and another amazing promise from God,

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Ezekiel 11:19

What we find is that we give God our whole heart and then God takes care of our whole heart.

We ourselves cannot change our own hearts. There are parts of our own hearts that we cannot even access and do not even know about. But God does. And so it is God who takes on the care of our hearts when we invite and accept and live in the life of Jesus Christ given over for us.

And in **Romans** we find more of God’s promise for us,

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:26-28

Because God can take all of our lives, the good and the bad, we offer up to the Lord all of our lives. Even the bad things, even the sad things, even our broken places and our failures are used by God for good when we give them over to the Lord.

So we simply bring God all of us. We do not hide any parts of our hearts. We do not need to hide in fear or pretend that we are something we are not. Rather we come in honesty and openness and with our whole hearts.

And when we do this we will find that God is big enough for all of our lives and our hearts.

“God we come to you today in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We acknowledge you as Lord and Saviour of our lives. We say yes and amen to your work in our hearts. We thank-you.

Today we bring to you the things we have been afraid to bring to you. We bring you our bitterness, we bring you our hatreds, we bring you our fears and our worries.

We declare our trust in you God and declare your love for our hearts. Thank-you Jesus for dying for our hearts, for our lives, and being the one who carries all our darkness and the evil in our hearts.

We give you our whole hearts today. Amen”

May you be encouraged today to not keep any parts of your hearts from God. For God passionately loves you and will make you whole and strong from the depths of your heart.

**“I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise.”
Psalm 138:1**

Volume Twenty-Three: In Weakness

It is hard being a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For within the role is the dynamic of all of God and then all of who we are.

All of God are the miracles and the signs and the wonders.

All of us are the aches and pains and the loss and the sorrow that we each personally have.

We preach healing and we experience sickness ourselves.

We declare healthy lives and we struggle with estranged relationships.

We teach and lead others to Christ and then can barely find him for ourselves.

I am reminded of Elijah in the book of I Kings chapters 18 & 19.

Elijah was a mighty man of God. He walked in obedience and risked his life time and again to bring the word of the Lord.

For instance, in I Kings 18 we find him battling it out with the priests of Baal with a mighty result,

“Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench!” I Kings 18:38

A great work of the Lord to be followed by another miracle (Read I Kings 18:41-44) and then special strength,

“Then the Lord gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab’s chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.” I Kings 18:46

All of this simply shows the Holy Spirit pouring through Elijah. As God and Elijah worked as one, mighty miracles took place and a great witness of the Lord’s power was established.

And then that particular work was over and Elijah went off into the wilderness and we read,

“I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.” I Kings 19:4

After the great works of the Lord Elijah finds himself despondent and oh so very human. He is dejected and tired, to the point of wanting the Lord to take him.

Don’t we all feel this in our persons? After a work of God pouring through us we are simply reminded of our humanity and the frailty of our hearts and minds and lives.

Praying healing over a crowd, speaking God’s heart to your congregation, visiting the sick and the down-trodden, all this and more carries a mark of God upon it, and when the work ceases for a time we must simply rest.

I suggest that the exhaustion after God’s work is simply very normal. It is something we can in fact expect. Always remembering that in that exhausted place the Lord cares for us.

“Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!”⁶ He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

⁷ Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”

⁸ So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he came to a cave, where he spent the night.” I Kings 19:5-9

Ministering the Lord to others is not about us being larger than life. It is about the extraordinary of God stirring through our very ordinary lives.

If we expect to be extraordinary, we will be disappointed and disillusioned.

No, rather it is our God who is extraordinary. And in fact, when we feel very human, we can be sure we have just encountered our living God.

For it is the contrast of us and God that reminds us of our weakness.

The good news is that where we know we are weak there the Lord is strong indeed.

Time and again we find in the Bible promises and hope for those who are weak:

“He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.” Isaiah 40:29

Paul himself said this, **“Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.⁹ Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 Corinthians 12:8-10**

In all this we come to find that there is nothing to fear in weakness.

We find that our humanity and the frailty of being human is exactly what God wants to harness for his Kingdom.

When we know our weakness, when we feel our humanity, that is when we depend on God more than ever before, and that is when there is more room for God to work.

And through it all, the hardships, the deprivations, the sacrifice we find as the Psalmist did,

“My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.” Psalm 73:26

Be strong in the Lord today, as you bring him your weakness. Allow the Spirit to inhabit all of your life and simply be blessed today.

Volume Twenty-Four: A Long Life

The Bible speaks many things about living a life unto God and when we do this the good fruit we experience.

Today I’m outlining just five principles that lead towards a long and prosperous life.

I. HONORING THE ELDERLY

We will begin where the Bible begins, with one of the Ten Commandments given to Moses for the People of Israel. In Exodus we have record of the Ten Commandments with the fifth commandment,

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Exodus 20:12

In Ephesians 6:1-3 we find this commandment repeated and noted as the first commandment with a promise.

We find that honoring our parents is critical to our future satisfaction with life for honor is of God. God honors all individuals, and there is a special honor for those who have lived life before us.

The essence of this command ties into the law of sowing and reaping. For instance,

“The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.” Galatians 6:8

The law of sowing and reaping determines that when we sow (plant) honor, we will reap (receive) honor ourselves one day.

While we may in our flesh want to ignore our parents, despise the elderly and simply get on with our lives, we are told that this does not please the Lord. Dishonor does not work in the Kingdom of God.

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” Galatians 6:7

Learning to reap unto the Lord begins as we grow a deep respect for the Lord.

2. DEEP RESPECT FOR THE LORD

It is our honor of others that shows whether we have a deep respect for the Lord, or as it is said in Psalms 128, as one who fears the Lord.

“Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.” Psalm 128:1-2

A fear of the Lord is all about understanding that one day we will stand before God and answer for our life. This is not something to be afraid of, so much as something to understand and realize with much sober mindedness.

The fear of the Lord spurs us on to live a life pleasing to God, a life that is ordered around the Lord's principles and heart. What God loves we love, what hurts God's heart we stay away from.

In a very simple way it is the same deep respect that we would give to a family member, a good friend and our marriage partner.

It is about living in such a way that we do not purposefully break fellowship with our Lord.

A fear of God compels us to make good decisions, to weigh choices carefully and to walk in honor of our Lord.

When we do this we will **“be blessed, and it shall be well with you”**

3. INTEGRITY AND TRUTHFULNESS

Our deep respect for the Lord begins to show up in our speech and the attitudes of our hearts. God is all about integrity and truthfulness.

“Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous? Then keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies! Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace and work to maintain it.” Psalms 34:12-14

God asks here, ‘Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous?’ Then here is what you do:

- do not speak evil
- do not tell lies
- refuse to participate in evil
- be a peacemaker

Peacemaking comes into this conversation because where there is evil there is no peace.

Where we tell lies we cause trouble for ourselves and for others. And when we speak evil we agree with the enemy and not God.

God has taken the initiative to overcome evil with good, and we are called to do the same.

This is the way to a **“long and prosperous life”**.

4. OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD

All of these things so far, are the very ways we are to obey God. Obedience is not often about what we do and where we are going. While our physical choices are certainly an element of obedience, the core of following the Lord is:

- to live in a manner where our hearts are 1. Honoring our parents and the elderly.
- where we have a 2. Deep respect and holy fear of God
- where we 3. Walk in integrity and truthfulness

***“But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’”
Jeremiah 7:23***

Walking in God's ways is not about the letter of the law, but rather in the spirit of the law and the change that must come to our hearts. When we do not pay attention to what is important to God and go our own way, this is what we experience,

“But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.” Jeremiah 7:24

The good news is, that our lack of obedience, our inability to hear God's heart, our lack of honor and the lies we live and the truths we avoid, can all be confessed and renounced.

We bring ourselves to the cross of Christ and we find healing and wholeness.

While we know how to live, we are unable to live it. In and of ourselves we will violate every single one of these principles.

This is why Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead. To become our righteousness.

5. TRUSTING ON CHRIST FOR OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” Psalm 23:3

It is the work of Jesus Christ that saves us, that makes us holy, and that restores us unto righteousness (right living). It is Christ that we serve.

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5

“Jesus we welcome you into our lives today in a new and fresh way. Where we have dishonored our parents and the elderly around us, please show us honor, teach us to honor, may we have new habits of honor.

Where we have not respected you or sought your ways, we ask that you would show us who you are in a fresh way. Enable our hearts to understand your might and your holiness. May we learn a holy fear of who you are, and may we not disregard the amazing opportunity and invitation to do life alongside your ways.

The times we have operated out of falseness and in lies, where we have lacked integrity and truthfulness in our dealings with others, we bring ourselves to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We lay down our dishonesty today and renounce it in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Build in us new sensitivity to truthfulness and honesty. May we not manipulate or lie to get our own way. But rather may we trust you with our lives as we live in honesty.

And where we have heard your voice and felt your compelling on our lives, but have not taken action, where we have not obeyed we simply bow to you today. We are sorry. Restore to us the ability to walk with you, to hear your voice clearly and to follow you. May we simply be obedient people, those who show the heart of you in everything we do, the ways we talk and the ways we love others.

In all this, we declare our dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our salvation and the one who makes possible our life unto God. Jesus we thank-you today for making a way for us to walk with our God. Holy

Spirit, please breath through our hearts and thoughts and lives today. We invite you. With all glory and honor to God and God alone, amen and amen.”

Volume Twenty-Five: Honest Prayers

We find intimacy with our Lord through prayer, and yet for many of us we are unsure how to pray. We worry that we are not saying the right words. We may think that the burden of prayer lies with us. We may not understand how conversational prayer works.

While we do not have time for a full study of prayer here, we will look at a primary principle of prayer: – Come before the Lord with a commitment to honesty -

“Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.” Psalm 51:6

Opening our inner being before the Lord is much of what prayer is about. How can we expect intimacy with God if we are pretending deep within ourselves?

Admitting to our own thoughts and desires in quiet before the Lord, breaks down the barriers between us and him.

We need not worry about having our lives in good order first, for God knows more than us how unholy our inner person is. Our part is to admit and acknowledge all that is not okay.

Jeremiah asked, **“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (17:9)** and the answer is, God knows.

It is therefore best to come before the Lord without pretence. In fact, we find some pretty strong language about how God feels about pretence and hypocrisy.

**“I hate all your show and pretence—
the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.” Amos 5:21**

Pretence and hypocrisy are the difference between our outer lives before the Lord (and others) and our inner hearts. To walk with God we must put aside our pretending and simply come in honesty and truth before the Lord.

King David who wrote many of the Psalms is our master teacher in coming before the Lord in all honesty of heart and mind. Consider this passage,

“O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? how long will my enemy have the upper hand?” Psalm 13:1-2

Haven't we all wondered at times where God is? Well, David wasn't afraid to say this to God. He knew that God was big enough for his doubts and his fears and he brought his whole heart to the Lord. He refused pretence (pretending) and chose honesty. David later gave this advice to his son Solomon,

““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.” I Chronicles 28:9

Every relationship is built on honesty and trust. It is no different with God and us. In fact, God also works at intimacy with his people. In John we find Jesus telling us this very thing,

“I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.” John 15:15

In fact, in Amos we find this amazing statement,

“Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7

God reveals himself to us, and invites us to reveal ourselves to him.

In the midst of our honesty before God, when we take courage to speak what we are thinking and feeling, we come to find the peace of God stealing into our hearts.

David's cry to God in Psalm 13 concludes this way,

**“But I trust in your unfailing love.
I will rejoice because you have rescued me.
I will sing to the Lord
because he is good to me.” Psalm 13:5-6**

And as we read many of the Psalms we find this same progression again and again.

1. God I'm really having trouble here
2. Where are you?
3. Help me!
4. I commit to your goodness
5. Thank-you for being my God

We start out blaming God and throwing our hurts and accusations before him, and then, once we have spoken our minds we find the Spirit of God softly coming alongside, validating and putting an arm so to speak around our hearts; we know we have been heard.

In fact, we are told,

“the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.” Romans 8:26

Not only does God hear our prayers, but he joins in with our prayers and in fact intercedes for us in an even deeper way than what we can do ourselves. Our Holy Spirit advocates on our behalf as we cry out to God.

We become partners with the God-head as we pray. Jesus himself has entered into our struggles and has experienced all of what it is to be human,

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16

Amen and amen.

Come to the Lord in the honesty of your heart today. Speak your mind and heart. Welcome dialogue. Listen for what the Spirit is saying to you. Allow validation. Release anger. Accept grace and peace and comfort.

Your life will be infused with greater courage and trust as you go forward with the Lord in this way, day by day. Be blessed.

Volume Twenty-Six: A Glad Heart

2 Corinthians 9:7 reads, **“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

It is the cheerful heart that intrigues me.

While this verse speaks about money and our tithes and offerings, I wonder how might the ‘glad heart’ principle apply to the rest of our life?

It occurs to me that there are three things that the principle of a glad heart guide us in:

I. IT CHALLENGES US TO CHECK OUR HEARTS.

What are we believing and feeling about any given situation, and how might we adjust our attitude in order to find and express a gladness of heart?

It takes maturity to overlook the assumptions, expectations, and ignorance of others. But in order to give with a glad heart this is often what we must do. It is, after all, what God has done with us.

Despite our offensiveness and sin God rose above all that to give to us with a glad heart.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17

And while we are not God we can have the Lord’s help with our hearts at any time. The Psalmist cried out, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” Psalm 51:10**

While we cannot change the core of our hearts we can come in honesty before the Lord. It is honesty before the Lord that purifies and refines us.

While we cannot mandate another’s heart, we are to be responsible for our own. In this we find God working on our behalf.

“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13

The principle of a glad heart is highly personal. It is something for each of us to work through with the Lord for ourselves.

2. IT GUIDES OUR GIVING.

For many of us, generosity is a way of life. Yet, because of this there may be many who simply come to expect, and take for granted, this in us.

When expectation, without respect, is placed on us by another, our hearts alert us to this difficulty – our hearts are not able to be glad.

When we are unable to give gladly it is time to step back from giving. Perhaps we are burnt out. Perhaps we have been taken advantage of. Perhaps we feel compelled and manipulated.

Perhaps we intuit that our giving would end up with regret.

Here we are warned away from a generosity that would suck our life-force from us. If we cannot give gladly, it is better to not give at all.

In some instances gladness will return, other times not. What is inferred in **“each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** is honesty and integrity in our inner core.

Our decisions and our actions must clearly align with our hearts, otherwise we are living falsely. This doesn’t bless the Lord. And it doesn’t ultimately bless others.

We refuse to give under compulsion, or guilt, manipulation, not grudgingly or with regret.

We put boundaries against those who would dishonor us. We do not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of. We ensure an honesty in our giving. For we understand that it is our job to ensure we can remain in a gladness of heart.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” Proverbs 4:23

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;” Hebrews 12:13

Do what you are glad to be doing. Allow your heart to lead you in the activities and service you are to be about. There are many good things to do in this world, but which good thing makes you glad?

Go after that. Invest in that. For therein lies your passion and the calling of your life. Here is where there is honest living for you, and true blessing towards those you serve.

“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” 2 Corinthians 8:12

Keeping in mind that we do this to the extent of what we have. While many may demand and expect of us much, we must always remember to give of what we have.

Do you have wisdom, perhaps money, expertise in crops, business savvy – a heart for school children, for other leaders, for women, for education, for trades and technical skills... what is your heart for? Work from there.

3. IT REMINDS US TO NOT BECOME A WEIGHT ON OTHERS.

When others cannot engage with us gladly, then we know something is off. The lack of gladness in others reminds us to back off, to fix our approach, to reckon what might be wrong, and to give full respect for the generosity of others towards us.

We can watch for this gladness in others in a variety of situations.

While applying to our financial giving, it also applies to any situation, from the gifts we give, to help with chores around the house, and even to sexual intimacy in marriage.

I once heard it taught to men how to recognize the willingness of their woman in regards to sexual intimacy – it was this: *Look for enthusiasm*. When a woman responds with enthusiasm, know that she wants sex as much as you. Without enthusiasm, you are bordering on rape at worst, and blatant disregard at best.

Gladness of heart in the bedroom reveals the core of a marital relationship. Gladness of heart in the bedroom indicates the level of honor and respect in the relationship.

In addition to this example from marriage, consider how this applies to leadership. There are a number of verses throughout the Bible admonishing us to work in cooperation with our leaders, and I am convinced that gladness of heart is at the core of these requests.

“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” Hebrews 13:17

As a leader, a teacher, a mentor, when is it most amazing to lead?

When we can do so from a glad heart.

As people, we want to increase other's gladness. Leading is hard enough, there is no need to make it any harder. Take care not to erode the gift of gladness to those who are spending their lives on our behalf.

For as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, the point is so that mutual give and take, blessing and being blessed, can flow back and forth within the Christian community.

We give with a glad heart out of what we have, knowing that God is taking care of us just the same.

“Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.” 2 Corinthians 8:14

We cannot ever force another to have a glad heart. In fact, remaining in someone's face demanding their gifts in a gladness of heart, ensures a less glad heart.

In every area of life, pushing for what we want, means we get less of what we want. While perseverance is good it is always to be worked out in the context of relationship with each other. It does us no good to get what we want but to break fellowship along the way.

Gladness of heart ensures a right attitude as we give, and as we receive, and as we work and live and love alongside others.

When we invest in our own glad heart, respect the glad hearts of others around us, and when we refuse to diminish the glad hearts of others, we find a deep gladness for life itself.

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:15-17

Volume Twenty-Seven: Holy Spirit

In the Amplified Bible we find Jesus telling his disciples,

“But the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.” John 14:26

In a regular dictionary we find the following definitions of these adjectives describing our Holy Spirit:

1. **Comforter:** A person or thing that provides consolation
2. **Counselor:** A person trained to give guidance on personal, social, or psychological problems
3. **Helper:** a person who contributes to the fulfillment of a need or furtherance of an effort or purpose
4. **Intercessor:** (mediator) a negotiator who acts as a link between parties
5. **Advocate:** A person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy
6. **Strengtheners:** a device designed to provide additional strength
7. **Standby:** Readiness for duty or immediate deployment

Even in this simple way we can see the immediate kinds of help that the Spirit of God brings to us.

There is much to say about the Holy Spirit. Too much for this simple study, so let's look at just a few of the marks of the Holy Spirit, how we can recognize the Spirit of God in our lives.

The very first place where we find the Spirit is in our salvation. When we come to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are told that the Spirit seals us in him.

I. THE SPIRIT MARKS US AND SEALS US IN CHRIST:

**“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”
Ephesians 1:13-14**

This is important because when we first come to the Lord we are immature in our faith. Sometimes it takes years to mature and to grow to our full stature in Christ, and God understands this.

God knows that growth is a process and that while we go from immaturity to maturity, even in that process, we are marked as belonging to God by the Holy Spirit.

“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:25

Because of the intercession of the Spirit, one of the first ways that we experience the Holy Spirit is in the inner sanctum of our hearts. Paul in Romans gives this blessing:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

And it is in the inner experience of joy and peace and hope that we are assured of God’s presence in our lives. We all know that we cannot conjure these things on our own. Rather, joy and peace and hope are gifts from God and come to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And it is out of this joy and peace and hope that we are healed.

2. THE SPIRIT HEALS US:

Isaiah records it this way,

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.” Isaiah 61:1-3 (Read all of Isaiah 61)

Consider how the Psalmist describes it:

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” Psalm 30:11-12

God in his power and majesty and by the work of the Holy Spirit enters into the depths of our hearts with comfort and joy and dancing.

In the power of God we are given back celebration and worship. We are enabled to praise him and to experience in that praise a deep gladness of heart that transcends all that we know and understand.

I am convinced that when Peter says, **“always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” 1 Peter 3:15**, that we are to answer the basic question, “how has God made you glad?”

We might know all scripture, understand the ancient texts and languages, but if we do not know how the Lord has brought gladness to our hearts, if we do not know where our mourning has been turned to dancing, then perhaps we are missing an elemental component of walking with God.

If nothing else, know this day the impact and the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

It is from this touch of the Spirit to the depths of our hearts that we then walk in wisdom and understanding.

3. THE SPIRIT TEACHES US AND GIVES US WISDOM:

“And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13 (Read 1 Corinthians 6:6-16)

Life is complicated and fraught with confusion. It is therefore good to know that we do not have to do life on our own understanding. Rather we have access to the wisdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah in his foretelling of the coming of Christ said this,

“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:2-3a (Read 11:1-10)

We come to reverence in the Spirit of God. Our understanding is opened to the might and majesty of God and we are never the same. We learn obedience and how to walk in sync with the living God.

How God moves we move. What God is concerned about concerns us. The manner of compassion and grace of our Lord becomes our own. There is something different about those who walk in the Spirit. We find in Galatians,

“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

Our very manner of being takes on the mark of our Lord. In this we give tangible evidence to the Holy Spirit in our lives. This depth of the Spirit in our lives is important to God. Consider the words found in 1 Corinthians,

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

We may have good deeds, prophecy, knowledge, and even faith, but if we are not walking in the manner of the Holy Spirit, the place where our hearts reveal the fruit of the Spirit as

Galatians teaches us, then we are missing the greatest point of walking with God – change within our inner person.

Christ didn't die on the cross to get us to heaven. He died and rose again so that our entire life might be redeemed and restored to the original vision of God, and this begins with the infilling of the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit one to another.

I'll leave off with Peter's blessing:

“According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” 1 Peter 1:2

Volume Twenty-Eight: Repentance

There is a time for celebration and rejoicing and for worshiping God, and then there is a time for mourning and grieving and laying bare our deeds before the Lord.

Consider what James says,

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” James 4:8-10

Admitting that we have done wrong is one of the most freeing experiences. Repentance is deep intimacy with The Father.

Yet it is not a normal human response to admit wrongdoing. In fact, our natural response is to cover up and to hide our sins.

But think about it, when we cover up our sins we still have them with us.

They bury into our hearts and minds with the memory and emotions. We are never free of our sin when we harbour it in our selves.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” Proverbs 28:13

At the very beginning when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden we see this propensity to cover over our sin. We read,

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” Genesis 3:8

We have been hiding ourselves ever since.

“But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said,

“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” Genesis 3:9-12

Do you notice the excuses, the blaming, the rationalizations? Don't we all continue in sins of avoidance and fear, of shame and covering over?

The man blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent, and ever since we have been making excuses and blaming others. We have been unable to admit our wrong and have carried death as a result.

God saw this and understood the depths of the problem. Shame was coiled around us, guilt was heaped on our heads, and we were emotionally and psychologically unable to admit wrong. We are fearful of the exposure that confession requires.

Then in verse 21 we read, **“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” Genesis 3:21**

In one amazing act of grace, God, who made all things unto life, now kills an animal/s in order to provide a covering and to remove shame.

In a powerful prophetic act looking ahead to the cross, God takes on our sin and death so that we might be all that God originally intended.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21

God was committed to our covering and our keeping right from the start, and has since played that out through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Our sin is buried with

Christ when we accept his salvation and turn from our wrongs.

In fact, the blood covering of Christ is the only thing that truly covers our sin and washes it away.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

Imagine in your mind's eye the cross of Jesus Christ. And imagine the blood that fell from Christ onto the ground at the foot of that cross.

Imagine that you bring your sins and lay them down at the foot of the cross, and imagine that Christ's blood, as it soaks into the ground, takes your sin with it.

Burying the sin, washing the sin away, covering over the sin.

This is the work of Christ, not us. We cannot bury our own sin. We cannot cover over our own sin. Only Christ can do this.

When we try to cover over our own sin we simply become hardened of heart. In trying to keep our sin secret we build a wall between our self and God.

READ all of Psalm 32

If you think that you are above sin, consider this verse, **“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:23**

It is imperative that all of us, no matter our station or influence, allow repentance. The leaders amongst us should be the first on our knees before the Lord, the first to repent and to enter into a contrition of spirit before the Lord.

Let us never forget that, **“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” Psalms 34:18**

And that, **“As the scripture says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6**

We are given a conscience, a knowledge built into us, of right and wrong. And when we violate this sense of right and wrong we have only two choices.

One, we labor under the sin, trying to get free, cover it over ourselves, hide it, but then like anything that goes bad we are simply left with a poison in our hearts and minds. We are not free, we are caught. And there is a deep divide between ourselves and God.

There is a better way. Our second option is to confess our sins to God and each other.

““Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” Joel 2: 12-13

Bringing our sin out into the open allows the light of Christ to come upon it and us. And in the shift deep within our being as we bring our wrongs into the light, we find that we are given the gift of sorrow and grief and mourning. We come near to God in humility and repentance.

We grieve over our sin. We acknowledge it. We say, “I did this.” And without excuse or blame we simply stand before the living God.

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

Instead of trying to cover over our own wrongs, we find that God then covers over our wrong. Jesus (who already took it over 2000 years ago) takes our sin and washed us clean with his blood. Our wrongdoing is buried along with Christ’s sacrificial death and we are free.

**“I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah”
Psalm 32:5**

And in our acknowledgement we experience and really come to know that God is for us.

The Psalmist put it this way, **“But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, My glory, and the One who lifts my head.” Psalms 3:3**

God surrounds us and lifts us up. We come broken on our knees before him, and we find ourselves standing beside the Lord.

Repentance is the key to this sort of freedom. Repentance enables us to receive God’s grace.

Nothing else can do this. Without repentance we are simply stuck in our sin.

But with repentance we find life.

**“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...”
Isaiah 61:1**

With repentance we are rich in heart and mind. We find ourselves, as this verse declares of the Living Christ, our broken hearts are bound up, our captivity to sin is turned into liberty of life, and the prisons and bondage of guilt are opened and freed off of us.

As we accept and agree with the sacrifice of Christ, the forgiveness established on the cross over 2000 years ago becomes our own. Repentance is our hearts position to receive all the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Without repentance we are merely in contempt of the cross, and against the work of the Lord. But with repentance we find the habitation of God in our very lives and we receive his gladness throughout our whole life.

“For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” Isaiah 57:15

“God I come before you today in the name and the blood of my Lord Jesus Christ, bringing my sins (they are....) to the foot of your cross. These sins, my guilt, and my shame have weighed us down and crippled our hearts and minds.

We are tired of our sin and wrongdoing, and today we say, “No more” in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Today I declare enough is enough and I release my sins unto you God. We enter into a contrite heart and we ask for a deep repentance before you.

Leaving our sins at the foot of your cross, declaring them covered by the blood of the Lamb, they are washed away and cancelled by the power of our Living Lord Jesus Christ.

I take unto myself your salvation to every part of my being. We receive your grace and give praise, declaring all glory to you God. Amen”

Volume Twenty-Nine: Agreement

The basis for all of our spiritual work and authority is the principle of agreement.

The foundation of all our spiritual work and authority is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

In his death, burial, and resurrection, we have been given the keys to life in Christ, relationship with Father God, and the Kingdom of God on earth.

The key is agreement.

When we agree with the work done by Christ we come under the gifts of the cross and of his resurrection.

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:28

Without agreement we have nothing.

The power of agreement is laid out time and again throughout scripture.

Initially we are introduced to the principle of agreement through the Jewish laws that declared there must be two or more witnesses before a charge could be laid.

“This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” 2 Corinthians 13:1

Agreement amongst a few was necessary, and all that was needed, to go forward in matters of business, family, and village life.

Jesus Christ affirmed this and added to it the instruction of agreement in his name as that which would accomplish anything.

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” Matthew 18:19

Jesus could say this because he represented God the Father in his life and work on earth.

It is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all heaven and hell is moved.

“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

Acknowledging this, working under this, agreeing with this, is our only work. Everything of any value flows from the work of Jesus Christ.

“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” 2 John 1:9

As believers and ministers of the gospel our agreement begins with the work of Jesus Christ, and then continues on out and over others.

Agreeing with Jesus regarding our own being is powerful.

Agreeing with Jesus regarding others is world changing.

So we must ask, what does Jesus say about you and I?

To what are we agreeing?

1. First we agree that we need a saviour, that there is waywardness and sin in our lives and that we cannot be rid of these things on our own.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

2. Second we agree to the character and goodness of God. That no matter how it might seem to our natural eyes, that God is indeed good and worthy of our praise and allegiance.

“For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.” Psalm 33:4

3. Third we agree to God’s creation of us as sons and daughters of The King. Agreeing with this we embark on a journey of discovery, finding once more our place within the Kingdom.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” Romans 8:16

4. Fourth we agree to our value and worth and purpose within the Kingdom of God. All people are invaluable and esteemed by God and created for good things.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

5. Fifth we agree to the Father’s heart over humanity. We agree to the spirit of God that seeks all mankind and loves all people.

***“Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
1 Timothy 2:4***

6. Sixth we agree, and give our lives over as a testimony to the goodness and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Father God.

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:17

And as we work out our lives in agreement with the heart of God we find peace and joy, purpose and celebration, belonging and deep gladness.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

Regardless of our life circumstances we find God’s presence burrowing deep into our hearts and thoughts and understandings. And even in the midst of difficulty we find that God’s presence makes all the difference.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28

We are strengthened, given wisdom, made glad.

Agreeing to the heart of God, the work of Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is powerful.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20

Our lives are not the same.

We are transformed.

“Dear God, thank-you for sending your son Jesus Christ to be our salvation. We receive fully and completely the work of the cross into my life this day. We agree in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Kingdom of God in our lives. We say yes and amen to the love of the Father, the encouragement of the Spirit, and the covering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask this day for your favor and grace. Bless us with your peace, make our hearts glad, remove from us worry and strain, we give our whole hearts to you this day. Jesus Christ please come and live in every nook and cranny of our lives.

We thank-you, we love you, we worship you. We agree to your goodness, we agree to your salvation, we agree to your plan over our lives, we agree to life and we disagree with death from this day forward.

We welcome you Lord Jesus, Thank-you.”

Volume Thirty: Holiness

Holiness is the call of those who claim to know God.

Holiness is the work of the cross done first in our own lives.

Holiness is our personal proving ground before we head out with the gospel to others.

Before Christ we were enslaved to our flesh. Our hungers were focussed on our physical body and our heart sins. We lied, we cheated, we were licentious and gluttons.

It was easy to hate. It felt good to slander. We brought others low so we could feel big. We were consumed with how we could bring pleasure to ourselves.

Then we came to know Christ. The Spirit of the Living God moved into our own hearts and minds and we began to change. Even our bodies began to submit to holiness and our living God.

“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

No longer could we hate. To slander felt bad. We now knew that lying was wrong. And focussing on our own pleasure came with sorrow.

Holiness is the mark of the believer. It is an ability to live above the sins by which we once survived.

***“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”
1 Peter 2:1***

Holiness is given us by God. Holiness is received by us. Holiness is maintained and grown through an honest relationship between us and God.

Personally and intimately we bring our flesh thoughts and appetites to God. We acknowledge them before him. We do not hide our sin from God, rather we bring it out into the open.

God is big enough for this.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1

And as we bring sin out into the light it loses its hold on us. Sin withers in the light of Christ and we find new ability unto holiness.

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” 1 John 5:18

It is a matter of what we are feeding. Feed sin and our flesh and it will grow. Feed holiness and God's heart in us and that will grow.

“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.” 1 Corinthians 10:21

Which do you want to be growing?

It is not enough to just remove sin from our lives and habits, we must replace sin with something; we replace it with holiness.

But this is not easy. And in the shift from sin to holiness we come across our own inability and resulting sorrow. We find we are disgusted with ourselves. Who we want to be in the Lord is confounded by what our flesh wants in this world.

But this too we simply bring before God. We bring our flesh to the cross, relinquishing our desire to self-gratify, and we call upon the name of the Lord for the ability and the courage to follow hard after God.

“Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Psalm 32:2

In the beginning this is hard. Everything in us cries ‘no’, but as we commit unto God’s way, as we stand against our own licentiousness and greed these things begin to die and God in us begins to grow.

And over time it gets easier and easier. The choices you and I make every day are the small things that add up to big things. Living holy is the biggest way to be living.

Holiness requires restraint. Choosing to live unto God has us growing our strength unto right living.

But we must never forget that the power for this comes from God and from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and it is God we must choose and rely on each and every day.

And in Him we can do it – we can grow in holiness.

“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

Holiness requires a bigger picture than just today. Our flesh cries out to be satisfied today, but unto holiness and we put aside the urgency of today in service to eternity.

Holiness doesn’t live for now, it lives for eternity.

Holiness doesn’t live for ourselves, it lives for others.

Holiness is our investment in the Kingdom of God. Holiness is our agreement with the Kingdom of God.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-25

It is a manner of righteousness that honors God, that praises him through the choices we make, that proves him Lord in our lives.

And the farther we move into leadership and ministry the holier we must be. For where there is any 'flesh' in our manner of being, this is what the enemy can grab hold of.

Living in The Spirit and there is nothing for the enemy to grab. In the flesh we are destined to attack and confounding.

May we simply choose holiness today. In this we reveal our love for the Lord.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8

“God we simply come before you today confessing to this difficulty unto holiness. Sometimes we are worn down by the constant struggle. Sometimes we feel stuck in our own flesh. But today we acknowledge that you are bigger than our flesh. We agree and say ‘yes’ and ‘amen’ to your holiness through our beings.

We invite you to make us a holy people. We bring our flesh to the cross of Christ and we declare it this day crucified with Christ. In the power and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we say ‘no more!’ to sin and its hold over us. We say ‘Yes!’ to purity and truthfulness, integrity and honor.

May we honor you with our bodies, with our thoughts and with our choices. May we honor others as we honor you.

Thank-you Jesus for making a way for us. Without your death, burial and resurrection we would not have a way through our sin and suffering, but you have made a way, you are The Way, and we give you honor today and we claim the blood covering of our Lord Jesus Christ over us today. With all glory and honor to you God. Amen”

Volume 31 - Rules for Living

It is easy to want rules for living. Something that tells us “do this” and “don’t do that” removes us from the need to walk in true relationship with God. If we can just figure out what he wants then we simply have to follow a to-do list.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of The Kingdom is much more than what we are doing or not doing. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is about relationship, about nuance, about principles for living (not rules), and about our manner of being woven throughout everything.

If I was to give anyone rules for living the Christian life I would direct them to the book of Micah.

“O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you, to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

From what I can tell this sums up life in Christ.

So let's take a look at it's parts:

I. DO WHAT IS RIGHT

There are many things that are right. Notice here that we are not instructed to not do what is wrong. Rather the author directs us to the positive. By this it is reinforced that at any given time we all know what is right.

Our consciences tell us what is right. God has hard-wired into each and every human being this knowing system that alerts us to what is right.

We find a similar message in James.

“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”
James 4:17

This means that sin is a very personal thing. This verse takes us beyond the rules and law and brings us to the reality of conviction.

Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives in relationship and response to our walk with God. Convictions are the thoughts and compelling of the Spirit of God unto good works, kind words, faithful service, compassionate care, and more.

James makes it very clear that we must follow our convictions, and that to do anything less is in fact sin.

What is God calling you to do today? How might he be compelling you?

To what are you being invited into and are you responding positively or negatively?

This is the crux of 'Do What is Right'. Follow the Lord's compelling.

2. TO LOVE MERCY

Mercy understands that we are all the same in our inner being. Mercy gets it that the sins of others could be our very same sins. Mercy does not hold ourselves above others as though we are better than them.

No! Rather, mercy knows that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. We all stand at the same height before our God. All of us.

And mercy understands that to put ourselves above another is to refuse mercy to that person.

In Matthew we find this truth:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Matthew 5:7

Thing is, we always receive what we give out. We want to be merciful people. We want to live above the letter of the law and enter into the spirit of the law.

The letter of the law says we are all condemned. If we live under this we then come to think we can condemn others also. We begin to believe that the gospel of Christ is about condemnation. But it's not.

Rather, the Spirit of the law says that Christ came to do away with condemnation and to grant us grace and favour when we least deserved it. Living under this we find mercy and are then able to extend that same mercy to others.

In Exodus we find this mighty declaration of the character of God:

“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,” Exodus 34:6-7a

Here we find that the heart of God is about compassion, mercy, grace, steadfast love, faithfulness, and forgiveness.

This is the very same things we are called to walk in. This is to be the manner of our being as well.

In Matthew we also find this:

“As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector’s booth. “Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.

Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with such scum?”

When Jesus heard this, he said, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.” Then he added, “Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’ For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” Matthew 9:9-13 NLT

Notice at the start of the passage in Vs.9 we find Jesus’ invitation, **“Come follow me and be my disciple.”**

We might wonder what this means. What is it to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Well, the passage goes on to show us.

Jesus ate with tax collectors (a hated despicable people at the time) and with notorious sinners.

We realize, as we look at this passage and many others, that Jesus did not hold himself back from relationship with anyone. And the church leaders at the time were scandalized.

*Notice, Jesus was hated by the church leaders because he kept breaking all the rules:

1. He ate with sinners. **Matthew 9:10**
2. He let the adulterous woman go free. **John 8:2-11**
3. He didn't wash his hands before eating. **Matthew 15:2 + 20**
4. He healed on the sabbath. **Mark 3:1-6**
5. He worked on the sabbath. **Matthew 12:1-8**
6. He refused to come under their manipulative ways. **Matthew 21:24-27**
7. He spoke with Samaritans. **John 4:9**
8. He forgave sins. **Mark 2:5-11**
9. He let the sinful woman touch him. **Luke 7:37-38**

And the end of this passage in Matthew points out what the gospel is, ***"I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices."***

We are drawn down the core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What does it mean to become a disciple of Jesus Christ?

It is this: Mercy. Given to all. Freely.

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." John 3:17

To LOVE Mercy. Fall in love with mercy. Receive it unto ourselves. Give it away freely to all. This is the work of the Kingdom. This is what the Lord requires.

3. TO WALK HUMBLY WITH OUR GOD

In Luke we find some practical advice from Jesus regarding humility,

"When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: "When you are invited to a wedding feast, don't sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? The host will come and say, 'Give this person your seat.' Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table!"

"Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, 'Friend, we have a better place for you!' Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 14:7-11

Jesus is wisely advising all of us to never seek after our own honour, but to rather humble ourselves.

Presuming we are great we in fact will find ourselves brought low.

We are rather to live as Christ himself did. In Philippians we find this,

"You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. 7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human

**form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.”
Philippians 2:5-8**

And in 1st Peter we find,

**“And all of you, serve each other in humility, for “God opposes the proud but favors the humble.”
6 So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up
in honour.” 1 Peter 5:5b-6**

This verse, **“God opposes the proud.”** should bring us to our senses.

Are we getting this? Do we understand fully and completely that when we are proud (and we all start out this way) that God has no other option than to oppose us?

We may be doing the kingdom work, we may be honestly seeking after what is good and right, but listen and listen well: when we do this in a spirit of pride we are not under the covering of our God.

We are in our flesh.

And in our flesh we are opposed by God and in danger to attack of the enemy.

Humility rather, is of the Spirit, and here in the same manner of Jesus Christ we find we are 100% protected and covered and kept in the Lord.

We must lead in humility. We must humble ourselves or be humbled. We must put aside our pride or we will be opposed by God.

These are powerful and scary truths. One I pray you take to heart today.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ advances through us, or not, depending on how well we are acting out the gospel of Christ.

It does no good to be speaking it and then acting in a different manner.

Rather we go forward in relationship and ministry in the spirit by which Peter writes,

“Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8

What do Disciples know? They know that:

1. God loves them
2. Jesus covers over our wrong
3. The Holy Spirit is alongside us to lead, guide, comfort and convict.

Trust this in your own life, and you can trust this in others lives. Trust the work of the Lord in your own life and you will be able to trust the work of the Lord in other's lives.

Ministry takes on a whole new meaning as we simply learn to Do What is Right, To Love Mercy, and to Walk Humbly with Our God.

“God we come before you today confessing our need of you. We so like our rules and our guidelines, but God I see today that you in fact call me to relationship with you, not with your rules.

You are right, I do know what is right. May I grow in integrity as I commit to doing what is right. May I not push away that still small voice that compels me to do good things for others. May I not ignore your convictions unto compassion and tenderness and grace.

Teach me to love mercy. Enable me to accept your mercy. Please pour your mercy into me and burn away the stuff of condemnation. We are a people desperate for mercy, teach me to give mercy to others, and to become a person of mercy in all of my dealings. My pride I bring to you and I renounce this day in the name and blood of my Lord Jesus Christ. I confess

Father that I cannot remove pride from my own being. And I realize that pride has in fact blinded me to the depths of my pride. I don't even know how bad the problem is. So today I simply bring my whole self to you asking that you do away with my pride and that you teach me humility. Enable me to walk in sober reality of who I am. Please help me.

Thank-You Lord for your heart of justice, of mercy and of humility. Make my heart like your heart today and every day from here on out. I love you. I honour you. I bless you this day. In the name and the blood of my Lord Jesus Christ I simply declare Amen and Amen”

Volume 32 - Worship

Worship is an important part of our lives as believers. Each Sunday around the globe finds multitudes coming together in praise to our Lord.

But what if worship is more than singing and dancing before God? What if worship is intertwined throughout our lives and the manner of our hearts?

I propose that worship is much more than what we think it is; lets take a look and see.

I. THE WORK OF OUR HANDS

In Colossians we find,

“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (3:17)

The work of a craftsman, an artist, a gardener, a builder, is also a way to worship. There is no work that is more pious or sacred than any other work. All that we put our minds and efforts to accomplish is holy unto the Lord as we commit it to him and invite him into it.

Today, be grateful for the work of your hands and give it the honour it deserves, and allow it to usher you into the presence of God as worship.

Today, honour and celebrate the work of other's hands. In this way we also worship our Lord who has equipped each of us for beauty and excellence in everything we do.

2. TRUSTING GOD

The Psalmist writes,

“Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie! You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.” Psalm 40: 4-5

I suggest you read all of Psalm 40. It is a chapter thick with the presence of God when we remain in trust of him. This is of course always the challenge. How do we continue in trusting God when circumstances appear that we must do things on our own?

To remain steadfast and in trust of our God is also worship. It is the refusal to give up on the character and goodness of God in our lives. This will be tested time and again for trust is not easy to have. But for those who remain in him these ones prove their worship.

3. LEAVING REVENGE TO THE LORD

“The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken. Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.” Psalm 34: 15-22

When we are under attack from others we often want to cry out and

- defend our reputation
- declare our innocence
- hurt those who are hurting us

But none of these things are the way of the Lord. In fact, God calls us to a different way. God says, 'leave it with me, trust me.' And when we put our reputation, our innocence and our hurt into the Lord's hands, trusting Him, we are worshipping.

Proving by our actions and our restraint to go after others we enter into another deep layer of trust and rest in the Lord, here our worship is pure and sweet.

4. TREATING OUR ENEMIES WELL

In Matthew we read this one sentence,

“And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” (5:41)

Jesus was talking in this passage about how we are to treat our enemies. He was speaking to the Jewish people who were under Roman rule. Their very lives were always under scrutiny and oppression. The

Romans were present in the land and a law at the time was this: If you are on the road and a Roman soldier is going the same way as you, that soldier can make you carry his pack (his bag) for one mile.

The people obviously hated this. It would have been like having dust and dirt ground in your face by the one you hate. It would have been humiliating and degrading to carry the pack of your enemy.

So Jesus speaks of a better way. A way above humiliation and degradation, and that way was to bless over and above the required amount. If one mile is required then carry it for two.

As we overcome evil with good we step out of ought and should and law and we enter into love and good deeds that again prove our understanding of God and his ways and in this we enter into profound worship.

5. BEING AN HONOURABLE PERSON

Proverbs says,

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” (4:23)

It is up to us to choose what we see and bear in our hearts. We are commanded to keep our hearts with vigilance. This means to take great care about what we put into our hearts and the thoughts and attitudes that come out of our hearts.

We are to be:

- honest and truthful
- patient and gracious
- holy and with a clean heart
- prayerful and trusting
- keeping our word
- gentle and kind

The manner in which we care for our hearts can also be worship. Make good choices without excuses and here we also worship our Lord.

Honour him today and you will be honourable and your worship will be honourable.

6. BEING A PEACE KEEPER

In James we are admonished,

“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (3:18)

I suggest you read all of James 3. This entire chapter is speaking about our language, the things we say and the spirit in which we say them.

It is a chapter about being careful with our tongues and our words. The passage finishes off with this verse that speaks of peace. We are told that righteousness is sown by peace.

This is important to know and to remember. Righteousness does not come about by violence or under compulsion. Rather, peace is our method if we are to be in the Lord. Here too, as we seek peace and lead with peace we are worshippers. In peace we honour the heart and ways of the Lord and here we also worship.

7. ENJOYING ORDINARY PEOPLE

Romans tell us,

“Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!” (12:16) NLT

As leaders and pastors we must leave our importance behind if we are to please the heart of our God.

There is nothing more offensive than Christians who think they are better than everyone else. In fact, arrogance and pride make filthy our worship. When we think we know it all we leave no room for God or others to give us a hand, and this is offensive to the ways of the Lord where we are to be receiving from each other.

As we leave our importance behind, only then can we truly enter into worship. Enjoying ordinary people is our worship.

8. HONOURING PEOPLE

And in Romans we read,

“Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.” (12:10)

The love of our God is people. It is for people that Christ came to earth. It is for people that our Holy Spirit remains with us. God is for us and as we are for others we come alongside the Lord. This too is worship.

To be concerned with what concerns God is worship. To take action and advocacy on behalf of others is exactly what Christ did for us and this too is our worship.

In fact, all of our lives can be summarized by how we have loved people. This in fact proves our worship.

We may very well come each and every Sunday to worship, but if our treatment of others is ill-kempt the rest of the week our worship is nullified.

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Matthew 5:23-24

And there is more. Basically, in any way that we agree in words and heart and action with our God, this is worship. For in the heart of worship is acknowledgment and due respect and honour proven by our actions and choices, by words and deeds.

Worship the Lord today and every day.

“God we bring you our very lives and ask that worship would become a part of every day. As we interact with our children, our spouses, our families, our neighbours, remind us that our kindness and care reveals our hearts of worship, or not.

We want to express you through every part of our day. Enable our actions to speak of you. May the work I must do today be unto your glory and honour. I worship you with my work.

Teach us patience, trust, faithfulness, and peace that in all things my manner may worship you. Renew my heart and my attitudes so that you are honoured in all things by my life and mind.

Thank-you God for worship and adoration. May my outer worship on a Sunday morning be supported and proven true by my actions and words and love the rest of the week. With all honour to you Lord, Amen.”

Volume 33 - Choose Christ

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17

God is always coming towards us, inviting us, wooing us, offering us himself to live by. In our natural state we are against God's ways. In our humanness we would rather hate than love, condemn than receive.

For instance, our fallen human nature would rather put others down than lift them up. We tell lies where there should be truth and we are jealous where there might be contentment and peace. When we see wrong we condemn instead of giving grace, and we are often demanding with each other rather than living with each other in understanding ways.

We are told, ***“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”*** Galatians 5:22, and in this it is obvious to see that we need The Spirit of the living God, we need the help of our Lord Jesus Christ if we are to obtain these things in lasting measure.

Whether we have known Jesus Christ a long time or are only just coming to know Him, we can all agree that none of us can manufacture or live these ways of The Spirit of God on our own. These things, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, are beyond our own efforts and ability.

Thankfully we are reminded that ***“God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*** 1 Thessalonians 5:9

God has not destined us for wrath – that is the enemies work, yet sometimes we get the condemner and God mixed up. Sometimes in our Christian zeal we take on a spirit of condemnation, of contempt, and of impatience with the lives of others, yet this way, we must remember, is a mark of the enemy and not of our God.

We forget that while **“the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:23**

While sin extracts death, it always has and it always will, when we carry the mark of God upon our lives we live unto life and not unto death. We want to live in this free gift of God for the alternative is a sin-state that is turned away from the God who IS life. God does not punish us for our sins because sin is in fact the punishment. God's heart, rather, is always for our good.

“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.” Ezekiel 18:32

While sin, agreement with Satan and not with God, sets our life up for difficulty, disease, despair, danger, and the like, God in his great compassion and love saw our immense difficulty, that we were stuck in these never-ending agreements with Satan and death, and He stepped in to do something about it.

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

By sending His son Jesus Christ, God made a way for us to turn from our allegiance to sin and to establish new agreements unto God.

“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

The question comes down to belief. Do we believe that Jesus Christ died on a cross and then rose the third day? Do we believe that sin has been taken care of by Jesus? Have we allowed His grace to penetrate our hearts and minds and lives?

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:6-7

The work and blood of Jesus Christ is a covering that we choose to come under. When we choose Christ we come into the compassion of God, we come into pardon. A free gift to each and every one of us when we enter into the blood of Jesus Christ, we accept his work done on our behalf.

“Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25-26

We respond, *“Yes Jesus, I realize that I am a sinner. There are many parts of my life and being that I cannot make right on my own. My heart and life reveals striving and self effort, a life apart from your grace, but today I choose to agree with you Jesus and with your work done for me. I enter into your compassion and pardon. I receive you into my life. I receive your life on my behalf.”*

And we are then told,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” John 5:24-26

What is profound in all of this is that God never tells us to work for our salvation. We are never instructed to make right our lives, to prove up, to become worthy, to work harder. Never. In fact, just the opposite.

It is when we are trying to work for our salvation, when we put trust in our own good works, when we feel justified in our habits, it is these times that we have in fact missed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” Galatians 5:4

For those of us in the ministry of our Lord we must abide, we must remain in the grace of our Lord. We came to Christ in grace, we must remain in grace.

In zeal for what is right and wrong and for what is good and bad we can lose sight of our own sinfulness.

The Pharisees, the church leaders at the time of Christ, had become experts in the law of the Lord, in habits of cleanness, in rituals of worship and scripture and more, but Christ called them whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27); they looked good on the outside but were filthy on the inside. They demanded that people act as perfect as they and this is what Jesus said,

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.” Matthew 23:13

The Kingdom of God is not about how good we are, it is about the goodness of God.

The Kingdom of God is ours only as we recall our impoverished state before the Lord and enter into the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Pharisees, the church leaders remember, refused to enter into the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and in this they missed out on the Kingdom of God.

The gospel message is not just for all those ‘out there’ it is for us, each of us. Every day gives us new opportunity and fresh experience of walking in Christ, of taking him on in our lives, of wearing his manner through our manner.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Volume 34 - Money

There is nothing quite like money to test our integrity and our priorities. Through money we can easily see the character of a person, the quality of an organization, and the honesty of a church.

As humans we are quite naturally concerned with our everyday needs. We are concerned with where we live, the food we are eating, the things we must pay for and provide for ourselves and those we are caring for.

While money is necessary for all these things we too easily make money into much more than just the things we need. As humans we distort money. We use it to know our personal value and worth, we use it for status and as a way to prove to others the value of what we are doing. We use money to gain favour with others and to show that we are important people.

But using money like this distorts and defiles both money and God. For we are not to look to money for our needs but we are to look to God. Speaking to our personal and daily needs God says,

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6:31-33

He is saying, ‘Seek my ways, do life as I instruct and I will take care of you.’

We live in unceasing struggle and burden to make our lives work but God cuts in and says, ‘You can be relieved of your worry if you will entrust your life to me.’

Now this does not mean that all things will be fixed just like that. God doesn’t work this way. Rather He slowly bit by bit leads us into greater truths and integrity about who He is and how this impacts and changes our hearts and minds and then lives. And this is true of our relationship with money as with anything else.

Now it is quite possible to gain money outside of God’s ways and through dishonest means. People do it all the time. There are those who accept bribes and those who pay bribes. There are those who sell the gospel, tricking people into believing that God can be bought and that this is okay. We can go after big money even while we are sinning with little money.

The writer of Proverbs knew that **“Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.” Proverbs 13:11.**

A primary principle throughout scripture is about being faithful with a little. While it is part of our sin nature to be unsettled in what we have here and now and to go after the much we see all around us, this is not faithfulness, it is not stewardship, it is not trust, and it is not wisdom.

Money matters reveal our hearts. In Hebrews we read,

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” Hebrews 13:5

It is very important for each one of us to be content in the here and now. Right now, as things are, can we be content? Are we able to give thanks? Is our heart grateful?

These noble characteristics of our hearts have nothing to do with the amount of money we have. We are tempted to think that if we have more money and all the things money can bring that then, THEN, we will be content. But it just isn't true.

If you are not able to be content with a little you will not be content with much. Our ability to walk in integrity, to be honest, to refuse bribes, to give freely, has nothing to do with our money. Integrity, honesty, generosity, trust, faithfulness, all has to do with our hearts and the motives hidden there.

What kind of a person are you with money?

Where we get it wrong is that we fail to learn that money belongs to the Lord. My money, your money, our money, all belongs to God.

This means that we do not make decisions about the money we have without consultation and obedience to what the Lord is telling us. We cannot just do with God's money what we want. It is not ours. Rather, we want to be faithful stewards of what belongs to God. We want to become trustworthy in all matters before God including money.

- Do you understand that your money belongs to God?
- How might this change your money decisions?

We do not want to steal from God for then how can God trust us with more? We want to be people who

God can trust with money and this requires a number of disciplines.

I. THE FIRST MONEY DISCIPLINE IS TITHING:

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” Malachi 3:10

As we read in Malachi God challenges us to trust him and to test him. Now a tithe is traditionally 10% of what we make. We receive money from a job or a gift and we take 10% of that money and give it back to God. Giving it back to God means that we invite the Lord to tell us where to give that money; it might be to our church, to a neighbour in need, to a school or an orphanage.

Tithing brings us back to who we are trusting. Are we trusting ourselves, our jobs, in donations, or are we trusting in the Lord. Tithing secures our life in God. It is an act of obedience that both tests us and releases us. Tithing is a private thing between ourselves and God. Simply invite the Lord himself to personally lead and guide you in your tithing.

2. THE SECOND MONEY DISCIPLINE IS GENEROSITY:

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” 2 Corinthians 9:6

While we tithe a portion of our money we are also instructed to be generous with our other gifts and abilities and in fact with our very lives. Generosity can be expressed in many ways. For someone with land perhaps we make available to someone, a portion of that land.

For someone who sews for a living perhaps a portion of every weeks labor, perhaps a dress or shirt is given to someone in need. Maybe you own a cow and a portion of the milk from that cow can go to someone who needs it more than you. Perhaps you are gifted in writing and reading and maybe you can gift your writing skills to someone who cannot write but needs to get a letter to someone.

While generosity positions us to be blessed by the Lord the mark of purity in giving is revealed in the heart of the giver as one who expects nothing back. Generosity is not about what we will get in return, it is about our heart that freely gives as the Lord has freely given to us. True generosity does not expect to be repaid. True generosity does not give to get.

3. THE THIRD MONEY DISCIPLINE IS FAITHFUL WITH A LITTLE:

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much.” Luke 16:10

We all begin with a little. In fact, this is the best way to begin. It is therefore important that we learn integrity, truthfulness, honesty, with the little bits of money that we have. We learn to tithe on the little we have. We learn to give with the little that we have. We learn to trust the Lord in the little that we have.

In this our hearts are purified of greed, of hoarding, of possessions, of envy of others, and of coveting what is not ours. The little tests us. How are you in this test?

As in all things God is growing us up into people he can trust. If he cannot trust us to act rightly with a little bit he will never be able to trust us to act rightly with much. Choose today what kind of a person you want to be in regards to money and to God.

Do not be in dismay about your little. Take it as an opportunity to grow in the Lord.

4. THE FOURTH MONEY DISCIPLINE IS GIVE THE GOSPEL AWAY:

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Isaiah 55:1

The entire point around the work of our Lord is that it is freely given. Grace, forgiveness, healing, deliverance, freedom, cannot be bought and should therefore not be sold.

“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.” Matthew 21:12-13

When Jesus came to the temple and began turning the tables of the money changers over in great rage he was responding to the sin of the leaders who were taking advantage of the people's need. The people were travelling from a far ways to come to the temple and to make their yearly sacrifices. Because of this long distance they often did not bring the dove or the lamb that they would be offering to the Lord, rather they planned to buy these things once they got there.

The religious leaders of the day took advantage of this need. It wasn't that they were charging for doves, it was that they were charging exorbitant amounts for doves. They were taking advantage of the people's need for their own gain. This is what had Jesus in such a rage; forgiveness is not for sale, grace is not for sale, healing is not for sale, prophecy is not for sale.

“But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!” Acts 8:20

Perhaps no where else are we to be so careful with money as in the church. It is just so easy to have distortions. Consider some of these possibilities. I once heard it said by a tv evangelist, 'The wealthier you are the holier you are.' I once heard of a pastor paying his congregation to bring people to church, 'For every person you bring you will receive xx number of money.'

These are crazy distortions of the word of God and defile the gospel.

Churches are to be the leaders, the ones showing us how, to tithe, to be generous, to be faithful, to be stewards of God's resources, and to not sell the gospel.

While there are other principles that we could look at in regards to money, but for today I leave it to these four and simply leave off with a few more important verses about money for your own study.

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Matthew 6:1-4

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

Most of all settle yourself in greater trust and rest in the provisions of our Lord. Be okay with today. Trust Him for tomorrow. Be content. Present all your requests to the Lord. Wait on Him. Do not rush ahead. Do not lag behind.

In all things, particularly with your money, walk in step with the Lord. Be obedient. Be willing. Receive with thanksgiving, hold with open hands, and give as God directs. And remember,

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

“God we come to you today in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess that we have not always been good with our money. Too often we do with it what we want, what seems best to us. We have not asked you for direction.

Today we change this, today we turn toward you, we turn our money toward you. Please show us the way free from our money sins. Where we have stolen may we repay. Where we have greedily held money close to us may we be free.

Where we demand from others may we release them. Where we guilt and shame people into giving to us may we stop. And where we do not yet fully trust you please teach us and give us faith.

We declare today in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that my money belongs to you God. I set myself to obedience to you with my money. I invite your leading and your guiding. Make my spirit quick to hear your instructions and wisdom.

I remove from money the authority that only you God are to have. I give you lordship of my life. Amen”

Note, that if you are the pastor of a church that has misused your people in regards to money, that this prayer is for you as a leader and for your church leadership team to set straight before the Lord all that has been wrong, so that all that is right might be yours.

Volume 35 - Simple Guide to Sermons

I write this today to give some practical and simple guidelines to those who are compelled to share the word of God but may struggle with any of the following:

- Do not have a Bible school training
- Do not have opportunity to study the Bible for hours at a time
- Are brand new to the Bible

This simple guide can be used by pastors and by lay persons to prepare a simple sermon, a Bible study class, or to simply share a personal testimony.

“Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance,”
Proverbs 1:5

I. READ GOD’S WORD DAILY

The Bible is best when we make it a part of our every day. Bit by bit, reading little by little, we will become familiar with its pages and all that God has to teach us through it.

Reading the Bible on a daily basis is like tithing a tenth of our day to God. It can be hard to take the time to read the Bible, but when we do we by our actions declare our trust of Him over our lives and our desire to honour him each day.

Note: always begin with a simple prayer of invitation for God to teach you. Like this,

“God I come today in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. I invite your revelation to my mind and heart and spirit. I stand against all confusion of the enemy today. I am dependant on your wisdom God. I welcome you to teach me. Amen”

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

2. AS YOU READ MAKE NOTE OF WHAT STANDS OUT TO YOU

Rather than focussing on understanding great long texts at a time, read each day until a thought or verse stands out to you. Sometimes this might be after 20 verses, sometimes it might be after 3 verses.

Remember that the point of Bible reading is to be impacted by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit can work through many many verses or just a few. Trust God to teach you as you read His word. Do not gobble it up thinking this makes you a better pastor or person. Take your time and really chew each story and verse.

When a portion of a verse impresses itself upon you, make note of this. Either write in the margin of your Bible where you are reading, or in a journal write out the verse and what has impacted you about it. Both are best.

Writing small notes in your Bible will help you find those places again, and will help you to recall how God has used each part in your life. Writing longer responses (but they don't have to be long) in a notebook will help you later as you glance back at what God has been teaching you.

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

3. AFTER THREE MONTHS LOOK BACK OVER YOUR NOTES AND SEE WHAT GOD HAS BEEN SPEAKING TO YOU

It is an interesting thing to be noting day after day small thoughts and impressions as given by God, and then to look at all of these impressions at one glance. Very definite patterns emerge and themes of God's instructions and movement in our life become apparent.

At this point take a bit of time to sit before the Lord and invite further direction and revelation, or to simply worship and thank the Lord for what He has been teaching you.

The Bible is the word of God, the voice of God, and in this we are invited to interact with it and through it to interact with God. Our study times simply become conversations with God. So we thank Him and give honour to Him for his voice penetrating our hearts and lives.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Psalm 119:105

4. BEGIN TO IDENTIFY HOW GOD’S TEACHING IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR HEART AND LIFE

After a few months of daily reading even just a little bit of your Bible you will begin to notice a difference in your thinking and in your hearts response to life. While the changes will begin happening immediately we often cannot notice them right away; mostly because changes that last happen little bit by little bit.

God shifts our thinking in small ways. Our Lord leads us day by day. The Holy Spirit reveals things bit by bit.

Small changes building up over time make for the longest lasting transformations. Small is best when it comes to our walk with the Lord and our interaction with His word. Trust him to be teaching you and in turn take the time to glance back and see the difference in your life.

Remember, we do not study the Bible just to know the Bible. We study the Bible to be changed by the Living God.

Ask yourself: How am I different today than I was three (or six or twelve) months ago?

This becomes a vital part of your story and of the messages the Lord is giving you to share.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” John 14:26

5. BEGIN TO SHARE WITH OTHERS HOW GOD’S TEACHING IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR YOU

When we begin to share with others about what God is doing in our life, we want to simply give our testimony. We simply declare how God has impacted us. For instance, instead of sharing all of the Bible verses about how we do not need to fear, it is just as powerful to simply give testimony, *“Six months ago I was afraid of many things. But today, after reading His word and seeing how much God loves me and is taking care of me, I am no longer afraid. My courage is building.”*

This simple sharing can be done among small gatherings of friends, when you are walking with your spouse or sitting with your family. It is the place and way for anyone new to this to begin passing on the messages God is giving you.

You do not need to have fancy words or big long sentences to share the Lord’s goodness in your life.

Rest in simple testimony. For the authority with which you speak is based on your personal encounter with the Living God.

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17

6. AFTER A TIME OF DOING STEPS 1-5 YOU WILL HAVE PLENTY OF MATERIAL FOR A SERMON

All that is left is to organize your thoughts.

- A. Know your main point (what do you want people to go away with?)
- B. 1st point
- C. 2nd point
- D. 3rd point
- E. Add in the verses that God used to teach you these things
- F. Include relevant stories to help tell your point
- G. Have a conclusion

Remember: Share how God is impacting you. What have you learned? How have you changed? What does God's word say to this or that?

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Philippians 4:8

7. CLOSE IN PRAYER. BE AUTHENTIC AND SIMPLE

The power of prayer is found in our lives alongside the Lord. As we walk in obedience to God's leading in our lives our prayers become stronger in their power and authority. Big words and long sentences do not make for stronger prayers.

The people you are teaching and leading need to know that they can pray as well. They need to know that prayer is not a big mystery but a simple conversation between us and God. Teach them this. Use your own prayers to model conversation with God.

Thank God for the lessons he is teaching us. Invite Him to give more lessons. Declare blessing over His people. And close with an Amen. It really can be as simple as this.

“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.” Matthew 6:7

And finally, for those of you who are pastors or spiritual leaders in your communities, teach this simple method of study and sharing to others. Also, make room in your church services and as small groups of believers gather for others to share in this way.

We want to be learners of our Lord through each other. The Body of Christ is vital to our well-being and each one can bring a fresh word from our Lord. As leaders we must make room for this. For every one of your people who have a Bible (and for those who don't join up with someone who does), take small bits of time on a regular basis to read and discuss and learn together.

While the Bible is a big book it is best taken in small bites, and after time those small bites add up to full meals and satisfied lives.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8

“God we come together today in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess that the Bible is a big book and many times we are swamped with anxiety about how to share it all. Today we choose to rest in you. Today we settle into your leading and guiding, your wisdom and insight.

We invite you to teach us. We open our hearts and minds to your direction. Lead us in all things. Most of all help us to make you and your word a priority in our lives. Help us to read even just a little bit of your word on a daily basis. For those of us who do not have Bibles, we ask that you would enable us to have them. For those of us who cannot read we ask that you team us up with those who can. May we simply study together.

All in all we thank you for your movement in our lives and that we are ever changing into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. We bless you Father God. Amen”

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18

Volume 36 - Love

I write these God's Hearts as the Holy Spirit leads me. I don't have an agenda of topics chosen months in advance, I simply write in accord with the Lord's leading. And these last few weeks I've been brought back to the central truth of God's love for us and am compelled to pass that on.

It feels to me that the Lord wants to remind all of us that while we are working and serving alongside the Lord in His kingdom that we must not forget how much we are loved.

The heart of God's love for us is beautifully expressed in Jeremiah 3:17,

“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Just this one verse alone reveals a depth of the heart of our Lord in regards to each one of us.

1. God is in your midst
2. He is the mighty one who saves
3. He rejoices over you with gladness
4. He quiets you with his love
5. He exults and sings over you

Lets review these one by one.

I. ONE: GOD IN OUR MIDST MEANS THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE.

Though the weight of our work and of life itself may press down on us we can know that God is with us.

Immanuel means 'God with us' and is one of the names given to Jesus.

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Isaiah 7:14

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

God with us means that God is working through us. As we rest in the presence and work of Jesus Christ he works through us. We take comfort in this. The work is not all ours to do. Rather we enter into dependence on God and as we invite Jesus Christ into our lives we agree with Him and when we agree with the Lord life takes on new satisfaction.

2. TWO: THE MIGHTY ONE WHO SAVES INDICATES A CONTINUOUS PRESENT TENSE.

God has saved us. God is saving us. God will save us. We experience the truth and presence of God in our past, present, and future.

“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Acts 2:21

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,” Titus 3:5

The love of Father God foreknew us and prepared a way for us. Jesus Christ his Son entered into our present tense and died a sinless death so that you and I might live. Our Holy Spirit remains with us leading and guiding us each and every day.

This work of God never ends. It goes on in our lives and in the lives of every human being on planet earth. God is continually drawing all people unto himself in love and kindness and understanding. This we can count on. This we rest in.

No longer do we need to force God upon each other. No longer must we micro-manage those around us.

No longer must we fear. God is active in all our lives even when we cannot perceive Him.

Because of this we can come to a place of greater understanding alongside our fellow human beings. We are released to just be people alongside people for Jesus is the one working in all our lives.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:29

3. THREE: HE REJOICES OVER YOU WITH GLADNESS

God's heart over us works to dispel the lies and condemnations within us. Remember the utter joy of a child born to you? This is the same joy (but bigger yet) that God experiences in regards to you each and every minute of every day.

I ask: How might His joy about you change how you view yourself, God, and this life you are living?

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Romans 14:17

“Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure.” Psalm 16:19

Life alongside God brings us to deeper understanding of our lives. We realize that there is another reality to living than just this earthly experience and our earthly struggles.

We learn alongside God that even though there are difficulties God is in the midst.

4. FOUR: HE QUIETS US WITH HIS LOVE IS THE EXACT RESULT OF GOD IN OUR MIDST

We cannot stay stressed when we are aware of the presence of God. In His presence our anxiety, our worry, our concerns fall to the side. We are quieted in our inner person.

“For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name.” Psalm 33:21

“He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed.” Psalm 107:29

While we make our plans and do the work of our lives it takes on a new ease as we allow the Lord's quieting over us. We do the same work but our hearts don't worry the same. We carry on the same tasks but we are more relaxed and okay with God's leading. We do not rush to control or fix things like we once did. God quiets us and we enter into His rest.

5. FIVE: HE EXULTS AND SINGS OVER YOU AND HE EXULTS AND SINGS OVER EACH ONE

In this love of the Lord we realize that he loves everyone to the same extent that he loves us. And as we realize this we begin to take greater care with those around us. We realize that we must treat others as the great loves of God that they are.

As we experience God's love and exulting and singing over us we bring this same spirit and manner over others. We learn too to rejoice in our fellow human beings. We begin to see the beauty of mankind all around us.

God's singing over us changes how we perceive each other. We, all of us, every single person, is precious to God, and we dare not use and abuse them. It is God's love that alerts us to this.

“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,” 1 Thessalonians 3:12

**“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
John 13:35**

We are reminded today that though we work to understand God more, though we work to bring justice where there is injustice, though we work to teach and guide and lead those depending on us, though we strive to accomplish much good in the countries in which we live, we remember that love and our manner alongside God and others is the most important thing of all.

We remember that how we treat each other matters first and foremost. We remember that God loves us with a deep and abiding love and we are reminded to slow down, to take notice of our fellow human beings, to acknowledge each other in kindness and understanding.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”
1 Corinthians 3:1-13**

Volume 37 - Identified with Christ

Identity is important. Who we know ourselves to be brings stability and confidence to our lives and how we walk out our days.

Because identity is so important we are easily fooled into identifying with the wrong things. We know of course about those who identify themselves with a licentious lifestyle. We know those who identify and live out drugs and partying and drunkenness and we know that these identities will lead us to death and destruction. So we know to avoid this and to find our identity elsewhere.

But we, in our wild swing away from this, often come to find identity in self-righteousness. We preach against drunkenness, we hate the partiers, we despise the drug addict, we scorn the prostitute, we will not spend time with the sinners, and we refuse to get to know those whose lives are different than ours.

We are afraid. And our identity is obviously not very sure if we must define ourselves by what we are not.

We miss the fact that in this response our identity becomes one of hating, despising, scorning, and refusing to be in the presence of those we cannot agree with.

This is the natural result of religion. It was the same identity that the pharisees of Jesus' day had taken on. They prided themselves in their self-righteousness, in their superiority, and as a people who could maintain an outer appearance of godliness.

And yet Christ called them white-washed tombs. Christ could see their hearts and though their outward behaviour was perfect their inner being had become about hating, despising, scorning, and refusing relationship with people. They had become exactly what God is not.

And God confronted them with this.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.” Matthew 23:27

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretence make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” Luke 20:46-47

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” Matthew 23:25

The Pharisees had made a distinction between themselves and the ordinary men and women around them. They set up rules and regulations as a way of excluding common people and they used these rules and regulations to justify their disdain and contempt of others. They grew in their superiority as they hated and rejected others and God said, “Be very careful of such people.” and even called them blind guides. (Matthew 15:14 and it’s surrounding context)

We, as leaders and pastors and teachers in the Kingdom of God do not want to be blind guides. We do not want to define ourselves by what we are doing or not doing. In Matthew 15:1-20 Jesus makes it very clear that it is not our habits or our traditions that make us clean before the Lord. It is the attitudes of our hearts that reveal if we truly know God or not.

Jesus came to give us a new identity. He came to remove from our lives an identity with religion (which is full of rules and regulations and resulting condemnations) and to give us an identity with himself and true godliness.

All we have to do is to look at the life of Jesus Christ to see what this new identity is all about. What did Jesus do? How did he treat people? What characteristics did he model? What was the manner of his speech? In what way did he live his life?

1. JESUS IS GOD

“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” Hebrews 1:3a

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Colossians 1:15

2. JESUS LIVES OUT THE FATHER’S HEART

“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” John 5:30

“Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.” John 4:34

3. JESUS CAME FOR ALL PEOPLE

“And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” Matthew 4:23

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” I John 4:9

4. JESUS SPENDS TIME WITH SINNERS

“The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)” John 4:9

“And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:10-13

5. JESUS IS COMPASSION

“He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” Isaiah 40:11

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

6. JESUS IS UNDERSTANDING & PATIENT

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” Isaiah 1:18

**“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
2 Peter 3:9**

7. JESUS IS INCLUSIVE

“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

**“The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”
Revelation 22:17**

8. JESUS SAVES US

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

9. JESUS LOVES THE STRANGER

**“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”
Leviticus 19:34**

**“Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor.”
1 Peter 2:17**

10. JESUS IS JUST

“You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour.” Leviticus 19:15

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8

11. JESUS BRINGS US TOGETHER

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:13

“Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” Romans 15:7

12. JESUS LOVES OURS ENEMIES AS MUCH AS HE LOVES US

“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles,” Proverbs 24:17

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” Luke 6:27

13. JESUS IS PEACE

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Proverbs 16:7

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

14. JESUS IS LOVE

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.” 1 John 4:7

And there is so much more. Today we go in the strength of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We walk in compassion, loving our enemies, in understanding and with patience. We live out the Father’s heart in our lives, coming close to people, extending peace, winning over everyone in love. This is our identity.

Becoming people who live as Christ lived, loved as Jesus loved, embraced as Jesus embraced, accepted as Jesus accepted, honoured as Jesus honoured, healed as Jesus healed, forgave as Jesus forgave – this is to be our identity.

Habits and traditions around worship and church and eating and preaching and gathering together and what it means to be a pastor can all move in response to the spirit when Christ is our identity. Issues of nationalism and politics and matters of law and governance need not be our core identity once we have identified with the person of Jesus Christ.

The traditions of the generations and the cultures of our times need not be our identity once we know identity in Jesus.

Jesus Christ simplifies our lives. We live as he lived. We love as he loved. We choose to be a Jesus kind of people, and after that everything else begins to make sense and fall into line. We walk with God.

“Jesus we come to you today in the power of your name and life given over for us. Thank-you for showing us the way to life, thank-you for being the way to life. We take on your life in our spirits and souls and bodies today in the name and the blood of our living Lord Jesus Christ. Wash us, heal us, make us new.

Where we have created distinctions among our fellow people forgive us. Give us eyes to see others as you see them. Give us your compassion so that we might extend your healing to many. May our love be pure and just.

We declare our dependance on you for these deep transformations within the very core of our beings and so we wait, resting in your work in our lives, and we choose this day to act in accord with the model of Jesus, the very perfect image of God himself. We enter into your life Lord. Thank you. Amen and Amen.”

Volume 38 - Sabbath

It is hard taking a day of rest. There is this driving fear that would keep us working, working, working. Bills need to be paid, food needs to be bought; there is just always something that needs to be taken care of.

It is why it is so difficult to understand on a human level God's rhythm, and command even, to take a weekly sabbath.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” Exodus 20:8-11

God, at the beginning of time, set into place a rhythm for our working and our resting. And while we do not any longer live under the law of the Old Testament, we do want to understand the principle behind this command; we want to know God's heart and intention for us in this admonition to keep a sabbath.

In it's simplest understanding a sabbath is a day of rest. It is one day a week that we dedicate to ceasing from our labours and the things that must always be taken care of.

It is a fasting of sorts and an act of trusting God for our work and our livelihoods; by taking a sabbath we act out our trust in God's keeping of our lives. We may be tempted to believe that it is only the wealthy that can afford a day of rest, but in fact as we risk to enter into a day of rest we are then entered into the wealth of God.

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.” Isaiah 26:3-4

I remember years ago when I first began keeping one day of rest a week. It was a fearful thing to do.

There was always work to be done, many things to be attended to, and yet I came to realize that these things would always be there. My work would never be done on this earth and I realized that it is faulty thinking to wait until our work is done before we take a day of rest.

Taking a sabbath is in many ways a simple act of obedience to our Lord. It truly is a way of saying, *“I trust you Lord with my days and with my life.”*

Then, as we grab hold of the courage to take a day of rest we welcome into our lives a greater movement of the Lord on our behalf.

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.” Psalm 37:5

Think of it this way. We can either continue trying to maintain our lives by our own hands and effort, or we can make space for the Lord in the keeping of our lives. A sabbath helps to make space for the Lord in our lives.

We intentionally step back from our own keeping, we take our hands off our own care so to speak, and in this space, as we take our hands off, God is invited to put his hands into the mix.

Taking a Sabbath makes space for more of God in our lives.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6

Taking a Sabbath comes out of our hearts of worship and trust in our Lord.

Unfortunately, the ancient church leaders had made the sabbath into a weighty and unholy thing for the people. They demanded and shamed and made the sabbath harder and harder to keep, with more and more rules and condemnation for any transgressions.

And so when Jesus arrived on the scene he modelled a healthy view of Sabbath keeping. For instance, we find him,

“On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come and stand here.” And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” And after looking around at them all he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored.” Luke 6:6-10

He brought us back into balance that the sabbath is a gift to mankind. It is God’s rest for those who are living in his trust.

“And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27

And so we must walk balanced in our practice of taking a day of rest. For those in Christian service, pastors and lay-leaders within the church, Sundays are generally not a day of rest. Rather, they are days of much preparation, teaching, and leading. For Pastors and Christian leaders and their wives, it is often therefore important to take another day of the week as your sabbath.

**“But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”
Isaiah 40:31**

If you are married it is as husband and wife you will want to decide together what day is going to be a sabbath for you, and you will also need to discern best how to make it a day of rest for both of you.

It is not okay for a man to announce to his wife that he will be resting on this or that day when she must remain cooking over a hot fire that same day. Men, you want to honour the Lord and honour your wife by making room and taking up the inconvenience of giving her a day of rest also.

How might you do this? Think creatively and be generous in your plans towards her. Perhaps she takes a different day as her sabbath and you take care of the home as she rests with the Lord. Perhaps you and your family fasts on the day decided as a sabbath, so that no cooking needs to be done. Or, perhaps you help her to prepare extra food the day before your sabbath and then everyone eats cold food on your day of rest.

Men, I can guarantee you that as you take a sabbath that both honours the Lord, and honours your wife, and teaches your children to do the same, your lives will be blessed and you will experience more of the Lord in all your earthly matters.

**“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,”
Ephesians 5:25**

There is no end of the creativity that can be taken to keep a sabbath day holy unto the Lord. There is no right or wrong in any of this. Remember, God has made the sabbath to be a day of rest for his people. It is a gift from God, and like all gifts the receivers must simply take the gift gratefully and make good use of it.

We do not make a sabbath into law for others, rather we take it as a day personally for ourselves and our family; we live it out in the spirit of a gift as God intended it to be for us.

“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” Hebrews 4:9

And finally, we must remember that the Sabbath is not an excuse to neglect people. It is not a day meant to make solid habits of laziness and disregard for responsibility. It is also not a day to make others work harder so that you may take it easy. The Spirit of a Sabbath is about generosity of time and of entering into the rest of the Lord.

“Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.” Exodus 20:9-10

A rest is for everyone. Facilitate this in your life and the lives of those around you and receive good favour from our Lord. Taking a Sabbath brings us into the blessing of the Lord as children of God.

“If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
Isaiah 58:13-14

LET’S REVIEW:

1. Sabbath is a healthy rhythm of work and rest for our lives.
2. A Sabbath is like a fast unto the Lord where we act out our trust in Him.
3. Taking a Sabbath is an act of obedience whereby we respond to the Lord’s leading.
4. A weekly habit of taking a Sabbath makes more space for God in our lives.
5. A Sabbath can be any day of the week on which we choose to rest in the Lord.
6. As married couples come to agreement about the details of your Sabbath day of rest.
7. Men, use the Sabbath to minister to your wives and children.
8. Remember, to take the Sabbath as a gift for yourself, do not burden others with it.

As you walk with God and learn how to honour him and each other with a Sabbath I pray the Lord’s deep peace and joy upon you. May your lives take on a new richness as you trust in Him. Amen and Amen.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 13:15

Volume 39 - Peace

God has a lot of things to say about peace:

“Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”
1 Peter 3:11

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

“A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” James 3:18

“When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Proverbs 16:7

Our peace comes from God:

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.” 2 Thessalonians 3:16

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

**“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.”
Isaiah 26:3**

**“In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”
Psalm 4:8**

And He commands us to walk in His peace:

“Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.” I Peter 3:9-11

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.” Colossians 3:15

“So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” Romans 14:19

Peace is a gauge by which we assess our hearts before and within the Lord. Peace is not something that we impose on others from without, rather, peace is something that flows from the heart of God, through our hearts as we are surrendered to Him, and then out to others.

Yet the peace of the God pouring through our lives is not something that happens automatically. In our flesh-selves we find ourselves striving with each other, demanding of each other, condemning each other. Chaos and strife are our natural bent.

**“A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”
Proverbs 16:28**

“But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” James 3:14-16

“For you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?” I Corinthians 3:3

As in all things there is a process in becoming men and women of peace. To be conduits of peace there are a few things that must be accomplished in our own hearts and minds.

I. First, we come to understand that we do not really know His peace. We recognize that there is much to learn about the peace of God and we admit our need and confess the lack of peace in our own hearts and minds. We allow the revelation of the Lord to show us our jealousies and to highlight our contentions and then we confess these things to God. Bringing our lack of peace out into the light makes a space by which God’s peace can begin to change and inhabit our lives.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

2. Second, we must bring our ego needs to the Lord. Where we are insecure we must rest in God and what He declares about us. We do not take our sense of self from our outward lives, but rather we settle into self that is settled in the Lord. We come to Him and He wraps us in His peace.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” Isaiah 41:10

In this, we loose off our demanding of others. The way of peace is the way of walking in forgiveness and understanding.

- Are we contentious in our spirits? We need the peace of the Lord.
- Are we unsettled in joy and faith? We need the peace of the Lord.
- Are we unwilling to set things right with others? We need the peace of the Lord.

“For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” James 1:20

Peace is powerful and active. Sometimes we believe peace is passive and lays down at the first hint of trouble. But peace is far more than just refusing to engage chaos or give voice to dissension, peace is the heart of our Father God and when our hearts are transformed by his peace, our hearts become a conduit of His peace.

Out of this work of the Lord in our own lives, peace flows out of our person to others around us. And when we walk in the peace of the Lord the darkness around us must submit to this spirit of peace carried in the love of the Lord. Peace enters in the kingdom of God just as light illuminates a dark room

Where there are spirits of chaos and destruction, we ignore the spirits of the enemy and instead we pray peace, “God we declare your peace in this place.” Rather than focussing on evil, we focus on God. Instead of going after the enemy, we bring God himself. In this way God’s ways take preeminence – peace does this.

“God, we say yes and amen to your peace over this community.”

“Jesus, we agree with your peace this day over this home.”

“Holy Spirit, bring your peace to our hearts and minds.”

“God, we enter into your peace.”

The enemy cannot stand against peace, for peace is the exact opposite of the nature of the enemy, peace is wholly the nature of God. Most particularly, our own sin nature loses it’s power when brought into the peace of God.

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

“Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.” Jeremiah 17:14

“Creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,” says the Lord, “and I will heal him.” Isaiah 57:19

Where the enemy seeks to destroy, peace seeks to heal. Where our hearts wish to condemn, peace forgives. Where communities are embroiled in dissension, peace brings a balm of the Lord and tensions ease and life increases.

The peace of God changes our lives, transforming our communities. The peace of the Lord begins in our own hearts and spreads from there. May we become people of peace. And as we do this may we enter in the Kingdom of God on earth.

“Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.” Psalm 147:1-5 (read all of Psalm 147:1-20)

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,” Psalm 103:2-4

Volume 40 - Disciples

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28:19-20**

The church is where disciples are being made.

Where disciples are being made there is the church.

The Biblical definition of church has always been about making disciples. It is easy to gather and even easier to build a building than to build disciples. Somehow, we have mistaken church to be about buildings and programs. Yet the church is the people, the body of Christ.

Consider what we are told about the early church,

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Acts 2:42

The early church was formed of simple and small communities of people where instruction and understanding naturally flowed in the context of fellowship, of eating together, and in prayer. There were no large gatherings, and there were no ‘church’ buildings, gatherings, or agendas, as we know it today.

Simply put, church is where the gospel and manner of Jesus Christ is passed on to others and where we are to take on identification with Christ and become like him.

Yet we have, in our formalization of the gospel in our church attendance and programs, in fact watered down the gospel. We easily miss that Jesus offers to any who would be his disciple, a two part invitation, the first, 'come to me', the second, 'learn to die to yourself'.

KEY: Disciples are those who have 1) turned toward Christ in the fullness of their heart, and 2) who are learning to die to self.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

**“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”
Luke 14:17**

This is a hard message. It does not support much of our modern preaching where we are told that if we come to God he will make us big, or wealthy, or happy. Instead, Jesus basically says, 'come and die with me'.

It is important that we understand this. The gospel is an invitation to die to our selfishness, our own comfort, our need to be recognized, our arrogance and pride, our own best thinking and understanding, our prejudices, our self-pity, and more.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” Proverbs 3:5-6

It is as we come into contact with the true Lord Jesus Christ that we will become more gentle, we will honour all people, and we will be faithful to walk alongside others through the messiness of life rather than demanding some sort of christian facade.

Our hatreds, our impatience, our contempt, our disdain, our bitterness, our arrogance, our pride, our selfishness, our need for vengeance, and more, will all be put at the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we will become new creatures in Him. The persons we once were, we will no longer be. And we will grow

in steadfastness and faithfulness, regardless of the circumstance or difficulties of our life.

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 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 1:2-4

This is the promise of our Lord to us. To grow us up in Him, to strengthen us through the trials, and to change our hearts and minds and lives from the inside out.

So, the first mark of a disciple is someone who has turned to Jesus and is in process of dying to self. The second mark of a disciple is the ability to both give and receive, to enter into true fellowship with the Lord and each other. Consider this,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 7:21

And we may ask, what is the will of our Father in heaven? It is this:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Here Jesus is giving a new commandment. Now, just prior to these verses Jesus had this conversation with Peter,

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ 7 Jesus answered him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.’ 8 Peter said to him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.’ 9 Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’” John 13:3-9

Jesus was taking the role of a servant and performing the lowest act possible, that of washing the dirty and dusty feet of his disciples. He was modelling to them the attitude that they were to take with others. He took on the job *no one wanted*.

But Peter could not, at first, receive from the Lord. His pride was too great to enter into the vulnerability of having Jesus serve him and minister to him. And Jesus, as we see in verse 8, asserts that without the washing of the Lord we have no part in him.

Jesus’ death and resurrection is where we are first washed, but then this ‘washing of the Lord’ continues within our faith communities as acts of service to one another, primarily coupled with the ability to receive acts of service from others.

Now some will more easily receive, and these ones must learn to serve. Others more easily serve, and these ones must learn to receive. There is no division on this. In the Kingdom of God there are not some who serve and some who receive. We are all to serve and we are all to receive.

The early church was marked by this mutual uplifting and teaching of each other. And where this radical, God-centered model of church is today, there is thriving presence of the Lord with much growth and delight in Him.

This manner, this attitude of fellowship, of giving and receiving, is what marks a disciple:

A disciple does not count him or herself better than others.

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Philippians 2:3

A disciple serves the people around him or her.

**“My brothers, you were called, as you know, to liberty; but be careful, or this liberty will provide an opening for self-indulgence. Serve one another, rather, in works of love.”
Galatians 5:13**

A disciple becomes vulnerable and receives from others.

**“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28**

A disciple knows his or her brokenness and welcomes the healing touch of the Lord through others.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:3-5

Disciples allow no hierarchy amongst themselves.

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on 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 3:27-28

Jesus brought a model of corporate service to each other. He calls us to himself, and he then calls us to die to ourselves. Here, in humility and love we have the ingredients of a revolution, something so vastly different from our natural human natures that Jesus said these are the marks by which others will come to know God.

Model the Lord Jesus Christ in all you do. Be blessed as you pass Him on.

“Let all that you do be done in love.” 1 Corinthians 16:14

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

Volume Forty-One: Lament

Within our Christian cultures we do not often leave room for lament. The ability to lament may have been lost in our excitement over the saving of our Lord and yet, lament still holds an important place in our daily lives and in our walk with God.

To begin with, lament reminds us that we are hopeless without Jesus Christ.

It brings us to the end of ourselves and it is deliberate validation of the pain in our lives; this is key to a healing and releasing of our lives. In order to loose off the pain of our lives that pain must be

acknowledged, recognized and spoken for what it is; only then are we free to go on to forgiveness and the new things that God would have for us.

We read that Jesus was a man of sorrows, and that he wept.

**“He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.”
Isaiah 53:3**

“Then Jesus Wept” John 11:35

Lament brings us past being wounded, to being broken.

In order for God to shine through us we must first be broken; broken over our self concern, broken over the hurts of others, and broken over our own hurts. Broken is different than being wounded.

Broken allows the Lord to shine out through our lives. Wounded keeps God from entering. Wounded we build up hardness, scabs, barriers to God’s love. Broken we are opened to the love and touch of God.

For instance, when we are physically wounded our skin builds up scabs and toughens to protect itself; it is the same with our wounded hearts.

The only way beyond our wounded hearts is to invest in lament both on our own behalf and on behalf of others. Lament brings compassion and the oil of the Lord to our wounds. This softens our self-protection to the point that the Lord can break in with His presence and touch. The Lord wants to heal and restore us at our most vulnerable and hurting selves.

“He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.” 1 Peter 2:24

“They begged him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of his robe, and all who touched him were healed.” Matthew 14:36

We can in fact differentiate the broken from the wounded by their ability to lament. Wounded we do not have the ability to lament, but when we are broken, lament becomes ease to our hearts.

The Psalmists were powerful in lament. They were in touch with their sorrow and loss and spoke of it freely. We too must have room for this in our own lives and within the body of Christ.

“Listen to my prayer, O God. Do not ignore my cry for help! Please listen and answer me, for I am overwhelmed by my troubles. My enemies shout at me, making loud and wicked threats. They bring trouble on me and angrily hunt me down. My heart pounds in my chest. The terror of death assaults me. Fear and trembling overwhelm me, and I can’t stop shaking. Oh, that I had the wings like a dove; then I would fly away and rest! I would fly far away to the quiet of the wilderness.” Psalm 55:1-7

It is part of the ministry of Christ to increase our sensitivity to others and to make space for lament.

While it may be true that God will do great things, heal all things, and make us glad, the person in the midst of great sorrow does not need to hear this, not at first.

To be healing agents of our Lord Jesus Christ our first response to those in great pain is to simply acknowledge the pain, *“Yes, this has been very bad for you.”*

“I’m so sorry that this has been your experience.”

As we sit in the pain with them we do not rush them out of the pain nor we do not sweep it away too quickly. To brush away the hurt and pain is to disregard the harsh realities that many have faced; it is to disregard the person.

We do not rush people out of their pain in order to find Jesus, but we in fact enter Jesus into the pain; this is, after all, what He came to do.

He did not come to put on a happy face per se, as though sadness is wrong, just the opposite. He came to enter in and to inhabit our sorrows and to find us as companions in grief and loss. Paul described it this way,

“To the weak I became weak so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by some means I might save some.” I Corinthians 9:22

There is much in this world to be sad about. Your life and my life, we have things that have gone horribly wrong. Our lives contain things that cannot be fixed. To allow honesty about this is part of the ministry of the saints one to another.

Do we want to rejoice? Yes. Do we want to experience God’s healing and hope? For sure. Do we want our days to be a little lighter and with more gladness? Certainly.

But the path to this is not in putting on a happy face in a false way, but in bringing our honesties and hopelessness to God. It is imperative that we remain in the authentic emotions of sorrow in order to find God tucked in right beside us in the very midst. One of the gifts we give each other is the freedom to lament.

And as we invest in lament our joy increases. This is why Jesus could say,

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4

I was in Mozambique last year to a number of churches over a fairly wide area. In one place the land was hard and the people exhibited a toughness that mirrored the land in which they lived. With heat and a land of scrub-brush, where the people worked double time to eek out a living, I wondered at their resilience and strength in such a place.

I found the answer when we came to worship. While they had the traditional songs of praise, with upbeat tempo and dance, the song they chose to open our teaching time was one of lament; it was a slow, mournful, longing poured out in song.

The women led the way and it is truly one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard. It contained a special fragrance that wafted to our Lord and I learned in an instant the secret of their resilience in such a hard land – they easily and regularly entered into lament.

I don't know why we are afraid of lament. I don't know where we learned to avoid sorrow or to consider it bad and wrong. I don't know why we rush at people's pain with 'God will fix it'. I suspect it is because we cannot bear their sorrow, for we have not yet found God in the midst of our own.

Yet, Jesus lives to intercede for us. We read,

“Therefore his is able, once and forever to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.” Hebrews 7:25

We can courageously enter into lament because God is already there.

In contrast, when we are fearful of pain we dismiss one of the most powerful tools by which to reach the lost and to minister to each other for the ability to lament alongside others brings us into immediate fellowship and friendship and into the bonds of peace with both God and each other.

Lament enters us into the holy of holies where intimacy with our Lord increases, where we validate and honour each others stories, and where we find true strength as God comes near to us.

To understand and come alongside the man of sorrows we must come in the honesty of our own sorrows. We must engage them, cry them out, speak the losses, walk through the pain. Lament is holy work.

We must not push people away by too quickly saying, 'but God will heal you,' for before the healing must come the lamenting.

We must allow the infection of our souls to rise to the surface. As ministers of Jesus Christ this is one of our tasks. We first come into touch with our own lament, finding God richly in our lament, and then we are okay to enter into lament for and beside others.

“If one member suffers all suffer together.” I Corinthians 12:26

We cry with others. We sit in silence with others. We sorrow with others.

We need not be afraid of silence of lament. We do not need to rush to soothe it, or rush to throw God at it. A ministry of lament is part of a powerful healing process.

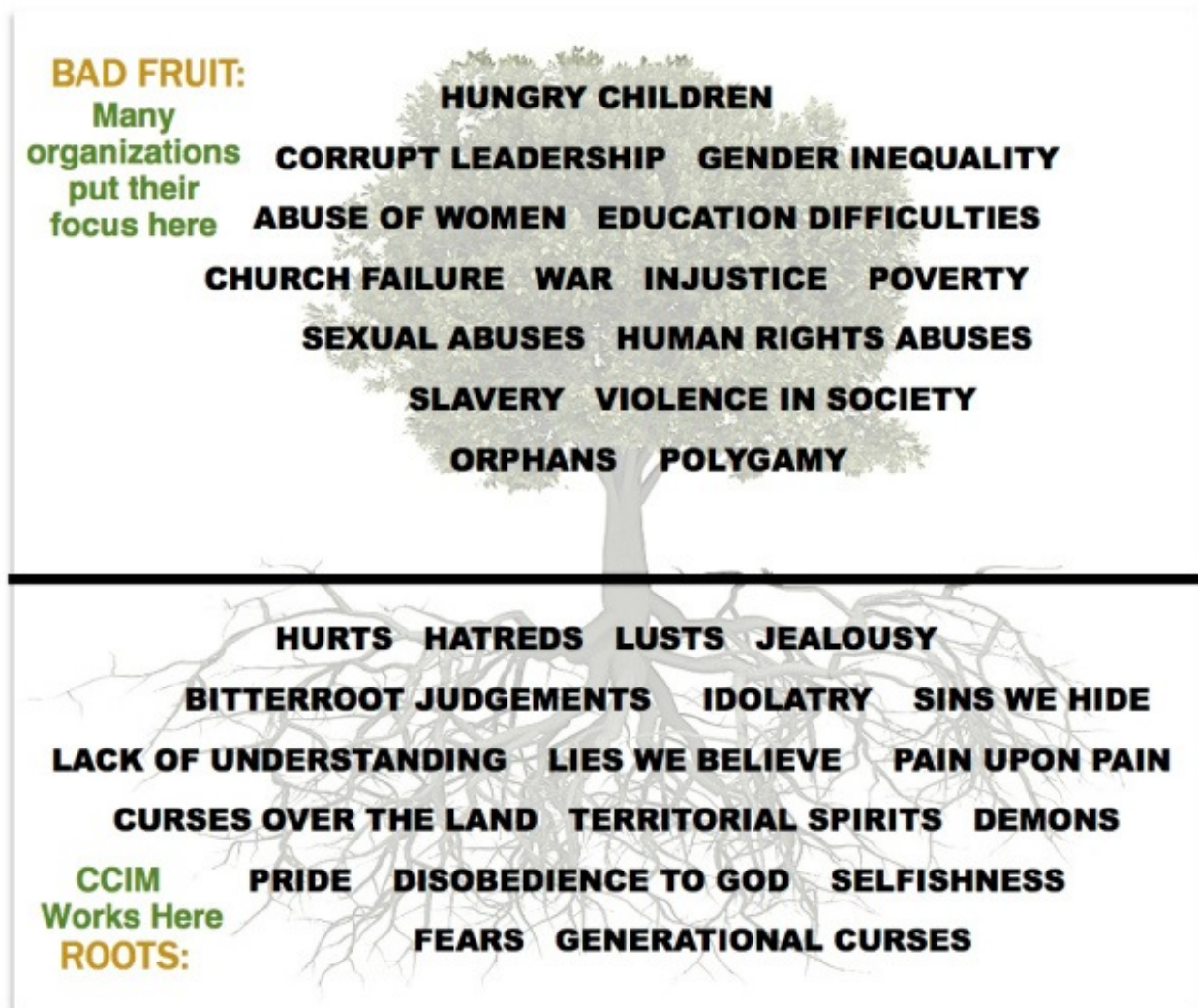
“Dear God, we bring to you the honesty of our hearts and lives. We carry many sorrows and sometimes the pain of our hearts is too great to bear. I am glad to read that you were also a person of sorrow and that you wept. Today I open my sorrow that it might mingle with your sorrow. Thank you for interceding for me before the throne of God. I bring you my pain, I bring you my loss, I bring you my sadness and I welcome you to carry it with me. I do not hide it from you, but invite you into it's midst. Teach me how to lament in a way that washes the sorrow from my being; may I acknowledge the pain of this life and be freed from its grasp as I enter into lament. May I find you in the middle of the hardest parts of my life. Thank you Lord that you also give us this same ministry of lament alongside others; please grow me in this ability to sorrow with others and to bring your ministry to them in this way. May we together find your joy. Bless you Jesus, thank you for showing us how to be honest about our lives. Amen and Amen.”

Volume Forty-Two: Roots

At Capturing Courage International Ministries we are called to work at the roots of difficulty and despair. Imagine, if you will, a tree. The tree has branches and on these branches there are fruits. The tree has a trunk and connected and below the surface of the soil are the roots of the tree.

Consider that the branches of the tree bear the bad fruit that we see in our communities. There is poverty, sexual abuses, injustice, corruption, educational difficulties, family breakdown, modern slavery, sex trafficking, and more.

Often, we look at these bad fruits and we are drawn to action. Now, action is always good and right and necessary, absolutely necessary. We must enter into these problems and make a better way for everyone involved.



At the same time, we must also begin to learn about the roots that are feeding these bad fruits. We might, after all, spend our entire lifetimes picking the bad fruit only to have it growing back again and again.

It is only in Jesus Christ, by his name, blood, and power, that we can remove the bad roots, that feed these bad fruits. The roots that feed bad fruits are things like selfishness, pride, bitter-root judgments, hatred, lust, idolatry, disobedience, fears, lies we believe, and more.

We read of the time to come in Revelation, **“I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever. And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” Revelation 21:3-5a**

The entire plan of our Lord is to redeem, restore, and make new. And though there is a final and future reality to this plan of the Lord there is also the bringing of the Kingdom of God to earth here and now.

We can participate in the healing and restoration of our communities and nations; this is, after all, the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to address the roots of our lives, our communities, and our nations. It is something that begins with us.

In 2 Chronicles we are told, **“Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14**

It is imperative, as the body of Christ, that we take the time to wait on the Lord, asking him to reveal to us where we have participated in the roots that lead to our (corporate) bad fruits.

The more we can come in repentance and humility before the Lord, the greater will be the healing of our lands. The Bible is clear, it is the body of Christ, you and I, that are called to be salt and light in the world.

Imagine that you had a big pot of food. And into that pot you put just a bit of salt — it would make all the food taste better.

Imagine that you were looking into a dark room. You are unsure about entering that dark room for it looks scary and ... dark. But imagine that you are wearing the light of the world, imagine that as you enter that dark room that the light you bring with you illuminates the room — the darkness goes away simply because of the presence of the light.

This is the call of Jesus Christ and of his gospel. He is good news to a world brought low by the weight of sin and roots that feed bad fruits. Jesus is the light that we wear as we enter into the difficulties around us. In Jesus we become salt that preserves and makes the whole world a little more glad.

There are many who do not yet know Jesus Christ. There are many who are not yet comfortable with repentance and humility. There are many who have not experienced Christ as the answer to their situations. But you have.

You, as a child of The King, are called to participate in the healing and restoration of this world unto Jesus Christ. And we begin by taking responsibility for what has gone wrong around us.

Consider Daniel who was an amazing man of God. In Daniel chapter 9 we find him taking responsibility for the sins of his people. Now, Daniel had been but a teenager when Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians (he carried no personal responsibility for those sins that had been committed many, many years before he was even born), and yet we find him in humility standing in the gap to declare and intercede and to make a way for both the spiritual and literal freedom of his people.

He was obviously past all blaming and condemnation. He had obviously invested in forgiveness and of trusting his own captivity to the Lord. And then, in great maturity and spiritual authority, he prayed and confessed and repented of the sins that had resulted in their captivity.

“I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants and prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.” Daniel 9:4-6

Let me say it again, Daniel confessed to sins that were not personally his. Notice how many times he said ‘We’. He took on the sins of the people in order to bring them before the Lord in confession and repentance. We know today, that this was a participatory act in the heart of the Lord for the freedom of all peoples. We must learn from Daniel’s example.

In fact, the intercession of Daniel was a prophetic act foretelling the ministry of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus came and lived a sinless life and then took on 100% responsibility for the sins of the whole world.

We can also participate in this for our neighbourhoods, our communities, and our nations. As we come before the Lord confessing to our own heart sins, and then the sins of our the areas in which we live, we bring the healing of our Lord. We bring the heart of God to our nations. And we are all healed and made a little more glad. This is the work of the body of Christ. This is the salt and light that we are equipped and empowered to bring. And it all begins with confession and repentance from our heart and lips.

“The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.” Psalm 52:17

So, we look at the roots that feed the bad fruits found in our communities, and we ask the Holy Spirit to begin a deep cleansing and healing work, first and foremost, in our own lives. And as we find the Lord’s freedom and healing deep within our own judgments, our own hurts and hatreds, our own disobedience, and the lies that we have believed, we are then spiritually equipped and called to enter into confession and repentance for our communities and our nations.

In this place we stand in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ declaring freedom over our lands and the Kingdom of God begins to inhabit our lives and our communities here and now.

“God, we come in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess God that we have been believing lies about you and about this world. We have thought God that all the problems are about everyone else. We have not stood in the gap and taken on the responsibility for our lands or our people. We have been glad to let them perish in their sin. God forgive us. Give us eyes to see that we can take responsibility in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and that we can bring our personal and corporate sins to the cross where they are washed away by the blood of The

Lamb. Begin to show us the strongholds in our communities and give us courage to take responsibility for these before you. We want to participate in your healing over this whole earth Father. Thank you. We bless your name.”

Note: to pray through sins to complete freedom and healing in the Lord [click on this LINK](#) to be taken to the healing prayer process that we use at CCIM. Gather as people of God and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the sins and bad roots that can be brought to the cross. Begin to take responsibility and to declare healing to your community. May the Lord bless you and may the Holy Spirit lead you.

Volume Forty-Three: Revival

I grew up in the church and often heard about revivals that happened over the years in various places. Yet

I never had a working definition for revival. Earlier this year I began asking the Lord to give me a better picture of revival, what it is, how it comes to us, and the impact it leaves in our lives.

To begin, let's define revival. If I had to give a definition to revival it would be when the Kingdom of God breaks in upon our realities; it is when we are touched by the living God and our lives no longer remain the same.

In my study of revival I found out is that Revival requires three necessary ingredients.

- A Hunger for More of God
- Repentance & Humility
- Religious Stronghold Broken

Lets take some time to look at these three key ingredients for revival.

I. A HUNGER FOR MORE OF GOD

When I think of a hunger for God I think of someone who wants God so much that he or she is willing to come to him regardless of what is in their life. We may have sins and regrets but we push past the shame and condemnation of those things to come to God; we may be nervous about being seen by God but we come anyway.

A hunger for more of God brings us beyond ourselves and we seek Him out. We no longer hide and we are ready to reveal our whole hearts to the Lord while we wait expectantly for him to reveal himself to us.

“For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” Psalm 107:9

“God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Matthew 5:6

We must ask ourselves, how hungry are we for God, how thirsty are we for Him?

A hunger for more of God brings us past our need to make things right before we come to him. Instead, we learn to bring ourselves to the Lord even in our sin. We do not hide our sin, cover it up, try to do away with it ourselves, but we become quick to be turned back to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we fear, doubt, worry, are in dismay and discouragement, a hunger for more of God has us turned to Him even at these times, especially at these times. And as we keep turned toward Jesus we come to be known by him and to know him better.

“But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord — who is the Spirit — makes us more and more like him as we are changed into this glorious image.”
2 Corinthians 3:16-18

And as we remain turned to Jesus, hungry for more of God we, by our hearts action, renounce the shame and the condemnation that the enemy would have us under. We, like Jesus (**Hebrews 12:2**) despise the shame and refuse to have it keep us bound to ourselves — we live free unto the Lord.

2. REPENTANCE & HUMILITY

We may think that repentance is only for those people out there. But repentance is a call to the body of Christ to intercede and to lead the way forward on behalf of our communities and nations. As the body of Christ takes the responsibility for the sins of their own lives, but then for the sins of their communities and nations, we become salt and light for this world.

This is an incredible invitation by God himself to participate in the coming of the Kingdom of God to this earth.

“But if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14

We must remain bowed to the Lord in our spirits, hearts, and minds. We must continue to know our need before the Lord. We must live with a heart that is eager to acknowledge our wrong before the Lord.

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. For the new wine would burst the wineskins, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be stored in new wineskins. But no one who drink the old wine seems to want the new wine. ‘The old is just fine, they say.’” Luke 5:37-39

In this passage the new wine is the fresh move of God through the work of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit personally and intimately through each person. The wineskins are us as people.

Jesus is saying that if we want to contain this new movement and work of Jesus Christ that we must become new wineskins. We must become new in Him or we will not be able to contain all that God has for us.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24

It is incumbent upon the body of Christ to lead the way in repentance and humility for repentance is the key to our own freedom and is the key to releasing the spirit of the living God into our communities and for the transformation of our nations. As each one of us comes in repentance we do our part and we participate in this coming of the Kingdom of God to earth.

3. RELIGIOUS SPIRITS MUST BE BROKEN

Lastly, religious spirits must be broken. The things of our lives that reflect religion must be renounced and broken off of our own lives and off of our communities and ultimately our nations.

Now, for many of us who have been in church a long time we may not be able to discern the difference between religion and the gospel of Christ. Unfortunately, we have within our churches often taken on elements of religion. So, let's look at the difference between religion and Jesus.

Religion says “Try harder.” — Jesus says, “Enter into my rest.”

Religion says, “Be perfect.” — Jesus says, “I am making all things new.”

Religion says, “You must always and forever more bring a Sacrifice.”

Jesus says, “I AM YOUR SACRIFICE.”

The gospel of Jesus is simple:

- receive Christ
- rest in him
- be the light of Christ

Yet it is so simple that we often complicate it in our quest to be more sophisticated. The gospel needs nothing more added to it and we must be careful that we are not coming back under a spirit of law and condemnation.

Paul in Galatians is strongly warning against this very thing:

“Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down. For when I tried to keep the law it condemned me. So I died to the law — I stopped trying to meet all its requirements — so that I might live for God.” Galatians 2:18-19

“But those who depend on the laws to make them right with God are under his curse.” Galatians 3:10

“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

“So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law.” Galatians 5:1

To remain in the work of Christ is to be diligent against anything that is of religion. We are called not into a religion of rights and wrongs but into a living relationship with God whereby, by his Spirit and by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ, we are freed unto living.

The world is chock-full of religions, all of which are demanding penance and paying dues and making sacrifices, but Jesus comes and frees us from this.

I am convinced that the wide way (**Matthew 7:13-14**) that Jesus says many will find, is religion, and that the narrow way that few find is this relationship, grace, and freedom with Jesus. We want to be people of the narrow way.

It is hard to rest in the work of Jesus Christ. It is not in our nature to stop trying so hard and to trust someone else and the work they have done. Yet, this is the invitation implicit within the gospel — Jesus says come to me and I will give you rest.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light. Matthew 11:28-30

Revival is a call and an invitation to every single one of us to enter anew into the rest of the Lord Jesus Christ. Revival is a call to stop trying so hard and to begin resting in Jesus and the work he did on our behalf.

Volume 44 - The Wide Road & The Narrow Road

“You can enter God’s kingdom only through the narrow gate. The [road that leads to destruction]ESV* is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.” Matthew 7:13-14 NLT *[highway to hell] NLT

I have become convinced that the wide and the narrow roads that Jesus talks about are not in regards to sin per se, but about our response to sin. The Wide Road experiences sin in shame and condemnation and out of that experience works to rid itself of sin.

The Wide Road is where we put in good works and our own efforts to try and make ourselves right with God. The Wide Road is where we participate in religion that appeases the Gods, that focusses on self, that works to come clean.

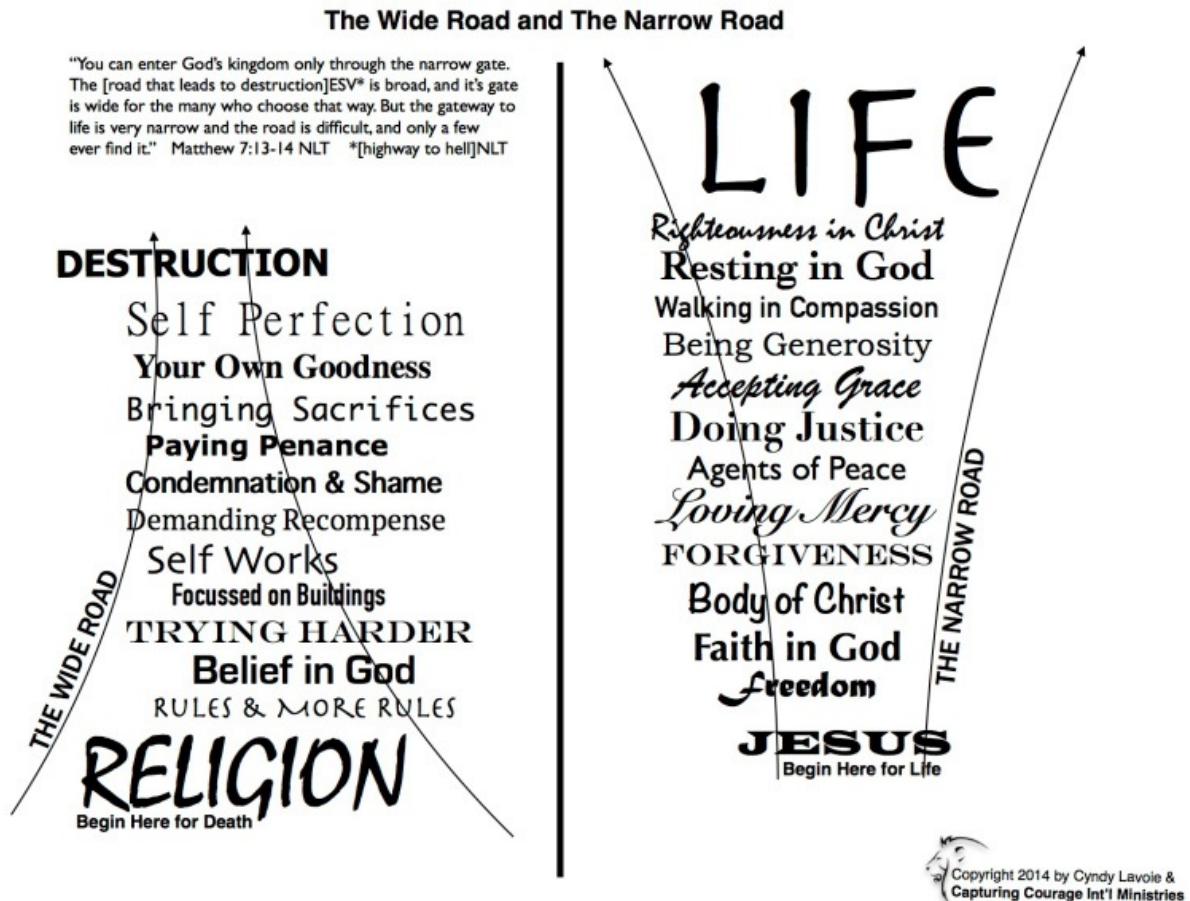
“If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.” 1 John 4:18b

The Narrow Road, on the other hand, does not experience sin as condemnation and shame but as a matter-of-fact part of our humanity and our fallenness. The Narrow Road despises the shame and condemnation and instead remains turned toward Jesus Christ the Saviour of our lives.

“And we do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.” Hebrews 12:2

On the Wide Road we continue to bring our sacrifices and our penance.

On the Narrow Road we rest in the work of Jesus Christ who is our sacrifice.



“The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing.” John 6:63

**“And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.”
Philippians 3:6b,7**

“Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.” Hebrews 10:22

On the Wide Road we participate in rituals, we tithe so that we remain in the protection of God, and we do good deeds to outweigh our badness. On the Wide Road we believe in God but we have not yet put our faith in Him.

“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me!” John 5:39

“Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” Ephesians 2:9

On The Narrow Road we stop trying so hard.

We understand that we CANNOT MAKE GOOD on our lives, (**Galatians 2:18**). We die to the law and we begin to live in Christ. We take our focus off of ourselves and whether we are good or bad or right or wrong and we put our focus onto Jesus and we follow closely as His Holy Spirit leads us; we let God guide our steps.

On The Wide Road we demand perfection from ourselves and from others. Because sin is the problem (only on the wide road) we do all we can to cover over, to pretend it isn't there, to fix it, to solve it, to come right in our own strengths.

“I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of getting right with God.” Romans 10:2-3a

“Make sure that the light you think you have is not actually darkness.” Luke 11:35

Yet, on The Narrow Road we know that sin is not the problem.

Does sin cause problems? Certainly! Yet, sin is not the problem.

Christ took care of that problem over two-thousand years ago, and so on The Narrow Road we know that we do not focus any longer on our sin or anyone else's sin — rather, we speak words of life and we give hope that, “You too can be free from the death cycles of being focussed on sin by coming into the saving work of Jesus Christ.”

“So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law.” Galatians 5:1

On The Wide Road this focus on sin and it's knee-jerk response of being good, has us on a cycle of condemnation and shame and trying harder.

“But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse.” Galatians 3:10

In contrast, those on The Narrow Road find that condemnation and shame no longer have any voice — these are mute in the great and holy, righteous, presence of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus despised the shame, so can we.

On The Narrow Road we rest in Jesus and we find life.

**“Come to me, all of you who are weary carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28**

Volume 45 - Understanding

Two weeks ago I was meeting with a prayer client. She had been meeting with me for some sessions and was in the midst of facing some hard decisions. As we came before the Lord inquiring of His thoughts it occurred to her that her trouble was that she has been trying to understand every part of what she was facing.

The Lord revealed that the problem was that she wanted to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, how to go forward; she was looking for a surety within her own mind and understanding.

The Holy Spirit brought to her mind this verse:

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7 ESV

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7 NASB

“Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 NLT

Notice the slightly different ways the verse is translated:

ESV says, **“which surpasses all understanding”**

NASB says, **“which surpasses all comprehension”**

NLT says, **“which exceeds anything we can understand”**

The Holy Spirit revealed to her that to follow the peace of Christ would in fact take her places, good places, that her own understanding would not go. It was a moment of revelation for her and in response she quickly and easily put down at the cross her own understanding. She realized the sin of following her own understanding.

When we are faced with difficult decisions and complicated situations it is easy to toss all possible options around and around in our hearts and minds. As we contemplate this idea and that solution, this option and that criteria, we can easily lose sleep at such times. The stress of trying to make a ‘good’ decision can make for bad days and may even ruin our health over the long term.

Yet God is pretty clear that as we bring our concerns and worries to him that he will guide us with His peace. The verse prior reads:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Philippians 4:6 ESV

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” Philippians 4:6 NLT

We know that life is not simple. There are complicated situations that are beyond our best thinking and understanding. Sometimes in fact, we are faced with hard decisions that may seem wrong but turn out to be right. It is especially at these times that we must pay close attention to the Lord and to his peace.

I’ve come to see that God guides us with his peace. We may be uncertain about something but God’s peace enters in and we risk to go forward in Him. Or, we may be uncertain about something and God’s peace is *not* found and so we risk to hold back.

God’s peace does indeed surpass our understanding. The peace of God is powerful and by it we are kept by the Lord in a way that doesn’t always make sense to us, a way that ‘surpasses our comprehension and that exceeds anything we can understand’.

My prayer client realized that she had been trying to do life according to her own understanding. She was trying to make the best decision, the right decision, but all in all, after many months of trying to get it ‘right’ she was frazzled and worn and worried and no closer to a solution or answer than she had been before.

One of the things she gave over to Jesus that day was her need to understand.

Instead of trying to understand, she committed herself to paying attention to the Lord and where his peace was for her; as she looked at difficult options to a complicated situation she came to see that only the peace of the Lord could truly guide her. And she caught a glimpse that the peace of God could lead her to good results that her own understanding is unable to produce.

She saw in fact, that her own understanding of right and wrong and of good and bad had been getting in the way of her walking in the peace of Christ. She had been doing what many Christians do, she was following the god of good and bad and right and wrong, rather than the God of peace that surpasses understanding.

Perhaps we are forgetting what the writer of Proverbs tells us:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” Proverbs 3:5

We must come to realize that our understanding is faulty. We cannot figure it all out. There are pieces to every situation that are not ours to know. Only God sees all the sides and parts and pieces of circumstances, of relationships, of ministry, of our futures, and of our lives.

It is good therefore to learn complete dependence on the Spirit of the Lord for wisdom and ways forward with whatever we may be facing.

And it is as we do this, that true understanding can be ours. *Waiting on the Lord*, turning away from our own understanding and turning towards Him brings us to wisdoms that would not normally be ours.

“Making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.” Proverbs 2:2-5

The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.” Psalm 119:130

I don't know what situations or decisions you are facing today, but I suggest that you wait on the Lord for his understanding. Learn to hold back, do not act on your understanding, rather, wait on the Lord, see what he has to say and pay attention to his peace.

How is he leading you? What are you sensing from him?

The peace of the Lord does surpass our understanding. The Lord often leads us in ways that may not make sense to us, but if there is the peace of Christ leading you then you best follow.

Coming into His peace we find ourselves surrendering to the Lord our own best understanding. We come out of agreement with what makes sense to us (in our own best thinking) and we come into agreement with the leading and direction of the Lord.

Give him this. Give him your understanding. Then invite God to lead you and to guide you with his peace.

“God I come today in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father, I have been counting on my own ability to understand and to make sense of things. But I see today that this habit of mine, this central focus on my own thinking, may in fact be keeping me from you, from your leading and from your peace.

Today I say ‘No more!’ to my own best understanding and I ask that you enter me into your wisdom and your peace upon my life. Show me the way you would have me go. Enter me into your understanding, teach me, guide me. Thank you that you desire us to live in your peace, thank you for your understanding. Amen.”

There are many strengths that we like to rely on in this world. But knowing God, understanding him, following his direction, having his peace, are the best kinds of strengths we might have. God will not fail us as we look to him for direction put aside our own best ideas and take on his understanding.

Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me...” Jeremiah 9:23-24a