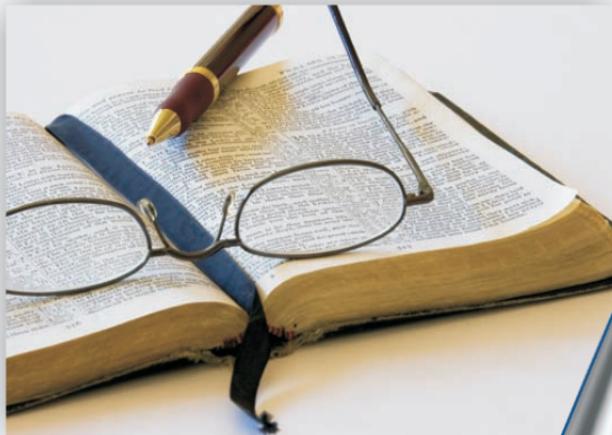


Spiritual Living for Ministers

Studies in Spiritual Formation



Truman Scott, PhD.

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SPIRITUAL LIVING FOR MINISTERS

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Truman Scott

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DEDICATION

No tribe or village or person could be more blessed than to have a mature, Gospel preacher devote his time and giftedness in sharing the sweet message of Jesus and His invitation to salvation.

This study is dedicated to those men, who, across the centuries, have devoted their best in exalting Jesus as the Savior of lost men and helping every person to find the abundant life in Christ and become whole in Him.

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PREFACE

A Call to Spiritual Living

It was the Apostle Paul's belief there was a God who had created within every man a longing, a hope, a groping for experiencing the intimate presence of his Creator God. He affirmed that belief in a lecture to scholarly Athenians (cf. Acts 17:27). Augustine, the noted theologian in the fifth century, believed that a man could not be happy until he had filled the God-created vacuum within himself, filling it with God. And so, every generation of man has hungered for the presence of God, for a deep sense of intimacy with his Maker.

The multitude of books and lectures confirm that many have pondered over the question of spirituality. How to define it? How to achieve it? How to drink deeply of it? How to share it? Few have felt confident enough with their own spirituality to tell others how or where to find it. It could even seem arrogant for one to pretend he has arrived at such a level of spirituality to show others the way to the presence of God. Yet, doesn't the longing of the ages demand that if anyone has discovered even a piece of the journey he should share it with others who, like him, are groping to find God? Oswald Chambers tried to do this in his book, My Upmost for His Highest. Likewise, E.W. McMillon aimed at such a noble goal in his book, The Spiritual Life of A Minister. Such was the mission of Jesus, to show us the Father.

Since the early years of my ministry, thus over fifty years ago, I have hungered constantly to have a more meaningfully felt, a more convincing certainty, and a more unbroken sense of being close to the presence of God. I know the agony of feeling distant from God, even when my life was being given happily in His service. I know the ecstasy of being surely in the presence of God, short-lived as it sometimes was. I know the hours of study and reading, of listening to others speaking on their efforts to know God, and of pushing hard on the doors of heaven. I know the sudden recognition that being active in ministry is not a

Preface

substitute for being holy and that lasting fruits do not grow in shallow soil. From all of those hours and efforts, I accepted an invitation to teach fledgling ministers at Sunset International Bible Institute on becoming spiritual in their oncoming ministries. That assignment continued, sometimes twice a year, for a decade, to new classes of men with the same longing and groping to know God.

This study is the result of those years of urging men to deepen their spiritual lives. In those classes, students were urged to make every effort to share with others what would come from both the revealed knowledge of seeking God and the experienced confidence that God had created us to have union with Him. They were often assured that our God wanted us to seek Him and would be near to guide each step toward a life of spiritual living in His presence. I hope that what you read in this study will either encourage you in your walk toward God or will confirm that what you are doing will surely lead you to “walk with God in the cool of the evening” in the garden of your deepest longings to be spiritual in all your thoughts, feelings, and actions. God’s people will be blessed through the spiritual life you enjoy and your God will be glorified among His saints.

Truman Scott

Introduction

The Prerequisites to Spiritual Living

What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a process. It is the outcome of a long series of good choices. It is not synonymous with old age, but it does require, not years, but decades to develop. It does not happen mechanically, automatically, routinely. It is purposely pursued. It is the equivalent to the mystical search for the *holy grail*. It is a life-long quest for intimacy with God. After all that a man might do in the quest for spiritual intimacy, at the core of it all is the Spirit of God at work in forming character.

A clear, biblical illustration of the dimensions of spiritual living was given by Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians. Read Ephesians 3:14–21:

- It is being “*... strengthened ... with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*”
- It is “*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*”
- It is “*... being rooted and established in love.*”
- It is having “*... power ... to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.*”
- It is “*... to know the love that surpasses knowledge ...*”
- It is to “*... be filled to the measure of all of the fullness of God.*”
- It is to have God working powerfully in the believer, doing “*... immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine ...*”

Some, like Brennan Manning in his *Abba's Child*, say that spiritual life begins with our acceptance of our wounded self, coming out of hiding and exposing the imposter in each of us. As important as self-awareness, wholeness, is in the process of becoming spiritual, it is not the beginning of spirituality. One cannot begin to know and accept self

without knowing God. Knowing God in nature, in revelation, and more specifically and clearly, knowing Him in His Son, Jesus, is the beginning of spiritual living. We cannot know just how incomplete we are without knowing something of the completeness of God. We cannot know how to accept ourselves without knowing to what extent God has gone to redeem us and set us apart for more noble living and purpose. We cannot know our potential without knowing how marvelously we are made in the image of God.

Simply and most correctly stated, the way into the presence of God is Jesus Christ, His Son. It is still true, Jesus is “*. . . the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through . . .*” Him (John 14:6). He further elaborated by saying, “To **know** me is to know the Father” (cf. John 4). Walking in His ways, believing His truths, and living His life is not only the surest, as compared to all other proposals, it is the only hope of being with God. A lifetime spent in knowing the Son is the only way to know the Father.

Spirituality Is Knowing Jesus

Jesus is the Way! He is the Truth! He is the Life! **He, Himself and He alone!** Identifying with Him, living in union with Him, responding to Him in every nerve and sinew of our souls and being, as it were, absorbed into His very being opens the doors to a meaningful spiritual life. Walking the Way begins in observing the life and teachings of Jesus, believing in His divine nature, understanding His atoning sacrifice, and acknowledging that, separate from Him, there is no hope in this world or in the world to come. Those experiences, be they long or short in time, must result in trusting in Jesus, committing oneself in a purposeful redirection of life, of acknowledging and following Him, and making a faith response in baptism by being immersed into Him (cf. Romans 6:4). With all sins atoned for and washed away, forgiven by God, one then walks in a new life. Such a one is committed to live the truths he is learning and to drink deeply of the joys of the abundant life.

Mastering the Gospels, for the new believer, both in structure and content is a good place to begin in living a spiritual life. However, one must continue by listening intently and repeatedly to every sermon preached by Jesus,

pondering over every one of the parables, again and again, taking note of every conversation and every confrontation. One must marvel over every one of the recorded miracles, and stay close in following Jesus from Judea through Samaria to Jerusalem and back again. Feel His weariness of teaching, walking, hungering, and grieving with people. Determine not to miss a detail in any of the some thirty days described in His life and ministry, straining to drink deeply of every event, pluming the depth of each statement and feeling the impact of every response of the lives He touched. Capture His love, feel His concern, understand His anger, laugh with Him, puzzle with Him over the hardness of hearts and be touched by His tenderness with children, widows, and the suffering. Climb to the heights of His view of the Kingdom, to the Holiness and purposes of God, to the unfolding of the Scheme of the Ages, and to His becoming the Suffering Servant of Old Testament prophesies. Agonize with Him in the Garden, cringe with His beatings, torture, and crucifixion. Be broken up inside with His humiliation, with His seeming defeat, and powerlessness in burial. Be disturbed with all that began to happen from the Temple, the earthquake, the disemboweling of the tombs, and His own empty tomb. Be awakened to wonder over the select meetings after the resurrection, His promises, and His return through the skies to the throne room on high to be enthroned in glory. Be discerning of how the earliest Christians lived out their lives in practicing the teachings of Jesus and paying the highest price for their unflinching faith in His being the promised Messiah, their Savior.

Spirituality Is Seeing Jesus Touching the Lives of Others

Spirituality is more than a human quest or learning much from the Bible storehouse of knowledge. It is something that God does to one who walks in the Way, believes the Truth, and lives the Life. Making oneself available to the touch of Jesus is the crucial difference from being humanistic in one's quest for spiritual intimacy and being the object of divine grace. Jesus does something wonderful to those who open their hearts to Him. That "something wonderful" is the fragrance of spirituality.

Stepping out of the pages of the Gospels into the lives of living people is one of the most emphatic ways of really knowing the Son. His promise was if we see the Son, we see the Father (cf. John 14:7).

A young Asian, college professor in Russia, who prided herself in being an atheist and in having convinced a number of Christian believers to renounce their faith, listened to a lecture on Jesus in His dealings with people. At the end of the lecture, she asked to be baptized into Christ, explaining that in all her studies of human history, she had never encountered anyone like Him. Her first reason for baptism was to become like Him, she was in love with Him and His ways. Further, she acknowledged that she could not begin to become like Him until she was free from her sins and could start living, feeling, and acting like Jesus. She wanted to devote her life to calling on everyone to believe in Jesus and be given a new life.

Some of the most inspiring and instructive parts of the New Testament can be seen in watching how Jesus touched and changed the lives of others in His own time. His humanity is seen everywhere and in every way. Yet, there is that something that stands out that draws people to Him, wondering what kind of man is this and what is His source of spirituality?

Nicodemus

Any carpenter from a country village would be shaken with doubt, fear, and dread if a prominent ruler of the highest court in the land approached him at night in the bustling city of Jerusalem. He would be trembling, sure that soldiers were close behind to take him for some alleged crime. He could hardly hear, little alone believe, that the ruler was wanting to learn something from him about deep, theological questions. He would have little to offer to such a scholarly man at the top of the religious ladder. What he might finally mutter would hardly cause the ruler to pause, to ponder and to ask for further explanations. The ruler surely would not go away so deeply convicted to become a devout follower and courageous defender in the months to come. But, Jesus, the Galilean Carpenter, so impacted Nicodemus through His public teaching that the ruler braved the night and the deadly accusations of peers, if exposed, to come to see if the

Carpenter might be the long awaited Messiah. Jesus changed the saintly ruler. Through an evening exchange, Nicodemus became the first believer in the circles of national scholarship and among supreme court judges. The story of Nicodemus in John 3:1–21, then, should become a prime passage in learning of the powerfully, impacting spirituality of Jesus and how **a searching spirit is a prerequisite to spirituality.**

The Samaritan Woman

Virtually, any and every Jewish man of the first century who cared anything for his reputation would not be seen in public, religious discourse with a woman, a stranger, and one known for her exaggerated immorality. Perhaps, even worse, was that she was a Samaritan, that mixed breed that in their best were a false, pretentious religion claiming to be the true heirs of Abraham and custodians of Moses' authentic writings.

Yet, this passing-through Galilean saw something promising within her, something to be renewed, reclaimed for God. He spoke insightfully of some of the most profoundly spiritual and far-reaching themes that were reserved for more religious settings and disputants. To the most unlikely of sinners, He showed and told her that He was the Messiah for whom many waited. He looked beyond the prohibitive, cultural obstacles, religious pretensions, and moral debauchery to claiming a believer who would influence a town full of people in discovering the Messiah. The Samaritan woman's story in John 4:4–26, 39–42, then becomes another instructive story in picturing a gateway to spirituality, **believing, on evidence, that Jesus is the anointed Messiah.**

Peter at Work

What business does a carpenter, a land-lubber, have in telling a seasoned fisherman to do something contrary to all that he knows and has often experienced in his profession? Jesus said in effect, "You have failed in the best time of the night to catch any fish and even if the fish are not biting and it goes against all you know in your profession, do what I tell you to do." The biggest fish story of that morning was not Peter and Andrew and his two partners, James and John,

being unable to haul in all the fish. It was what impact Jesus had on Peter. Something made Peter realize his utter unworthiness to be blessed by Jesus. With fish being piled into the boat all around him and water pouring in, Peter was more struck by his sinfulness. He pled, “*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man*” (Luke 5:8). Spirituality waits for men to realize their spiritual needs. No one penetrates the heart so deeply as Jesus. Being with Jesus makes one want to be like Him, free from sin and living a winsome life. Peter’s story in Luke 5:1–11, must be one of the fountains in one’s quest for spirituality, teaching us the need to **recognize our sinfulness in need of a Savior.**

The Possessed Man

Picture a crazed, ranting man, one living in the stench of the tombs, filthy and scarred, plunging down the hilly slopes, screaming at the top of his voice. Whatever the disciples of Jesus were doing to confront this decadent soul, Jesus stood firm, ordering him to be released of his evil spirits. Jesus had just commanded the angry waters of the sea to be calmed, being superior to the natural order. Now, He extends His authority over the supernatural world through the world of evil spirits. Before their eyes, the disciples saw a man snatched out of a life of violent, evil possession and clothed in his right mind and robe. What Jesus did there, He has done just as dramatically in legions of cases. The possessed man knew of his destitute state, even knew the uniqueness of Jesus, but feared all of the challenges of a new, responsible life. Jesus gave the man in abundance what he feared but, having it, wanted to share it with every one in all of the ten, Grecian cities on the East of the Sea of Galilee. Mark 5:1–20 speaks volumes of what Jesus will do when **people recognize who He is and throw themselves at His feet.** He does more and better than is asked.

The Hemorrhaging Woman

How much could a young carpenter know about treating a long-term, debilitating case of hemorrhaging? What could anyone hope from Him when doctors had repeatedly failed? How desperate must a woman be when no hope weighs on her? However, hopelessness can be the beginning of a new

search for help. Jesus had healed others. Why could He not heal her? Was anything too hard for Him? At the end of twelve years of incredible suffering, isolation, humiliation, frustration, being duped of her well-being, and stripped of her dignity, she sees hopelessness turn into new strength and wholeness. What a renewed sense of life, what a new list of purposes, what a statement of worth and source of gladness! The story of this hemorrhaging woman in Mark 5:24–34 shows how an **outstretched hand of faith** opens the door to a dramatic life change and newness of person.

A Woman Caught in Adultery

A lonely woman, who was being embarrassed before all having been dragged from her hidden bed of sin, faced an accusing mob of men with no compassion and the certain end of life, soon to be pelted by harshly thrown stones. The woman was feverish with fear, defenseless in shame, entirely guilty as accused, and with no one to give her any hope. She was worthless chattel to her accusers who were using her to find fault with the stranger from Galilee, called by some a Rabbi. Jesus saw something different in her, looking beyond obvious sins, knowing well the consequences of such conduct. Both the woman's life and His life were in jeopardy in the evil jaws of the accusers. Being righteous called for judgment. Being merciful, mingled with grace, called for forgiveness. Either response could be appropriate to the occasion. He saw her in terms of a useful tomorrow and a glorious eternity. So with the condition of the Law for stoning not being satisfied and there being no remaining witnesses, He sent her on her way forgiven, with a new view of life at its best. Jesus was more interested in saving her, not only from the malicious mob, but perhaps, saving her for a life in a happy marriage, loving parenthood, being a revered grandmother, and a faithful citizen in the Eternal Kingdom. This woman's story in John 8:1–1, as a step in spiritual living, shows a Savior with the power and will to forgive the grossest of sins, to waive the penalty of sin and extend mercy, and to provide for a new life and victory over sin and its rightful penalty. **It shows us the extent to which Jesus will go to rescue a defenseless sinner.**

Zacchaeus

A tax collector, an agent for the hated Romans, a ruthless, greedy grasper of the hard-earned money of others including his own brothers, was roundly held in contempt by all. Extortion was his middle name and compassion was never felt. He would be the last to yield to a change of life that would take him away from his opulent lifestyle or expose him to the anger of the cheated. His shortness kept him from being in the crowd, but his arrogance and contempt kept him from being one among the people. Jesus, at His own expense of rejection, offered Zacchaeus friendship, value, and opportunity to rethink his life. It was a new experience, one he did not deserve and one that flooded him with a compelling sense of doing better. The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–9 shows that spirituality can start from the most unthinkable places **if one will search to see Jesus.**

The Gospels are full of such stories that show what happens when people have an intimate moment with Jesus. He changes people. He helps them dig new wells of fresh and living water. He helps them discover courage to make radical and difficult changes.

Spirituality Is Claiming the Lifestyle of Jesus

Thinking like Jesus, feeling like Jesus, and acting like Jesus is more than ten words. His vision, His purposes, His values, His choices, His attitude, and His reactions begin to describe His lifestyle:

- It was a lifestyle in which material attractions did not dominate decisions, though, even in His poverty, He did wear a costly, seamless garment.
- It was a lifestyle in which natural pleasures of marriage and intimacy gave way to eternal purposes, though loyal relationships and friends were important.
- It was a lifestyle in which a longing for longevity of life did not crowd out Kingdom priorities, though He dealt wisely in the care of His body.

- It was a lifestyle in which power, control, and applaud gave way to serving people, though He was destined to be King of kings and Lord of lords.
- It was a lifestyle in which He and those who followed Him had little hope to survive, though eternal reward was their pursuit.
- It was a lifestyle in which He did not allow His circumstances to shape His goals, though He saw in His circumstances the reasons for His life on earth.
- It was a lifestyle in which He embraced the largeness of God's eternal purposes, though He never overlooked the simple lessons He saw among the people.

Jesus' lifestyle was not intended to be caught up in satisfying Himself, in accumulating toys and things, in living on earth forever, in going to the extreme to get His way, in sacrificing others to get ahead or quitting when the obstacles piled up. His lifestyle kept true to His vision, focused on His purpose, and was loyal to His values. His choices were consistent with who He was. His servant attitude did not waver. Change His clothing, change His lodging place, or change the severity of His circumstances, and His lifestyle reactions were still predictable and exemplary. The choice of His lifestyle remained as man's best hope to share in His spirituality.

Spirituality Is Yielding to the Spirit

A continuing work of the Spirit is the formation of character. The saint of God is urged to "*live by the Spirit*" being "*led by the Spirit*" and walking in such a way as to expect a harvest of spiritual characteristics (cf. Galatians 5:16, 18, 22–25). From a life-long yielding to the Spirit, both to His revealed instructions in the Word and to His taking up residence within each of us, comes the wardrobe of spiritual clothing we all desire. Yielding to the Spirit and to His leadership in our lives is like the power of a new affection. Like a farm boy becoming a poet or a teen-age boy giving attention to his hygiene and dress when falling in love, so the yielding believer finds a new power beyond himself to reject all works of the flesh and be clothed with the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:19–23). The key to opening the door to

spirituality is not with well defined methods, highly disciplined schedules, and human efforts. It is yielding to the Spirit, who alone forms spiritual character. Staying in places the Spirit works, emulating people who share His values, inviting His sowing and harvesting in our hearts, and yielding to character changes He inspires will lead to a place where no human could reach alone by his best efforts.

Conclusion

On the surface of things, spirituality is something to be sought as a passion of the soul. There are some choices that each person must make to further his quest to enter and to linger in the presence of God. However, the sum total of spirituality is not found in adding up human efforts and with the best of law keeping. It features the overwhelming intervention of God who went so far, even to Calvary, first to save us, then to plant the seed of eternity in our souls, leading us from one spiritual plane to another, to still higher ground.

Enjoy the spiritual quest discussed in the body of this study. Study the specific choices that one can make, each being dynamically useful in the quest for intimacy with God — the true statement of spirituality.

Part One:

Foundational Blocks in Spiritual Living

These studies will lead the student to embrace the principles of living by which Jesus lived.

Choose the Way of the Cross

Following Jesus to a Personal Calvary

Without the cross at the center of time and at the focal point of God's redemptive plan the Christian way would be so much about little. No Cross means no Savior. No Savior means no promises. No promises mean no hope. No hope makes us men most miserable, having no noble purpose in this world. Rather, it would mean being cast as merchants of platitudes, peddlers of deception.

The first century, Church folks believed in the centrality of the Cross in establishing the Kingship of Jesus and His redemptive mission on earth. The Cross was something worthy to live for as it was something for which one should be ready to die. And many of them did. They thought nothing of being ready to repeat the history of the Redeemer in taking up their cross and following Him to their own deaths for the sake of the Kingdom. The Cross made no human sense, but when understood as preached by the Apostles, it made all kinds of sense in explaining God and His passionate search for men everywhere (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18–25: The power and wisdom of God).

The certainty of the Cross, with its accompanying empty tomb, is the basis for understanding God's long term desire to save us and the extent to which He has gone to redeem us again from sin:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16, KJV).

The Cross measures God's wrath against sin and His determination to blunt and destroy the power of Satan. The Cross is God's statement of how much He loves the unlovable and how far into lostness He will reach to retrieve

the sinner. The Cross does speak of how much God values a soul, but also, how much a faith response is required for us to be saved.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promises, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not desiring that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).

By way of the Cross, that is by way of Jesus' body, suffering and dying on the Cross, we have access to God:

Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body . . . let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith . . . (Hebrews 10:19–22).

The Cross sets our hearts on fire, a consuming fire setting ablaze spirituality in our souls and a global passion for sharing what great good God has done for us.

Spirituality Begins at One's Personal Calvary

. . . “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross (daily) and follow me”
(Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23).

Jesus not only gave us the way to begin a spiritual walk, but how to continue and complete the journey. There is much more to be said of mature spirituality in the Scriptures, but this statement is the overarching, all inclusive statement instructing obedient believers to enter into the intimate presence of the Father.

It must be noted that we are looking at a four point statement leading us to spiritual living: desiring to be a disciple, denying ourselves, taking up one's cross, and following Christ continually. All are ongoing, active, personal, and constant. Within the grace of God, the completeness of the end is determined by the nature of the walk.

Another way of expressing the statement is by the questions it asks:

1. Just how much does one desire to be a learner in the school of Jesus?
2. Just how much is he willing to give up to excel?
3. Just how much is he willing to suffer to be identified with Jesus?
4. Just how much is he willing to go wherever Jesus leads him?

The Pathway to Calvary

This opening chapter of study explores the path indicated by Jesus that leads one into spiritual living.

Fervent Desire

Seeing the compassion of Jesus, seeing how He dealt with people of all kinds, seeing how He was master of the seas, winds, and every form of human affliction, including death, seeing how He lived an impeccable life, seeing how He was the fulfillment of numerous Messianic prophecies, and worker of miracles, all these should elicit the most fervent desire to follow Him — to be His disciple, to be a learner in the Jesus school of life.

To confront the certain trials that will come into the life of a believer, especially in a hostile nation, one will have to have a strong motivation. None of the following steps of discipleship will be fully taken unless a novice believer burns with the desire to be like Jesus. How could Stephen stay triumphant in death by stoning without every nerve of his body being in love with Jesus? How could Paul endure all of his persecution without a deeply, stirred devotion for Jesus?

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia; that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves . . . (2 Corinthians 1:8–9, cf. 2 Corinthians 11:22–28).

Genuine desire purifies our motives, strengthens our resolve, provides us with clearer vision and insight, and authenticates every action. It picks us up when we have faltered or fallen and sets us again on a heaven-ward course. A driving desire leads on to making other decisions in spiritual living. Making those decisions further perfects a mature desire to serve faithfully until death.

Decisive Self Denial

There can only be one master, one person in charge of a life, one set of values, one overwhelming purpose and passion, and one affection that wins over all others. It will be self or someone to whom self yields itself. There are multitudes of choices. Jesus offers Himself as the best and most lasting of choices:

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30, KJV).

The radical, decisive dethronement of self and the enthronement of Jesus are crucial to spiritual living. Anything less will result in an embattlement in the inner life, doubt over most decisions, a constant tearing of the mind, motives, and purposes. A denial of self as the dominant principle over one's life means saying “yes” to Jesus, every day and in every way. It is to make Jesus the ruling principle, even ruling passion, of one's whole life.

Spiritual living cannot really begin without a visit to one's own Garden of Gethsemane and the decision to submit fully to the will of God. The decision, “...not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39), must be the beginning and daily experience for spiritual living to take root and flourish.

Self would always be second-guessing Jesus on the throne, not carrying out an order and not fighting long or well, or not using all of the resources of faith in the battles of the Kingdom. Self can be replaced on the throne for awhile, but anything short of joining Jesus in His suffering, bearing a

cross all the way to Calvary, being crucified, and dying to self will not blossom into spiritual living at its most fruitful.

A denial of self, resulting in an end to any personal pretension, imagination, ambition, or presumption is a prerequisite to spiritual living at its best. Only then will one be free to consider and fully adopt the purposes of the Kingdom enterprise and to live the life of holiness that is basic to spiritual living.

Calvary Bound

Picking up the Cross and following Jesus underscores a two-part decision: choosing a life of sacrifice over security and comfort and choosing a radical end of self to preclude an insurgency of self after a seeming victory has been won.

A Life of Sacrifice

The “cross” that a believer is to bear is not the common afflictions and difficulties that all humanity groans under. It is what one purposely chooses to give up for the cause of Christ. It is something that one may have earned, have every right to enjoy, but chooses to sacrifice for the advance of the Gospel. It is something that he will not hold on to at the risk of hindering Kingdom purposes. It is the choice between protecting his own interests and safeguarding his own possessions or giving priority to spiritual concerns.

Sacrifice is the common experience of all believers. Some will suffer martyrdom, shame, or exile. At the start, every believer accepts that real possibility. It may be the sacrifice of an inspiring ambition or a rewarding career to serve Christ or go somewhere beyond the applaud of men and the accolades of grandeur. It may be a place where the rewards are small and the resume will be unimpressive. Serving others almost always means sacrificing time and leisure and personal pleasure. Leadership duties, working with youth, visiting the sick and lonely, sharing the Word, getting down to wherever the lost live, may frequently call one away from the comforts of home and the warmth of loving and being loved by those most precious. Following Jesus almost always will lead one from adding more and more to his possessions in order to contribute to Kingdom needs. But beyond the expected moments of sacrifice, there

is the daily readiness and joy in doing whatever it takes to exalt Jesus before a needy world.

The new lifestyle to which Jesus calls His followers is to be suffering servants, identified with Christ in His suffering. In suffering, sacrificing, and dying, the faithful servant is identified with Jesus and shares the nature of the people of God of all centuries. Peter acknowledged that truth:

. . . for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (1 Peter 4:1–2, NKJV).

The choice for discipleship is the choice of sacrifice, even sacrificing one's autonomy to Christ, and a choice of suffering, even choosing the road to being hunted, scorned, and killed. Discipleship is joining the company of the suffering in which true fellowship with Christ is found.

A Radical End of the Self-Regime

A young man in Pisa, Italy, after being immersed in the sea asked, “Please help me that I will never let the old Andrea come back out of this tomb of water to dominate my life.” He understood that baptism, among other truths, speaks of a willful act to put to death the old man of sin, bury him forever, and get on with a new life of submission and sacrifice for the purposes of the Kingdom (cf. Colossians 3:9–10). The break with the old man is so decisive, so radical, it is called a crucifixion of self. Paul described it:

Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:6, NKJV).

The road to the cross that Jesus pictures in His appeal is the accomplishment of dying to self and continuing a daily walk to Calvary to renew oneself in the resolve to keep Jesus as the Lord of life, to reject any self-opposition that could be on the rise, and reaffirm that self is dead and Jesus Christ is alive. Spiritual living includes looking at the cross daily through the door of the empty tomb of Jesus, reaffirming the

supremacy of the risen Lord, and a readiness to pay whatever price is needed to keep Him before the world as the Lord of life.

Dedicated Walk

Spiritual living is not a “talk” religion, as much as it is a “walk” religion. It is rich in thoughts that must be proclaimed, but it is powerful in actions that appear as lights in a world of darkness. The “talk” will not be heard or believed without the “walk” being seen and appreciated. Falling in love with the author always makes a book more interesting and credible. Seeing how Jesus and His followers act will either make believers or stir up opposition. The centuries-old hostility of Muslim fundamentalism finds some of its fuel in the Christian crusades and the immoral and secular practices of 20th century Christianity of the Western Civilization. The Calvary message saves when believed and obeyed. It will not be believed without the world seeing that it can be lived in every culture and in every land.

For the believer, the daily experience of walking with Jesus is vital to one becoming intimate with the Father. Spirituality means absorbing the thoughts of Jesus as one walks with Him and patterns His responses. It is seeing how He encounters different folks, helping them in confronting temptations and Satan’s threats as they arise daily. With Jesus at one’s side, through early morning and evening prayers and prayers throughout the day, God becomes so very real and near.

Consequences of Discipleship

Jesus could not have been more open about the consequences one must face in making a choice for discipleship (cf. Matthew 16:24–26; Luke 9:24–25). Turning from discipleship to gain security can have its immediate rewards. Self first and safety first makes good, worldly sense. Rejecting Christ in order to live and avoiding the humiliation of being identified with the company of the Man of Galilee will work for awhile. Holding on to possessions rather than helping others provides life pleasures in the short term. Pursuing one’s own life agenda with its ambitions and rewards can result in a life of worldly gain. However, if any decision causes one to lose his soul, the gaining of the whole

world could not compensate the endless loss. It comes down to a choice of the moment or the choice of an endless joy. One way or another, every person will lose his life. Either give it to Christ and enjoy fellowship with God now and forever or keep it for oneself and lose it in a Christ-less death and eternal ruin. The validity of the choice to follow Christ is to be seen in the certainty of the second coming of Christ in glory to gather those who have chosen to follow Him in life and death.

Conclusion

Spiritual living begins with the mind being convinced that Jesus is the very Son of God, continues with the heart desiring to follow Jesus, and becomes more real with the exercise of the will, making the decision to dethrone self and enthroned Jesus as the Lord of Life. However ending there, Christianity would be nothing but an ideology resulting in a stained glass religion and long discussions on the theology of the Temple. One's spirituality would not get out in the streets taking the Gospel to the lost, healing to the sick, or comfort to the sorrowing. It would not stand long in the face of opposition and would yield to the more pressing temptations. It would often be reluctant to sacrifice for the good of the Kingdom.

The words of Jesus, “If any man would desire to be my disciple, he must . . .” (cf. Luke 14:26–33) loom as among the most important words to guide us into the heart of God. With minds convinced of the deity of Jesus (cf. John 8:24), with hearts burning with the passion to be one of His followers (cf. John 6:66–69), and with the announcement that He is the unquestioned Lord of life (cf. Matthew 10:32–33), one takes the first crucial step toward spiritual living. But joining Him on the way to Calvary to die to self, co-mingling blood with blood, sweat with sweat, suffering with suffering, and triumph with triumph, the fledgling believer continues his walk toward spiritual living. Beginning with the forgiveness of sins by identifying with Him in baptism and being lifted in triumph by the resurrection, we seek and find the Father in a life of spiritual growth and accomplishment.

Choosing a Lifestyle of Repentance

Our God is Holy! Being holy means He is infinitely above, superbly and incomparably different, and superior to any other deity. He wants us to share in His holiness in all aspects of our life, worship, and service. The Apostle Peter stated:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13–16).

Spiritual living begins with a house cleaning. Like spring cleaning each year, the chastening of the mind continues throughout life as one sweeps his temple clean for the divine residence. God cannot associate intimately with the clutter and trash of impure thinking. Jesus does not hesitate to pull men out of the gutter, but He does not long walk with people who find delight with life in the gutter or thoughts leading to gutter living.

Throughout His ministry Jesus called on men **to repent**. The repentance envisioned by Jesus was a change of mind, resulting in a change of conduct. Dressing a dirty body in clean clothing was not enough to meet the conditions of repentance. It was a radical change from the inside, from the heart, that reached even to the attitudes, values, relationships, outside behavior, and the treatment of others.

Being a caretaker of the “*temple of the living God*” (2 Corinthians 6:16), which each of us has become with faith

and obedience, means that we make repentance a life-style attitude and practice. With David we pray:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Psalm 139:23–24).

This study is devoted to understanding the pathway of repentance. Not as a single step in the plan of salvation from past sins, but as a continuing journey in pursuit of spiritual intimacy with God, the quest of the soul.

Repentance Starts With Knowledge

There is an in-born consciousness toward sin and righteousness bequeathed to every soul (cf. Romans 2:14–15). Most people, despite a bent toward sinning, know that they are doing wrong (cf. Romans 1:18–32). However, a natural disdain to sin can become seared over by frequent practice, so to some wrong can become right (cf. 1 Timothy 4:2). Thus because of the clarity of right and wrong, even in the absence of revealed Law, sinners stand without excuse before divine judgment. However, God has not left humanity with just an innate remonstrance to sin and a conscience that recoils initially from wrong behavior. He has revealed standards and expectations for becoming holy as He is Holy. The Ten Commandments given to the Jews at Mt. Sinai formed the core of the holiness of God's ancient people. The teachings of Jesus, amplified in Apostolic writings, portray the mantra of holiness for Christians following Jesus.

Lifestyle repentance begins and thrives on increasing knowledge of God's revealed will. When Jesus said, "*Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32), He knew well that good men before Him had recognized that it was not within man to guide his own steps (cf. Jeremiah 10:23). He had often poured over the monumental Psalm 119 which speaks eloquently of the place of the Word in shaping men's souls:

Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple. I open my mouth and

pant, longing for your commandments . . . Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me. Redeem me from the oppression of men, that I may obey your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees (Psalm 119:129–135).

Repentance Continues With Self Awareness

Comparing oneself with those around him, especially lesser responsible people, can leave a person thinking that things are not all that bad. After all, everyone stumbles occasionally. Seeing oneself in the light of God's standards, whether for morality or spiritual living, affirms the statement of Paul, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .*" (Romans 3:23). He had documented from Psalm 53:3 earlier in the text that ". . . *'There is no one righteous, not even one . . . there is no one who does good, not even one'*" (Romans 3:10, 12). He made the point that the whole world has become guilty before God. All of the Gospel cries out that Jesus came to save man because all men were sinners and could not save themselves. Repentance has no validity or power to change a person who does not acknowledge his sinfulness. John describes the moral deficiency in refusing to recognize one's sins:

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us (1 John 1:8–10, NKJV).

A person who ignores or refuses to acknowledge ill health may soon die. He certainly will never enjoy all of the benefits of good health. More seriously, in the eternal scheme of things, a person ignores his faulty values, misguided behavior, hurtful treatment of others, impure thinking, his sins, all to his own loss. Only in a carefully scrutinized life placed along side the life of Jesus can one enjoy the virtues of a well disciplined life. As regular as a night of sleeping and a day of eating and as natural and vital as breathing, one must inquire into his motives, his values,

his relationships, and his behavior at all times to see if God is being honored. Satan would distract us or even encourage us in being so busy serving others and praising God to keep us from looking at ourselves or acknowledging our sinfulness. He fears an honest heart that hungers to be like God and makes daily efforts to submit to an examination of the Spirit through the Word.

Repentance Takes Shape With Disdain Toward Sin

The ugliness of sin, its potential of destroying a relationship with God and other precious relationships and its deceptive nature, are seldom on display or easily seen. A lifestyle of repentance begins to take shape when sin can be seen for what it is and what it intends to do. The spiritual insight, sharpened by a knowledge of the Word and increasing success in battle, to see the end result of any sin is vital to confronting sin that is offered in any one of its alluring forms. Seeing what sin does to people, to relationships, and to the lofty purposes in the Kingdom enterprise should begin to raise a noble disdain within us, innocent and charming and desirable as the sin may be presented. Unfaithfulness that destroys marriages and people, especially the defenseless little people who are hurt for life, is abhorrent. Abuse of drugs, alcohol, work, family, and religion is despicable. Self centered pursuits, holding others in contempt, having goals that emarginate God, or hoarding one's resources to himself while others languish in need are deplorable, ugly, and to be disdained. Claiming to have fellowship with God while any such sins course through our veins should be met, steadily, by a rush of disdain and eagerness to be freed by repentance.

Repentance Grows With Delight in Righteousness

Being "more righteous than others" brings no lasting joy as it eventually is overcome by arrogance and a condescending spirit, even pity, and then contempt for others. Wearing the ever-new clothes of righteousness, the righteousness imputed only by Christ, brings a sense of delight, inspiring purpose, and an overwhelming feeling of gratitude. It is comparable to a poor man being given a new, fresh, clean, daily wardrobe of the best of clothing. It is undeserved, incredibly beautiful, and fits so well. Best of all,

the Father smiles on how well one looks like His Son, wearing the gifts of His sacrifice. Wearing the robes of righteousness given by Jesus, the redeemed sinner wants to stay near the throne, in the Temple presence of the Father, and never again go back to wallow in an active friendship with evil. But even in such incredible surroundings, he has learned by now that straying away from the daily, self-examination of motives and actions, and abandoning his commitment to a lifestyle of repentance could have its consequences. By God's grace he abandoned sin through repentance and by God's abiding grace he will continue his life of repentance.

Repentance Flourishes in Praising God

For however much the changes in the life of a saint have come because of repentance being practiced throughout the length of his life, the saint knows that but for the grace of God, so vividly and powerfully given through the sacrifice of Jesus, he would be powerless, he would be nothing. That is why he increasingly praises God for His loving kindness and His faithfulness in forgiveness. That is why the perfect life and perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross absorbs his day, erupting in praise. That is why he cherishes each victory over sin and rejoices when any one around him rises above a temptation. That is why he revels in every good he sees and is able to see beauty in the most unusual places and people. That is why he is continually challenged to overcome every obstacle that blocks his view of God and prays daily for the strength to dispel every shadow that blurs his seeing the beauty of the Almighty. That is why he finds purpose and resolve in praising God in every circumstance, through every difficulty and days upon end.

Repentance Matures in Sharing the Good News With Others

After all that has been said above, repentance at its best, or perhaps the whole of repentance, is something more fundamental than changing behavior. More than a behavioral change, repentance is turning from self-dependence, self-righteousness, and self-justification to seeing in Jesus the sole, sufficient payment for the penalty of sin. Repentance is turning to full reliance on the person, work, and sacrifice of

Jesus. The change that constitutes repentance is more than a change of behavior or even attitude toward sinful behavior. It is a change of mind, will, and emotion toward who Jesus is and what His sacrifice offers. Repentance is a turning from self to a full hearted embracing of Jesus. That deeply felt relationship creates a new, Spirit filled heart, resulting in a new recognition of God's mercy and grace, and makes dependence on Jesus become a lifestyle delight. That spirit of repentance, turning always away from self to continue embracing Jesus, is a life long experience. This message is compellingly shared with others in need of a Savior. That is evangelism at its most persuasive.

Repentance Is the Prelude to Moral Wholeness

Ministry skills, extensive biblical knowledge, and a charismatic personality all are given validity and strength by moral wholeness. How a preacher lives will be remembered long after he moves on to other places more than the sermons he preached, the programs he designed and led, and his wise counseling. The best of ministry can be destroyed by a carelessness in moral living. Ezekiel was shown the despicable sins being committed in the inner temple while prescribed sacrifices were being conducted publically (cf. Ezekiel 8). Jesus described the immoral lives of religious leaders as “*. . . whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness*” (Matthew 23:27, NKJV). Nothing has grieved the heart of God more than professed men of God serving at His altars with dirty hands and impure hearts. The call of God is that we be holy in all of our conduct because He is holy (cf. 1 Peter 1:15–16). We are called to be “*. . . like living stones . . . being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood . . . a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God . . . [living] such good lives among the pagans . . . that they may see your good deeds and glorify God . . .*” (1 Peter 2:5, 9, 12). Because immorality is such a denial of our mission and who we are, Paul encourages us:

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh

and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1, KJV).

Satan delights in reducing the number of those who would proclaim the Word effectively. Some of his traps induce us to yield to internet pornography and to let down our guard when surrounded by suggestive temptations. He makes us shortsighted in failing to look beyond the enticing moment to the devastating fruits of an action. He lulls us into allowing principles we preach to be compromised. We fail to love our wives in a one woman relationship and make ourselves vulnerable to illicit ways of meeting our needs.

A lifestyle of daily repentance is the only way to keep our feet pointed toward Jesus, keeping habits from forming by denying entry of any thoughts or careless actions into our lives. Sinful thoughts become entrenched, producing hidden sins that finally explode into devastating, public shame.

Conclusion

A spirit of repentance, in all of its many splendors, keeps one open to opportunities in spiritual growth. It keeps complacency at a distance. It elicits scrutiny of everything to determine if it will honor God or distract from Kingdom purposes. It is an early defense system against every threat. It brings one, hungering after righteousness, to his knees in contrition when he sins. It keeps one centered in Jesus. It keeps worship a compelling, moving necessity and joy. It keeps the spirit of evangelism stirred and the passion for souls real. Repentance is not one finger in the five finger plan of salvation. It is a daily experience in the life and service of the redeemed.

Choose to Be a Man of the Book

Committed to the Message of the Book

Everything a minister is and everything he does is inseparably dependent on the Word. There is no reason to think that the most talented man can be fruitful for long or even survive to the end without a full dependence on the Word. Nothing short of a full dependence on the Word will be sufficient for his spiritual journey and for his spiritual mission. There have been too many who have tried it on their own genius, having ended up either falling away or leading God's people away from the truth. The lengthy list of fallen proclaimers of the Word, both in Scripture and in history, should be an adequate indicator of the value of being a man of the Book.

Bible Study Must Be Core Driven

Like every believer, the preacher must aim at mastering the contents of the Gospels, both in structure and content. A practical means of mastering the structure and content of the four Gospels is to discipline oneself in a nine week, reading and memory plan. In doing so, one should purchase an index box with four index tabs. Write on the index tabs the names of each of the Gospels. Then take eighty-nine index cards and write on them the chapter numbers of each Gospel: twenty-eight for Matthew, sixteen for Mark, twenty-four for Luke, and twenty-one for John. Then begin reading the first ten chapters of Matthew, each day for a week. On the second day, begin writing the sub-topics of each chapter on the chapter cards and memorizing them. By the end of the week one will have read Matthew 1–10 seven times and memorized the outline of each of the ten chapters. For the next eight weeks, one will read the next ten chapters each day of every week and will memorize the sub-topics. In the

end, one will have read the Gospels seven times, memorized the topical contents of the chapters of each Gospel, and have their contents stamped on his mind. One could, as he was completing his reading and memorizing, add the names of the people, places, a special verse, and other things of each chapter on the back of the chapter cards.

This reading and memorizing could be extended through the whole of the New Testament, reading the succeeding ten chapters each day for a week and memorizing the topical contents, and so forth. In all, after twenty-six weeks, one would have read the 260 chapters of the New Testament seven times and memorized the topical contents of all twenty-seven books. What a fabulous storehouse of knowledge and enhanced understanding of the New Testament Scriptures! And what easy access one would enjoy to any part of the New Testament! Next up would be to use the same system to embrace the knowledge of the Old Testament, attainable in two and one-half years! Using this approach one could have a good knowledge of the Scriptures in three years and never leave his home. Such a well rounded, core knowledge of Scripture is a preacher's best means of serving, his best hope of surviving, and his best gift to share with the brethren.

Bible Study Must Be Purpose Driven

A working knowledge of the Bible includes:

- **Structural Knowledge:** Knowing the message of each biblical book, its sections, its author, its readers, and its purpose is the foundation on which the preacher must build his preaching and teaching efforts. Any Bible handbook facilitates such knowledge.
- **Content Knowledge:** Complete familiarity of the contents of the Bible, gained through daily, systematic Bible reading continued over a lifetime, is fundamental to a preacher being a teacher of the Word (cf. Reread the concentrated plan above).
- **Textual Knowledge:** Understanding the truth in its historical context, section by section, provides one of the richest soils for expository preaching.
- **Topical Knowledge:** Knowing accurately all of the great Bible doctrines (for example: God, prophecy,

salvation, Christ, Church, second coming, and so forth) is the best defense against error.

- **Biographical Knowledge:** Knowing all of the patriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, Apostles, leading characters, men and women, and other people provides the models for powerful applications.
- **Geographical Knowledge:** A thorough knowledge of the nations, lands, seas, mountains, rivers, cities, and other things related to the periods of biblical history, helps immensely in understanding and appreciating the Bible message.

Bible Study Must Be Principle Driven

Every preacher soon learns that gaining and using biblical knowledge should follow guidelines:

- One should understand and take seriously the Bible student's obligation to understand the purpose of the author, the message to the original reader, what he was expected to do with the message in his historical context, and the application of the inspired message in one's modern setting.
- One should gain the background knowledge to better accomplish the student's obligation.
- One should acquire and use updated, research tools to be most effective.
- One should develop a system to retain the knowledge in order to keep building on past studies.
- After personal application, one should organize the material to teach others and use every opportunity to share the knowledge (for example: classes, sermons, seminars, and other things).
- One should broaden the search for more knowledge among proven Bible instructors, being forever a life-long Berean or an inquiring, Ethiopian treasurer.
- If gifted in writing, one should reproduce oneself many times in composing articles, tracts, courses, books, video studies, correspondence, and so forth.
- One should make Bible study a life-long commitment, never content with any level of knowledge.
- One should know that the best access to Scripture is through the original languages of Hebrew and Greek.

Mastery of the biblical languages is strongly recommended for all those who are serious in unlocking the full knowledge of the biblical text.

The day the preacher quits studying the Word marks the decline or even halting of his spiritual growth. His preaching will reflect the neglect and his diminishing fruitlessness will catch up with him, with saddening consequences. Continued study of the Word is one's best assurance of continuing his spiritual formation.

Bible Study Must Be Ministry Driven

Amid serving, planning, even preparing to teach others, a preacher can forget to maintain a systematic and constant search of the Scriptures for his own survival and growth. The following passages out of Paul's admonitions to Timothy illustrate how the study of the Scriptures is important to a preacher's ministry:

- Studying helps the preacher know what is a “*pattern of sound teaching*” and to hold tightly to it in faith and love (cf. 2 Timothy 1:13).
- Studying enables a preacher to know what to commit to other faithful men (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2).
- Studying lifts the preacher above the foolish and speculative issues in which men get embroiled (cf. 2 Timothy 2:14–16).
- Studying makes a preacher complete, ready for every good work (2 Timothy 3: 14–17).
- Studying equips a preacher to accomplish his central mission: “*Preach the Word,*” doing the work of an evangelist (cf. 2 Timothy 4:1– 5).

A complete reading of Paul's statements to Timothy and Titus provide breathtaking emphasis on the need and value of constant study of Scriptures. A preacher who wants to get the best of Scriptures will read 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus once a week to keep himself motivated in the study of the Word. Many preachers find the best hours of in-depth study are before others begin to rise in the morning. A telling measure of a preacher's growing spirituality is seen in how much time he spends in recreation, physical exercises, or

even in “church work” as compared to the time devoted to the study in the Word.

Bible Study Must Be Value Driven

Every thing done regularly, despite the circumstances that could distract, must be driven by a compelling value. Without such a motivation the activity will decline and die. Bible study for the preacher is no different. It is very possible for the preacher to get so busy serving people and doing much for the King that he forgets to listen to the King. An indelible list should be imprinted on the fore mind of the preacher concerning the values of daily Bible study, study for his own growth beyond studying for a sermon or lesson. A day should feel empty and impotent when the preacher has not met with Christ directly in His Word. A preacher should fear going into battle when the “*sword*” has not been polished in recent hours. Prayers are hindered coming from staleness in the Word.

Weakness before temptations can be quickly diagnosed by the lack of study and replaced with strength by study. Having little to give comes from taking little from the Word. Searching for a sermon topic seldom happens to a preacher who is frequently in the Word. From his regular, daily study, he usually will have an imposing list of sermon ideas that just need to be developed. With God smiling into his life through the Word, the value-driven preacher finds study a delightful and necessary part of his daily life and ministry.

Bible Study Must Be Evangelistically Driven

Whatever else the Church is designed and mandated to accomplish, soul saving is among the dominant priorities. A preacher’s Bible study should reflect the evangelistic mandate. Souls near and far are precious to God. A preacher’s study should reflect the global nature of the soul winning Church. The Gospels declare the Person of our faith who we are commanded to share with every ethnic group in the world, every creature, everywhere (cf. Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15–16). Acts shows us the urgency, the plan, and the costs of global evangelism. The Epistles deepen our knowledge of the message, tell a great deal about the messengers, and show us how the early converts lived out their faith. Revelation thrills us with the ultimate destiny

of the soul after Satan has had his best shot in destroying the Sovereign God's plan to save the righteous. The preacher who studies evangelistically will preach evangelistically and will lead others in evangelism.

Bible Study Must Be Morality Driven

A study of the Man "*... who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin*" (Hebrews 4:15) beckons us to commit ourselves to a high standard of morality. A preacher searches the Scriptures to see what kind of man he should be before he dares preach piety to others (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27). A preacher who searches the Scriptures for the inspiring, lofty principles of moral living is best empowered to gladden an audience with the joys of holy living and reassures those who fall short of the redeeming grace of God.

Bible Study Must Be Model Driven

Among the many rich avenues of study are the biographies embedded throughout Scripture. The models of faith, of purity, of courage, of hope, of conviction, that is, of every virtue or of every act of faithfulness, along with every sin and circumstance we are to avoid, are given in striking and memorable stories. A preacher grows through the lives of those of ancient times who faced the same questions and circumstances we could face, especially if he develops the skill of placing himself in the story either to observe at close hand or as an actor in the scene. The more effectively he can identify with the people of ancient times and learn their stories and lessons the more effectively he can get close to those dear ones in the pews and in Bible studies. Such a preacher believes that such stories were written for people of our times who need similar messages to live their lives victoriously (cf. Romans 15:4).

A mature study of Scriptures paves the way for a robust spiritual life. Absorbing and living the Word in one's life are essential and synonymous to a formation of spiritual character. Spirituality feeds on the Word and blossoms in endless beauty.

Choosing to Excel as a Servant

Following Jesus

. . . “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me*” (Luke 9:23, NKJV).

In the introductory remarks, the wanting with all one’s soul, passionately desiring to follow Jesus was seen as the fountain head of spiritual living. Lacking that impulse of the soul no other effort matters much in the quest for the presence of God. Like sacrifice without love is an empty gong (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1), so spiritual living without the consuming longing to be in the presence of God is sterile.

Spiritual living, on a believer’s part, is about choosing to follow Jesus, bearing a cross. It is identifying with Jesus, it is becoming a part of His history that led Him to Calvary, it is a commitment to give no less than the Savior gave for us. Giving one’s life, dying, sacrificing, toiling, and agonizing are small prices to pay to be in the entourage of Jesus. A less willing believer will, at best, follow Jesus at a distance with all of the resulting losses of not being close to hear every word and participate in every event. At that distance such a believer would be more vulnerable to all the more vicious attacks of the ancient lion who goes about stalking and seeking whom he might devour (cf. 1 Peter 5:8).

Jesus longs for good men to follow Him into the presence of the Father. Once when Jesus called some followers to make a faith commitment, they left and walked away, never to return. The remaining disciples, when asked if they would go away also, were represented well by Peter when he said, “. . . ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and

know that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (John 6:68–69, NKJV). Another time Jesus sorrowed when a personable and admirable, young ruler found the price too high in choosing to follow Him, though he had a near impeccable life (cf. Luke 18:18–28). Jesus, however, wanted something more than a follower. **He wants each follower to be servant-minded.**

The basic condition to becoming spiritual in ministry is a growing sense of being a servant. A servant can work in a big house in a big city or in a little house in a little city. He can serve a rich master, dress accordingly, and enjoy available benefits or serve a less rich master, dress accordingly, and be content with what is available. It is not where he serves, but Who he serves, that is of singular importance to the servant. So whether a preacher serves in a large and rich church or toils in a smaller and poorer church, he serves with equal joy, energy, and purpose. As a servant, he does not base his serving on what recognition he receives. He does not demand special attention or pay because he is better educated, more knowledgeable, works harder than others, has more to show for his efforts, is more personable, or is a charismatic leader. He disdains anything that he might do, good or bad, that distracts the eyes, the ears, and the hearts of others away from his Master. He thinks, day and night, only of pleasing his Lord. He rejoices when his labors bring praise to his Owner. He knows serving is not about him and what he derives from his serving. It is about every thought being devoted to pleasing the Lord, about focusing on doing what most pleases Him.

A preacher can never progress in his spiritual life without taking on the garment, the sandals, and the mind of a servant. As the rich giver and the loud-voiced man of prayer in Matthew 6 gained only what they desired, the praise of men, so a preacher who performs well but neither dresses, works, or thinks like a servant will, likewise, fail in drawing nearer to the Master. Frequently thinking about self hinders him from thinking about being a servant at his best. Trying to climb a ladder of perceived ministerial success, getting the better paying and more prominent roles in Kingdom business distorts the purpose of serving and keeps a preacher in the shallow water of spiritual living.

Jesus Was the Ultimate Model of Serving

Against the background of Isaiah 53, in its presentation of the Suffering Servant, Jesus walked among men serving them at every turn. His miracles were all about serving the needs of those who were suffering, hungry, bereaved, and wavering in their faith. His teachings were to serve the listeners in knowing God and what would please Him. His readiness to stop what He was doing to listen to the pleas of many exhibited a serving spirit. When He pushed Himself to exhaustion and traveled constantly, He showed the intensity of His service. His bearing the insults, intrigues, and hostility of religious leaders showed His determination in serving. Undergoing the week of the cross, bearing the searing pain of the crucifixion, staggering under the overwhelming humiliation, and shouldering the crushing burden of human sin all revealed the proofs of His being the ultimate servant.

**Jesus Pronounced Servant-hood as the
Prerequisite of Spirituality**

Jesus did not ask what some might have expected of people to join Him in His journey above: not a powerful position, not education, not wealth, not being much traveled, or being highly regarded. After pledging trust, disdain for a sinful life, and a choice of a righteous life and being initiated into the ranks of believers by baptism, Jesus, first and last, asks each new adherent to be a servant. Being a servant speaks of obedience, regard for the master, devotion to the assigned tasks, lowered demands for self and recognition of others, and wanting only to honor the will of one's Lord. Satisfaction at the end of the day is that the Master's will has been done and a new day will soon dawn to continue to please Him.

The closest of Jesus' friends, the twelve Apostles, struggled with the concept of becoming servants, renouncing the arrogant ambitions of dominance over others. In their rush to the throne, they forgot that the pathway of serving was the prelude to glory. They aspired to rule, to have authority over others, accompanied with pomp, ceremony, and wealth. They saw Jesus perform miracles and were awed by His authority over all forces and saw themselves vested with the same authority, having already had a taste in the powers given them by Jesus in the limited commission. They

saw His dominance over the leaders of Israel and envisioned themselves rising above them. They listened to His teachings on the coming Kingdom and began jostling for superior positions, even becoming angry at anyone who seemed to be gaining an edge. They saw Jesus as the destined King and themselves next in command. They saw His resurrection as the confirmation of their eminent role in the imminent Kingdom.

The Apostles missed knowing the heart of Jesus. They stayed deaf and blind to His teachings on the nature of the Kingdom, a spiritual Kingdom whose citizens are first servants, in spirit and in fact:

- Though soon to be appointed King of kings, Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve (cf. Matthew 21:17–28; Luke 22:27).
- The highest rank in the House of God is reserved for those who serve others (cf. Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35).
- A true servant of Jesus the Lord does not expect a better station or treatment than his Lord received (cf. John 15:18–20).
- Lowering oneself to serve another, any other, is acceptable and expected (cf. John 13:13–17).

When we think of Christian doctrine, we are disciples and believers; when we think of the battle against Satan, we are soldiers; when we think of the awesome sovereignty of God, we are worshipers; but when we think of the nature of the Church and of our relationship to one another, we are a community of servants.

How Can We Recognize the Spirit of Serving?

The spirit of serving is not just doing good things for others and enjoying accolades and gratefulness. That could be entirely secular and selfish. Jesus dealt with that issue in Matthew 6:1–18. The gift of serving is identifying with the person of Jesus and serving in harmony with His purposes, Spirit, and methods. Look at Philippians 2:3–8 in light of serving:

- Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit (vs. 3).
- Humbly, regard others as more important (vs. 3).
- Concern for the needs of others (vs. 4).
- Absorbing the mind of Jesus, thinking what He thinks, feeling what He feels, and doing what He does (vs. 5).
- Renounce personal prerogatives to serve others (vs. 7).
- Keep service true and responsive to the highest demands of obedience (vs. 8).

The mind of a servant is described by Jesus in His preface to the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:1–10). The mind of a servant is described in the centerpiece of Paul’s writings to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1–13).

On a practical level, a servant spirit is a widely esteemed, college president who introduces a young, unknown missionary to the Board of Trustees at an annual Board Meeting on the affairs of the college and urges them to support the mission. It is an internationally known church leader who takes time to encourage a teen-age boy about his future or takes note of a child. It is a preacher’s wife being honored at the head table who gets up from the table to serve a neglected guest. It is a preacher who has been saving up for several years to buy a new set of prestigious golf clubs who gives it to help buy Bibles. It is a scholarly brother who could crush another in public by his logic and skill, but passes over the urge to appear important to find something to compliment. It is a world-traveled preacher who is careful not to dominate conversations with his extraordinary experiences, but rather brings out the mundane and ordinary in others and clothes them with interest and value. It is a preacher who makes the decision on where to preach based first on where he can best serve his Master. It is a shepherd in the church who is attentive to the needs of members from potlucks, to prayer meetings, to worship assemblies, in clothing needs, family troubles, and in brotherly disputes. It is a “you first,” “what can I do?,” and “what is mine is thine” spirit towards others. It is exalting others without thought of a “pay back.” It is not counting the times another has been helped and has failed to return with a “thank you.” It is a readiness to continue helping others when appropriate recognition has not been given. It is serving all day long and

well, yet believing that nothing that has been accomplished gives any reason to expect, much less demand, special recognition. Whatever great things have resulted in serving, still a servant is “unprofitable” without reason to boast except that the Master has been served (cf. Luke 17:10).

The Source of Spiritual Serving

Our motivation for serving others begins with our recognition of the gracious gifts of God to us:

- God gave us His Son who procured salvation by His sacrifice and urges us to be servants in sharing it with all (cf. John 3:16).
- God gives us of His Spirit who endows us with many ministry gifts, urging us to use them in serving others (cf. Titus 3:5–6).
- God gives us the hope of eternal life, urging us to run to tell others like one beggar would tell another about where to find food (cf. Titus 1:2).

Jesus is not asking us to do great things in His Kingdom, neither is He conditioning our salvation on being known for our many and marvelous works. He is asking us to be servants, serving Him without fanfare or designs for personal greatness, but for the singular purpose of being faithful in obeying Him. Jesus, as an ultimate model of serving, has shown us in spirit and in fact how to serve and how important it is to serve.

Conclusion

The spirit of serving is not seen in its fullness in just doing good things or even great things. It begins with a people-centered mindset, an attitude of giving, and continues with a selfless purpose to glorify God. It can lead to fullness and completeness but does not seek it. Rather at its core, it honors God and blesses others. It is content that God has been honored, people have been lifted up, and prays for another day, another place, and another time when serving God can be repeated.

Choose to Be Forgiving in Heart

Healing from Hurt

Becoming a spiritual leader like Jesus means channeling anger with a purposeful self-control, making emotions work for righteousness, and being able to keep a heart free from resentment, bitterness, and revenge. A trusted measure of one's growing spirituality is the amount of time that passes from the time of hurt and when one can genuinely care for the offender and plea to the Father for His forgiveness. How long did it take Jesus to process the hurt of Calvary and cry out to the Father for the forgiveness of the accusers?

The emotion of anger is the body's frequent response to a perceived hurt or threat. As such, in its inception, it is neutral, neither right or wrong. Its nature can be transformed by a choice. It can be turned toward avoidance, rejection, or hurtful retaliation, disrupting relationships, and precluding any good. Or it can be turned to forgiveness, reconciliation, and helpful service. Anger, as a secondary emotion, can be quick to follow a hurt or threat from another, but each person chooses what to do with his anger. Will he be “*. . . slow to become angry*” (James 1:19) and pave the way for forgiveness and reconciliation? Or will he unbridle his anger, paving the way for a progressive, hurtful ill will, a retaliatory defensiveness, or even repressive retribution? Which will it be?

The choices that follow are practical, powerful, and full of promise in developing a forgiving heart, a heart like the Son of Man:

- **A Choice to Be Honest:** to acknowledge hurt and anger.

The refusal to acknowledge one's health issues can lead to death. Cancer ignored can mean death. Anger ignored and hurts denied can lead to spiritual death. Many consider admitting to being hurt, with its attending anger, a sign of weakness which can be covered up with dishonest, deceptive farces. Little spiritual growth is encouraged without a candid disclosure, starting with being honest with oneself. Confession is a vital and urgent aspect of correction and growth (cf. James 5:16). Saying "ouch" to hurts requires the development of personal integrity, humility, courage, and candor with others, all pre-requisites to spiritual living.

The inability and spiritual deficiency that hinders one in being honest with himself and, thereby, getting in contact with his emotions lessens or virtually precludes ever enjoying the sweetness and power of forgiveness. Anger management that paves the way for forgiveness is blocked at the beginning without self-awareness. This is one of the reasons that the ancient Greek's central thought was "know thyself." One needs only to run the references on "*know*" in the Epistles to understand how much emphasis is placed on knowing oneself and being honest about oneself and the world surrounding him. Once one is quick to acknowledge a hurt and face the frequently resulting anger, the sooner he can get on with dealing with his anger productively and forgiving effectively.

- **A Choice to Make a Healthy Response:** to repress, to explode, or to give direction and control to hurt emotions.

Being spiritual means knowing how to deal promptly and efficiently with the perception of hurt and its accompanying anger. Guided by the flesh, one will do one of two things:

He will repress the angry feelings, deny the severity of the hurt, and begin a process that will lead to a seething resentment with all its consequences. He will pour in his own heart the "acid" for storage. Unfortunately, the human body was not designed to store up acid, not much or for a very long time. Stored up resentments begin by damaging

the person's emotional and physical health, continue in damaging treasured relationships, and end in damaging one's relation to God and compromising the enjoyment of the sweetness of forgiveness with all. Such resentments stored too long over a long period of time eventually explode, inflicting harm on anyone who is standing nearby. There is no redeeming value of "stuffing" or ignoring hurts and leaving them to do their destructive work. Paul urges us to process angry feelings promptly, beginning at once (cf. Ephesians 5:26, 31), even within the day of the hurt.

Guided by the flesh, a person will explode on the occasion of most hurts. Some schools in modern psychology have taught the "scream" theory in dealing with hurt and anger. They have correctly measured the damage of repressed, angry emotions, but have gone to another extreme in urging people to express, even angrily, their feelings in what results in an irresponsible manner of anger management. People get hurt, often severely, by an angry man who thinks he is being candid and courageous, "telling it just like it is." There is little virtue in hurting people with uncontrolled behavior. Spiritual-minded people do only what is best for others.

Being spiritual means one, having already become aware of hurt and meeting the resultant anger head-on, begins immediately to take charge of the emotion and give it direction, to begin channeling the anger toward forgiveness and reconciliation. He is a man well acquainted in the "second slap, second mile, and second piece of clothing" story of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:38–42). He keeps his emotions in check, buying not only time to act responsibly, but keeping anger from going inwardly and doing its damaging work. He gives impetus to a continuing process to be like Jesus in doing only good for people, never evil.

- **A Choice to Confront the Hurt:** to verify if it is real or perceived, if it is important, if it is current or in the past.

When people confront hurt and anger globally, unsorted, they have to deal with a barrage of issues that, more than often, is overwhelming and almost inevitably precludes dealing with the issues effectively. It has been estimated that as high as 75% of all hurts never happened, either at all, or

for the reasons assigned, or with the importance perceived. That means that many people are accused of things they never did or for motives they never had. This fact should be repugnant to any spiritual man — that he would wrongly accuse another and treat him as an offender, even to the extent of severing relationships! The spiritual man feels the weighty responsibility to be a custodian of truth, to search, find, and honor truth, at all costs. He knows and delights in truth that liberates (cf. John 8:32). He is committed to make everything he says meet the standards of truth and love (cf. Ephesians 4:15). Only then can he share in the ministry of truth with his Head, Jesus. Thus, he takes every hurt, with its anger already being dissipated by the previous process step, and runs it through a grid of truth, asking himself candid questions:

- ▶ Did this hurt ever occur or am I just perceiving or imagining it as having happened? Am I being fair and truthful? Is it possible that I may be mistaken in my perceptions? I didn't like the person to start with, am I just wanting to believe he would want to hurt me?
- ▶ Even though the hurt is real and it really happened, is it possible that I am blowing the hurt out of proportion, giving it an importance that it does not deserve? Is the hurt more important than the relationship that could be lost? Am I demanding enough of myself that truth will be honored?
- ▶ Am I feeling hurt because the person did not meet my expectation? Did I clearly communicate to him what my expectations were? Was I fair in my expectations or was he capable of meeting them? Or did he ever commit to my expectations?
- ▶ Is the present hurt just another hurt on top of many similar hurts of the past that I never really processed and forgave? Was I made to feel insignificant, not wanted, and the present slight or insult just adds to the feeling? If I was more whole, would the present hurt be less meaningful and hurtful?

When hurts are sorted out, given their truthful designations, we can more easily deal with them and move on toward forgiving those that are real, important, and

current. Those unfounded perceptions (remember they may be the bulk of our hurts), those unimportant hurts, and those hurts that are so severely felt because they bring up the unprocessed past can all be thrown away! Leaving us to deal with only what is real, what is important, and what is current.

Just a note: Before one can face each incoming hurt, he must do some work cleaning up the past, ignored, unprocessed hurts that burden his soul. A good starting place is to process them systematically and thoroughly so as to “liquidate the unwanted inventory of hurts.” In any case, when one has completed this step he is ready to start turning the corner on the way to forgiveness.

- **A Choice to Understand the Offender:** to put in context the significant hurts that have been verified, to ask “why” questions.

To forgive another of the real, important, and continuing hurts one must try to understand why another person would hurt him. While angry, we have little care to understand the offender, only to accuse him and retaliate, make him pay for the offence. Wanting to understand does not mean one has to justify a wrongful action. It is not to lessen the responsibility of the offender in hurting another. Wanting to understand indicates we want to care and we feel a value in the other person, all are conditions that are important to eventually forgiving him. There is never an excuse for a father abusing or even giving a low priority to his children. It becomes easier to understand his wrong behavior when we know how abusive or neglectful or burdened his father was. A person’s struggle in many human deficiencies, even addictions, should not occur, especially with the many helpful resources that are available. Yet, it is easier to understand a person’s hurtful, pattern behaviors by knowing the family environment in which he was raised. It is noteworthy how most people never rise above their nature or nurture and repeat those qualities in their parenting, passing on the defective and hurtful behaviors to another generation.

Spiritual living sets out to break the defective and hurtful cycles of our past and set in motion new values, new attitudes, and new behaviors. One of those new attitudes is to determine to understand why people fail, and then, non-

judgmentally try to put ourselves where they are and feel what they feel. While integrity would never permit us to approve of their wrong behavior, our understanding and sympathy would foster acceptance and a willingness to reach out to them. Unless something new and dynamic comes into the life of the offender, how likely is he going to correct his offensive behavior and be transformed? Understanding and acceptance leads further along the path of forgiveness.

- **A Choice to Desire the Best for the Offender:** to practice the Calvary choice on behalf of the offender, to practice love.

After processing the above choices, one is free to bring the most powerful dynamic of Christianity into play: *agape* love. Even before tender affections can gain roots in a relationship, there must be the choice to love and want the best to happen in the life of another. And before one can erase a debt, forgive a real, important offence, he must want the best to happen to the offender. Could Jesus have chosen to leave the side of the Father in heaven, to have come among men even in a beautiful earth, to have been treated with contempt by fearful men, to have faced and endured the Cross without having chosen to want the best for undeserving, unlovable sinners (cf. John 3:16)? So, one who would be spiritual in acting out of a forgiving heart must practice the Calvary choice on behalf of an offender. There are some hurts that are more powerful than the best of our human virtues. There is no hurt that is stronger than the strength of *agape* love.

Agape love does not look on what a person has done or failed to do. It looks on what a person can become in Christ. It looks on the new robes of righteousness that will clothe him in beauty and wholeness and a life of noble purposes. Thus, making him a vessel of worth and usefulness, giving him a place in the Kingdom enterprise.

- **A Choice to Forgive the Offense:** to stand at the side of the offender as a defense attorney and plead the case for clemency.

Through understanding the offender and wanting the best to happen in his life, the choice to forgive him becomes much easier and more meaningful. Before these changes took place within the individual, he would have wanted to be a vengeful, prosecuting attorney, a prejudiced jury, a “hanging judge,” or even a blood thirsty mob. Though knowing the guiltiness of the offender he now stands at his side as the defense attorney, devoted to getting him fair treatment. As Jesus called on God to forgive those who put Him on the cross, so the offended pleads the case of the offender that he could have hated had he not chosen to direct his anger toward forgiveness and reconciliation.

- **A Choice to Confirm the Forgiveness in Word and in Deed:** to decide to be a servant and assume some responsibility in the rehabilitation of the offender.

For the health of the offended, forgiveness is the goal of the disciplined effort. For the health of the offender, being the object of fairness, assistance, and reconciliation is a powerful dynamic. The impact of forgiveness, as a result of love, is the most powerful and moving experience known to man. It identifies the forgiving one with God. It draws the forgiven one closest to the nature of God. The confirmation that forgiveness has taken place is expressed in an affectionate statement, with a description of the process and the results. It is further confirmed by a pattern of positive actions to benefit the offender and a readiness to help him treat people more nobly. Helping the person toward a more sensitive and responsible life is done with a servant spirit, avoiding being condescending, impatient, and judgmental. After all, if the person has been forgiven, he is to be treated as one without a debt to repay.

- **A Choice to Maintain Vigilance and Discipline in Dealing with Future Hurts Through Effective Anger Management:** to practice the preceding principles each time that new hurts occur.

Having learned the steps of anger management and having succeeded in forgiving one for hurts inflicted, the spiritual person stays alert and prepared to face incoming

hurts. Hurts will come. Vigilance and discipline make it possible to process every new hurt that comes, often in just minutes after the event. Stress, anxiety, and selfishness soon subside. Involvement in service, caring for people, and self-confidence soon begin to increase. Opportunities are more quickly and effectively used. What is done is done better and for clearer and right purposes. There is no longer the storage of the acid of resentment and bitterness, meaning better health of the person and better relationships with others.

Conclusion

There are multiple blessings that come from learning how to forgive, starting with a Christian control of anger. Yet, the fundamental reason for forgiving is because in doing so we identify with the nature of God. God wants us to be like Him, to forgive out of love for the offenders. Jesus made God's forgiveness of us contingent on our forgiving those who trespass against us:

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14–15).

Paul illustrated how our identity with the Father was related to our forgiveness of one another:

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ Jesus forgave you (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV).

Spiritual living reaches no greater height than when a man learns how to forgive as Jesus did on Calvary and as God, in Christ Jesus, has forgiven us. The further any one is from having a heart of forgiveness, that is the distance he is from both the core of the Christian faith and the ultimate journey's end of the soul. And the irony of it all is that forgiveness is well within the grasp of every spiritual man.

A Spiritual Man Is a Forgiven and a Forgiving Person.

Choosing Wholeness as a Lifestyle

Thinking, Feeling, and Doing Like Jesus

Everyone who would dare to preach God's Word must claim for himself the goal that Paul had for every one he taught:

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [whole] in Christ Jesus. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (Colossians 1:28–29).

The purposeful march toward maturity in Christ has to include the maturing of the human, quality traits, each developed and controlled by the Spirit in the increasing likeness of Jesus, the Son of Man.

- The spiritual man is controlled under the stresses of life, keeping his responses under the supervision of the Spirit.
- The spiritual man confronts anxiety and transforms it into hope.
- The spiritual man is comfortably involved with people, welcoming opportunities to serve in human relations.
- The spiritual man is open and transparent at the feeling level, ready to be vulnerable to build relations.
- The spiritual man is sensitive and caring, able to put himself in another's place, to feel what others feel and able to disapprove but accept another with understanding.
- The spiritual man is able to be objective, unselfishly making decisions to benefit others, even at his own loss.

- The spiritual man is dominant and decisive, having a sense of worth, a sense of belonging, a sense of competency, and a sense of mission.
- The spiritual man is an able manager of his anger, processing his hurts and channeling them toward forgiveness and reconciliation.
- The spiritual man is disciplined, living an organized and productive life.

The above nine life traits are at the heart of who a person is and how he relates to others. There are several testing tools to help a person focus on the maturity of these qualities. The following elaboration can point a person to a self evaluation and a purposeful plan to be more whole in one's life.

- **Able To Cope.** Am I a person who can cope with the stresses of being a preacher? Can I be described as calm, controlled in a crises or do I often get "up tight" and stay nervous? Am I regularly running behind schedule, behind in my commitments, and being pushy in attitude? Every job or profession has its own list of stresses. It is not so much how much stress one faces in his work as it is how well does he know how to cope with the stress? Working under the direction of some difficult elders, trying to please a diverse or divided church, trying to meet unfair and badly communicated expectations, dealing with family concerns, or external obstacles in the community can load down and break a preacher. These things can make a preacher's life difficult unless he knows how to use the resources God gives him which enable him to keep standing in the battle, regardless of its changing pressures. The following guidelines can help:
 - ▶ Remember who is really in charge — it is none other than God. One thing is clear: no preacher is God! The church does not live or die according to the work of the preacher. No preacher needs to carry that impossible load.

- ▶ Be ready to take the leadership when guidance is needed, but learn to train people and delegate responsibilities.
- ▶ Facing a packed schedule? Spend more time in prayer and in the Word. Jesus did not allow a crushing throng of people to keep Him from rising early to pray or spending all night in prayer.
- ▶ Be confident in the Lord, but know that God's assignments in ministry follow closely to one's God given strengths and giftedness. When a preacher ignorantly, pridefully, or arrogantly insists on performing where God has not assigned him, he is likely to experience reduced productivity and possible defeat.
- ▶ Identify and seek help to replace any deficiencies in attitude or values that otherwise drain one's ability to stay calm, controlled, and productive.

Research Scriptures: Psalm 71:20–21, 131:1–2; Proverbs 14:30; Isaiah 26:3; Jeremiah 17:7–8; Matthew 6:24–34, 11:28–30, Luke 10:41; John 14:27, 16:33; Romans 5:1–2, 8:6, 15:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3–5, Philippians 4:6–13, Colossians 3:1–2, 1 Timothy 6:6–8, Hebrews 2:17–18.

- **Hopeful.** Am I a preacher who regularly changes anxiety into hope, able to see victory while the battle rages? Jesus presents the perfect model of pulling hope out of the jaws of anxiety in the most anxious weekend of his life, moving from Gethsemane, to the Cross, to the Empty Tomb!

Anxiety is defined as a crushing sense of being out of control, while hope is defined as a sense of continuity and looking for a favorable outcome. In the garden Jesus saw anxiety for what it was. He did not see some lightening bolt thrown by Satan that no human could possibly deflect, little less destroy. Rather He saw a four pronged attack by Satan, that could be destroyed, one by one. Anxiety is strengthened by the conspiracy of doubt, fear, loneliness, and guilt. Alone, it is difficult for any human to consistently confront and destroy each of these four conspirators, often coming at blinding speeds and from every conceivable direction. Jesus

confronted them and won an exemplary victory, as a man, using the same resources available to each of us.

- ▶ Jesus, drawing on His knowledge of God's promises, changed doubt, a sense of uncertainty, to conviction, a sense of certainty.
- ▶ Jesus, submitting His will to the will of God, changed fear, a sense of threat, to courage, a sense of security.
- ▶ Jesus, reaffirming God's caring presence and purpose, changed loneliness, a sense of isolation, to companionship, a sense of belonging.
- ▶ Jesus, trusting God to be faithful to His redemptive plan, changed the burden of guilt in humanity, a sense of accusation, to attachment, a sense of acceptance.

Defeating the anxiety that could have crushed Him, Jesus confronted and defeated each element of anxiety. The victorious history of the Redeemer must become the practiced experience of the redeemed. Satan must be stopped from employing anxiety with its doubt, fear, loneliness, and guilt to silence one who has a saving message to preach. Note that the resources of Jesus are still available to the messengers of the Lord:

- ▶ Knowledge of God's promises, derived from a life of living in The Book.
- ▶ Submitting to the will of God, derived from knowing and doing God's will.
- ▶ Reaffirming God's caring presence and purpose, derived from speaking often and clearly about God's intervention and extolling Him in prayer.
- ▶ Trusting God to be faithful to His redemptive plan, derived from being a keen observer and grateful recipient of God's grace.

Research Scriptures: Psalm 3:5–6, 37:1–7, 40:1–3, 42:11, 131:1–2; Proverbs 14:30; Matthew 6:25–34, 11:28–30; Romans 5:1–2, 15:13; Philippians 4:6–7.

- **Involved With People.** Am I a preacher who is more comfortable in my study or with a few select friends? Or

do I see that my work is all about people, eagerly meeting their needs, helping them grow in Christ Jesus?

The model of Jesus pictures One who, tirelessly, wanted to travel to where people gathered, was ready to sit down with individuals, even in the darkness of night, and was constantly addressing the varied needs and concerns of people. He was so consumed with people that even His family thought He had “lost it.” While Jesus knew how to balance the fury of a schedule by going apart to solitary places, refreshed, He was soon back to serving people. On a human level, what was it that made the difference?

- ▶ He was single-minded in His life purpose. He came to seek and save the lost, to give them an abundant life, to preach the good news, and to glorify His Father.
- ▶ He knew the truthfulness and value of His message, the urgency of His ministry, and the shortness of His time.
- ▶ He knew the lostness of people and of their eternal destiny contrasted with the heavenly abundance reserved for each obedient person.
- ▶ He knew the longing of His Father that all might hear, obey, and be saved.

This was enough to take Him from the solitude of His carpenter’s bench, to quell any natural, human reticence and to embolden Him to speak, to confront, and to comfort.

Research Scriptures: Romans 12:9–13, 15:1–2; 1 Corinthians 12:24–26, 2 Timothy 1:7; James 5:16; 1 John 4:18.

- **Open and Expressive.** Am I a preacher who is all intellect and no emotions? Or am I comfortable in opening up and sharing my feelings, needs, and longings? Can people approach me comfortably and relate to me well and quickly? Along with soundness in biblical knowledge and practices, holiness in life, well-honed ministry skills, and exemplary marital and parental relations, a preacher has to be approachable, likeable, and open in relationships. Being distant,

condescending, even aloof, blunts all of the other good things a preacher may do.

What was it that drew people to Jesus that is attainable and reproducible by every preacher?

- ▶ He was clearly knowledgeable, responding with wisdom, and engendered respect and confidence.
- ▶ He showed compassion to a wide range of people suffering dreadfully and without hope.
- ▶ He treated women with deference and value uncommon in its time and children felt drawn to Him and were comfortable surrounding Him.
- ▶ He welcomed questions, answered questions, asked questions, and honored the sincere questioners.
- ▶ He identified with people through His simple, direct, and understandable illustrations taken from their life situations, giving value to people and their experiences.
- ▶ He did not hide His needs for friendship, rest, food, and drink, even calling for something to quench the burning thirst on Calvary.

In short, He made Himself vulnerable for the sake of others. He was willing to give up much and suffer deeply. He placed others before Himself. Paul summarizes what we can take from the life of Christ, writing to the Philippians:

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:1–5, NKJV).

Research Scriptures: Proverbs 25:11; Romans 12:10, 15:2; Philippians 2: 1–4; James 1:19–20, 1 John 4:18.

- **Sensitive and Caring.** Am I a preacher who can identify with others, putting myself in their place, feeling what they feel? Does my disapproval of another preclude my understanding his circumstance or serving his need? The extent that a preacher can and will repeatedly visit in another's world and understand his hurts and needs determines the closeness that he will come to touching the person's life with the Gospel. People quickly sense how much a preacher cares long before they understand and accept what a preacher says.

How did Jesus draw so many to Him, both in real life and down across the ages?

- ▶ He looked beyond the moment of judgment to understand the forces driving the wrong action and tried to address that situation.
- ▶ His knowledge of wrong behavior or the wrong intent of a person did not blind Him to what the person could become, by the grace of God. So, He kindly persisted in calling every person to a higher standard.
- ▶ His defense of and loyalty to the integrity and holiness of God did not distance Him from becoming a lowly carpenter and unpretentious servant to all.
- ▶ He kept Himself above hate or ill will toward even those who had hurt Him, through directing His anger and hurt toward forgiveness and reconciliation.
- ▶ He could put Himself where each person was and see life from the other person's viewpoint, even as He had done in the incarnation, becoming God in the flesh.

A preacher who grows to be a caring, sensitive servant will get closer to the hearts of people than by anything else he does, even closer than by his skillfully, crafted sermons and ingeniously planned activities.

Research Scriptures: Romans 12:15–16, 15:1–7; Ephesians 4:31–32; Philippians 2:1–4; Colossians 3:12–13, James 3:15–17; 1 John 4:7–11.

- **Unselfish.** Am I a preacher who thinks of others, putting others first, making sure their needs are being

considered before my own? In my decision making, do I first consider what I will get out of it, or do I think of how the decision will affect others? What most controls me, at least initially, my emotions or reasoned facts? Several facts stand out:

- ▶ God gave us a mind with which to search and determine what is true and best.
- ▶ God gave us a will with which we are to submit all decisions to His will, a will with which to decide all matters rightly.
- ▶ God gave us emotions with which to add impetus, enhancement, and fire to every decision.
- ▶ Selfish people subject the mind and the will to the unreasoned demands of reactive emotions, frequently resulting in poor decisions, short-term decisions, and self-serving decisions.
- ▶ Unselfish people determine to use their well-honed mind with which to think. They determine to discipline their will to be in submission to the will of God and, once they are sure their decision will honor God, they will let their emotions grace and drive the resulting efforts.

Jesus is still our abiding example of having used His mind, will, and emotions in a God-honoring way on every occasion.

- ▶ He acted with the knowledge of what was needed, what was right, and what was important.
- ▶ A part of His human perfection was that He thought and submitted His will to God before He enlisted His emotions. There is seldom any need for repentance and apologies when one acts unselfishly, objectively considering all issues before acting.
- ▶ His central thought in every action was not self-seeking, self-serving, or retributive.

Preachers, too often, have a reputation of being focused on their own concerns before the needs of those they are pledged to serve. Driven by self-ambition, selfish motives, and secondary regard for others cuts deeply into the

effectiveness and fruitfulness of too many preachers of the Word.

Research Scriptures: Psalm 119:65–72; Proverbs 2:7–9, 12:8, 13:2, 15, 18:13, 28:13; Romans 12:3; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Ephesians 4:14–24; Philippians 1:27, 2:5–8, 4:8–9; Colossians 3:5–10; 2 Timothy 1:12–13, 3:14–17; 1 Peter 1:13–16.

- **Confident.** Am I a preacher who often fails to inspire others to join in a work for God, either because I am so dominating or so passive? People like to work with someone who is confident and inspires others to be confident that what is to be done is worthwhile, important, and God-glorifying. To have inspiring confidence, one must grow in the following qualities:
 - ▶ A sense of worth, most greatly achieved through understanding the magnificence of Creation and the price of Calvary. It has more to do with the mercy, grace, and the love of God than any human attainment or condition.
 - ▶ A sense of competency, most greatly achieved through discovery of the God-given, ministry gifts and the development and employment of those gifts in a healthy, church commitment.
 - ▶ A sense of belonging, most greatly achieved through understanding the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood in Christ, and the mutual, fraternal fellowship and service.
 - ▶ A sense of purpose, most greatly achieved through understanding the mandate of Jesus to His church and seeing one's place in its accomplishment.

One can increase his personal confidence by adding ministry skills, reaching new depths through personal research, continuing ministry training in reputable schools, gaining meaningful experience through fruitful efforts, and being affirmed by brotherhood affirmations. One's growing, mature relationship with God is the best and surest way to grow in a sense of worth, competency, belonging, and purpose. These qualities can help anyone become a confident, servant worker.

Research Scriptures: Genesis 1:27; Matthew 6:25–34, 20:25–28; Romans 8:28–39, 12:3, 16–21; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10; Galatians 5:25–26; Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:2, 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:24–25; Titus 2:4–5, 3:1–2; 1 Peter 1:18–19, 2:13, 5:1–3; 3 John 9.

- **Forgiving.** Can I forgive a brother who gossips about me or my family? Can I forgive an eldership who wrongly accuses me, fails to understand my work, or dismisses me unfairly? One of the saddest, even most despicable sights, is a preacher who at the end of his lifelong preaching career is bitter, begrudging, and unforgiving of people along the way. It seems to distract, even discredit, all of the many, dedicated fruits he has laid on the altar of faith. Among all the remarkable sermons he preached and the people he helped it would have been so good if he had learned to channel his anger and hurt into forgiveness and reconciliation. Seven, simple choices have been presented earlier but are worthy of repetition, promising multiplied fruitfulness and a ministry life ended well:

- ▶ A choice to be honest: to acknowledge hurt and anger.
- ▶ A choice to make a healthy response: not to repress, or explode but to give direction and control to hurt emotions.
- ▶ A choice to confront the hurt: to verify if it is real or perceived, if it is important, if it is current or in the past.
- ▶ A choice to understand the offender: to put in context the significant hurts that have been verified, to ask “why” questions.
- ▶ A choice to desire the best for the offender: to practice the Calvary choice on behalf of the offender, to practice love.
- ▶ A choice to forgive the offence: to stand at the side of the offender as a defense attorney and plead the case for clemency.
- ▶ A choice to confirm the forgiveness in word and in deed: to decide to be a servant and assume some responsibility in the rehabilitation of the offender.

- ▶ A choice to maintain vigilance and be disciplined in anger management from future hurts: to practice the preceding principles each time new hurts occur.

A mature preacher aims at being a healthy Christian, being a forgiven and forgiving person, preaching the necessity and urgency of forgiving, and modeling the quality in his daily life and ministry.

Research Scriptures: Psalm 4:4; Proverbs 14:29, 15:1–2, 16:32, 29:11; Ecclesiastes 7:7–9; Matthew 5:22–24; Romans 12:19–21; Ephesians 4:26–27, 31–32; 2 Timothy 2:24–25; James 1:19–21.

- **Disciplined and Organized.** Am I a self-disciplined person, organizing my time in establishing a balance in my ministry, family, growth, and leisure time commitments? Have I set and maintained priorities so that purposeful time is given to the important, urgent, and optional activities? Do I set and work at worthy short-term goals and long-term goals in all aspects of my life? While there can be many unexpected turns in many days of ministry, a well organized preacher knows how to get back on track to maintain his pursuit of goals. How did Jesus get so much done in three years of ministry?
 - ▶ He made extensive preparation before starting His public ministry.
 - ▶ He had an “end-game” plan and set His face toward accomplishing it.
 - ▶ Interruptions to teach, to comfort, and to confront were a part of His planned day. But after every such interruption, He went back to His purpose in preaching.
 - ▶ He kept attuned to God in prayer and dwelt in the Word for a renewal of strength.
 - ▶ He mentored others to join Him in His ministry objectives.

Time is one of the preacher’s greatest tools, but he must learn how to use it effectively in a well organized manner. Being well organized will not only lessen the stress and

anxiety, accomplish more useful work and bring more people together in team efforts, but a busy, productive, well disciplined preacher leaves less time and opportunity for Satan to destroy the preacher and his work. Idleness, which is the result of poor organization, sends an invitation to Satan to help the preacher fill his time. Not good!

Research Scriptures: Proverbs 25:28; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 5:22–24; Philippians 4:11–13; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 10:35–39, 12:35–36; James 1:2–4, 5:7–9; 1 Peter 1:13.

Conclusion

If we saw an army marching off to a battle, being well equipped, being veteran warriors, and being highly motivated to win, we would be enthusiastic about the anticipated victory. But if we saw that two-thirds of the soldiers and almost one-half of the leaders were critically wounded, with many lesser wounds, what would be our level of hope? We would know that wounded soldiers do not fight as long or as well as when they are healthy and whole. Such is the description of the Church and its leaders. One half of our elders and preachers are severely wounded in at least two of the above, nine traits, some being wounded in many more. One of the basis for our hope of winning more battles is for an increasing number of our preachers to become whole as this lesson pictures:

- **Able to cope**
- **Hopeful**
- **Involved with people**
- **Open and expressive**
- **Sensitive and caring**
- **Unselfish**
- **Confident**
- **Forgiving**
- **Disciplined and well organized.**

Choose the Pathway to Freedom in Christ

Being Clothed With Spiritual Intimacy

Most organisms have a predictable growth pattern. Could it be possible that such could be true of the spiritual man? Could there be stages of spiritual growth like there are stages of childhood development, the building of a structure, or the growth patterns of a mighty tree? Is this suggested by Peter's admonition:

. . . make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall (2 Peter 1:5–10).

In the past, spiritual formation writers have proposed different possibilities. As early as the late twelfth century, Marguerite Porete proposed seven stages of spiritual ascent: keeping the commandments, following the counsel of perfection, the death of the will, labors giving way to contemplation, the will abandoned to God, freedom in enlightenment, and final release. Paul Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress, Thomas Merton, in his Seven Story

Mountain, and James W. Fowler in his Stages of Faith were all outlining differing levels of spiritual experiences and growth.

What follows in this lesson are seven stages of spiritual growth to which a believer can ascend.

Stage One: Knowledge

The beginning point of spiritual freedom and growth is the knowledge of God's Word. It is still true, "*. . . You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*" (John 8:32). It will always be good for preachers to take personally the words of Peter, "*. . . grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . . .*" (2 Peter 3:18) and the commendation of Paul to the Ephesian elders, "*Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified*" (Acts 20:32). A preacher cannot safely or effectively go any further than his accurate and growing knowledge of the Word. He must be a man of the Book! (Note: review again Chapter Three, Choose To Be A Man of the Book.)

The day the preacher quits studying the Word marks the decline or even halting of his spiritual growth. His preaching will reflect the neglect and his fruitlessness will catch up with him, with saddening consequences. Continued study of the Word is one's best assurance of continuing his spiritual formation.

Stage Two: Obedience

All the Bible knowledge in the Book that does not result in humble and purposeful obedience is water going unused out to sea. The wise voice of Solomon still speaks, "*. . . Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*" (Ecclesiastes 12:10). The consistency and completeness of loving obedience is the measure of a person's or a church's pursuit of intimacy with God.

• Obedience Is a Measure of Our Love:

"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:10).

- **Obedience Is a Measure of Our Faith:**

“But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him . . . From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (John 6: 64, 66–69, NKJV).

- **Obedience Is a Measure of Our Understanding.** We show how well we have understood specific commands when we make the right, obedient decisions:

- ▶ Not looking at a woman lustfully (cf. Matthew 5:28).
- ▶ Forgiving a person as we want God to forgive us (cf. Matthew 6:14–15).
- ▶ Making Kingdom priority the guiding principle of life in each decision (cf. Matthew 6:33).
- ▶ Being careful in not being overly critical and judgmental of a brother (cf. Matthew 7:1–4).

- **Obedience Is a Measure of Our Certainty:**

But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19–20, NKJV).

- **Obedience Is a Measure of Our Churches:** just consider current examples of churches that are determined to be obedient even when those around them are listening to every wind of doctrine. It would be well for everyone to establish some guidelines in promoting the growth in obedience in order to be faithful until death (cf. Revelation 2:10). Note some examples:

- ▶ Purposely develop a love for core realities: God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the Gospel, the lost, evangelism, and ministry.
- ▶ Studiously develop a mature understanding of the imputed righteousness of God (cf. Romans 1:1–17).
- ▶ Joyfully develop a clear vision of the Kingdom purposes and your place in their fulfillment (cf. Romans 12:6ff; 1 Peter 4:10).
- ▶ Carefully develop a clear view of the desired results to every act of obedience.
- ▶ Solemnly develop an ability to foresee consequences of disobedience.
- ▶ Develop an awareness of the available resources to insure obedience (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13).
- ▶ Develop a history of obedience done to the glory of God.

Every preacher should have Paul's caution written across his mind:

I discipline my body and bring it into subjection. Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27, NKJV).

Stage Three: Conscience

Our responses to God must have something deeper than knowledge and obedience. Serving God only out of those qualities makes us vulnerable to the sin of the elder brother in the Lost Son story (cf. Luke 15:25–32) and the condemnation by Jesus of the Jewish leaders for their lack of committed conscience in obeying God (cf. Matthew 15:7–9). Serving God with all our heart is the benchmark for every believer. Serving Him from a committed conscience means deepening our intent and bringing our motives into harmony with our knowledge and obedience.

What are some of the indications that we are growing at the level of conscience, at the level beyond knowledge of what is right and beyond external obedience?

- ▶ When the Kingdom purposes are regularly the highest priorities (cf. Matthew 6:18–34).

- ▶ When the importance and urgency of spiritual development and service become a consuming passion (cf. young ruler in Matthew 19:16–22).
- ▶ When a convincing testimony to others becomes an important concern (cf. Matthew 5:12–16).
- ▶ When there is a consuming hungering and thirsting for things beyond ourselves (for example: the righteousness of God, cf. Matthew 5:12–16, the Word of God, cf. 1 Peter 2:2–3).
- ▶ When our failed attempts are seen as costly hindrances to Kingdom purposes.
- ▶ When our achievements are seen as victories in the cause of the Kingdom.
- ▶ When pleasing God and fulfilling His will are in our continual thoughts.

Each of us should have some helpful guidelines to promote a deepening of intent in our pursuit of God and spiritual formation:

- ▶ We need to conduct regular evaluations of our motives: Why do we give? Why do we pray? Why do we fast? (cf. Matthew 6:1ff).
- ▶ We need to conduct regular evaluations of ministry results.
- ▶ We need to conduct regular evaluations of the suggestions and encouragements of mature and loving brethren.
- ▶ We need to conduct regular evaluations of the observations of critics. Self-examination, scrutinizing one's motives and keeping them aligned to truth and purpose, are vital to serving God with a pure conscience. Paul urges us:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you . . . ? (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Stage Four: Discipline

The great giants in spiritual formation have always and only been those who disciplined themselves in the highest arts and skills of Christian living. Namely in the leading

disciplines of exemplary motives, Bible study, godly choices in living, giving, prayer, fasting, trusting, and practical applications of truth. All of these are contained in the Sermon on the Mount. Some of these will be developed in Part Four of these studies. A young convert starts early in the process of being disciplined in prayer, study, worship, and service. However, many do not enter into a serious, systematic process of excelling in the disciplines. Knowledge, obedience, and serving from the heart (conscience) lay the foundation for becoming a giant in the disciplines.

One can measure his growth in a systematic effort to grow through discipline:

- When the art and science of prayer is being mastered.
- When Bible study is becoming effective and fruitful.
- When evangelism is moving toward the center of one's activity.
- When teaching and preaching is becoming more passionate, persuasive, and purposeful.
- When forgiveness is becoming more frequent and complete.
- When conflict is being more frequently turned into reconciliation and unity.
- When relationships are becoming more positive, up-building, and endearing.

Each one should develop a program for mastering a discipline, using the following process:

- ▶ Capture a vision of God's view of a well-disciplined person.
- ▶ Choose a model of a champion in a discipline (in prayer, Bible Study, in service, and in other things.).
- ▶ Be alert to resources that can promote a discipline (books, seminars, conferences).
- ▶ Form a plan, complete with a schedule and a place to pursue a discipline.
- ▶ Commit to the plan, fighting off all distractions.
- ▶ Foretaste the joys of being a disciplined person.
- ▶ Celebrate as you are becoming mature in a discipline.

It should be understood that no accomplished discipline comes through the grit and sweat of a person, but is an empowerment of God. By the same power that He used to raise Jesus from the tomb, God empowers His people in becoming all that He designed them to be through the Spirit (cf. Ephesians 1:19–20). It is God who works in us “*... both to will and to do His good pleasure*” (Philippians 2:13, NKJV). By our efforts we put ourselves “in God’s pathway” of transformation, showing our intent in a committed discipline to receive His grace.

Stage Five: Devotion

Every saint longs for his time and heart to be more devoted, more meditative, more reflective, and more focused on God. The devotional level of spiritual growth feeds on knowledge, obedience, conscience, and discipline. Devotional experiences will be only occasional and superficial if the previous levels are deficient. If the previous levels are well developed and robust, entering and growing at the devotional level is a genuine delight and is never fully satisfied, “*as the deer pants for steams of water . . .* (Psalm 42:1).

Indications that one is growing in devotional maturity can be measured when the following experiences are increasingly encountered:

- When one is eagerly looking for more time to spend in prayer, in the Word, and in worship.
- When laying the Bible down or shortening a prayer is done with reluctance.
- When a day without prayer, without the Word, and without worship leaves a person hungry, feeling like something is missing.
- When deep feelings are regularly stirred in every encounter with God, lifting one to be filled with gratitude, praise, and adoration or sorrowing over things that grieve the heart of God.
- When insights are clearer and magnified, when views are broader and more distinct, and when there are assurances of seeing things more out of the eyes of God.

The following guidelines could help one who is wanting to grow at the devotional level in his spiritual formation:

- ▶ Focus on the devotional aspects of the Scriptures to promote growth and continued emphasis on prayer and meditation.
- ▶ Focus on the devotional giants in the lives of the champions of the Faith that are found in Scripture.
- ▶ Focus on the writings of spiritual giants, reading the spiritual classics.
- ▶ Focus on chronicling your spiritual journey, reviewing its pages to encourage continual growth.
- ▶ Focus on sharing your devotional experiences with others who have similar purposes and experiences.

When someone has matured to this devotional level of growth, he will need to be cautious against feeling more spiritual than others, putting his growth on display or, in any way, making others feel diminished. He is one among many across the ages who will have walked this far. Everyone he visits with is at some level where he has been or is still longing to experience. He should encourage those in earlier stages and learn from those who have already walked where he is walking. He needs to be humbly grateful that God has led him thus far.

Stage Six: Surrender

A denial of self stands at the threshold of discipleship (cf. Matthew 16:25). Self-centeredness should be lessening at every stage of growth under the impact of the Holy Spirit at work in each of us, breaking us, reshaping us, empowering us, and ennobling us. But there comes a time for the fullest of surrender if we are ever to be completely free to serve God at our fullest.

Such a total “sell-out to Jesus” begins taking shape when the following qualities begin emerging:

- When we acknowledge, confront, and surrender all of our feelings of doubt, fear, isolation, and guilt.
- When we challenge every idea, value, or attitude within ourselves that might be alien to Christ and His cause.

- When we renounce ownership of self, others, and things and more fully accept the role of stewardship.
- When we pointedly and increasingly yield to the will of God with fewer demands, genuinely believing that He is always right.
- When the fruits of having surrendered all things to God are the source of some of our greatest joys and give meaning and purpose to our lives.

We can hasten our full surrender by following the guidelines listed here:

- ▶ Focus on knowing even more purposefully and clearly the priorities of God and our ministry assignments in the Kingdom.
- ▶ Through sincere, soul searching identify anything we may have held back from God and launch a crusade of surrender.
- ▶ In all candor, expose any corner of our life in which we may have resisted the Spirit and purposely open the door giving Him free course to change all that He finds.
- ▶ Without fanfare or offense or depriving others, let us quietly practice giving up different things at different times to test our growing freedom from dependence on things.
- ▶ Let us continue to journal our crusade of surrender and share our struggles and triumphs with whomever we can share similar experiences and purposes.

Ever cautious not to sin in yearning for the applause of men, we must seek only the favor of God who sees in secret and rewards openly (cf. Matthew 6:1–4).

Stage Seven: Intimacy

To arrive at the highest and ultimate, earthly goal of every believer defies human description. Only a limited number of saints reach the top of the upward climb from each plateau of spiritual growth. Such a person has experienced a spiritual formation that has led him through the six previous stages of growth. Most writers are reluctant to describe the seventh stage, either because they only see it

from afar or, like Paul in describing the upper heavens, could find no human terms to describe it (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:1–6).

Here is a description of the experiences one might expect in the seventh stage of one's pursuit of the ultimate freedom in Christ:

- The long held knowledge that God knows all and sees all becomes one's greater delight.
- Being increasingly aware that God has long been open in revealing His deepest longings, His highest purposes, and His most far-reaching plans for humanity and has frequently invited man to be open and intimate with Him.
- No longer is there any impulse or reluctance to hold back any kind of feeling from God, inspiring an eager pouring out of self in every encounter and filling one's day with purpose, strength, and dignity.
- There is continual awareness of being welcomed into God's presence and being specially favored by His “...*loving kindness . . . and faithfulness*” (Psalm 89:33).
- Living with the confidence and purpose that there is nothing now that can threaten or interrupt one's drinking deeply and continually of the fountain of eternal life, regardless of where a person is or how he is being treated.

How does one cooperate with the Spirit in achieving this level of spiritual formation? The following guidelines will help:

- ▶ As never before, rely on the Holy Spirit to aid in breaking down any remaining barrier and in leading you in your communication with God (cf. Romans 8).
- ▶ Review the growth in the past six levels to see if you can strengthen any aspect of past growth.
- ▶ Guard against the designs of Satan to reclaim you through arrogance and self-sufficiency, renewing daily your trust and dependence on God, your submission to His will, and your involvement in Kingdom pursuits.
- ▶ Determine to look for God in every event, making every day a fresh, exciting encounter with God, marveling at

His holiness, His majesty, His grace, His loving kindness, and His faithfulness.

- Share your adoration of God with everyone possible, helping each move from one level to another, living long enough and rich enough to be intimate with God and free to be entirely free.

The final stage of spiritual formation will be described differently by every one arriving at the apex of his pursuit of God. In all cases, human language breaks down to express what one experiences. It is like the vast diversity of descriptions of those who stand on the summit of Mt. Everest. It is other worldly, non-earthy, unbound from human conditions, available to all who will continue the journey of being “*...faithful, even to the point of death . . .*” (Revelation 2:10).

Conclusion

The freedom to be free is the deepest need and longing of every human being. The way to freedom is not in being released from moral standards, in accumulating riches, in gaining the best of health, in travel or change of residence, in educational achievement, or in advancements of position and power.

The human, secular paths to freedom do not compare with the increasing freedom being experienced by the believer as he grows from one stage of spiritual development to the other. Finally, he arrives in his pilgrimage to enjoy intimacy with God and to claim the prize of full freedom: “*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free . . .*” (Galatians 5:1). Then the promise of Jesus will become reality: “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*” (John 8:36).

Choose to Be at Home with God

Seeing Hope Become Reality

The seed of eternity, the hope of a better tomorrow, the belief in a yonder world, all maturing into a longing for an eternal home are woven into the fabric of humanity, everywhere and in all ages. In some civilizations it could be seen only in simple outlines. In others, like the ancient Egyptians and their extensive burial rites and monuments, it was greatly developed. Nature illustrates an eternal home, but Revelation affirms it.

The Bible Affirms a Yonder World, Eternal in the Heavens

In the long ago, Abraham, a nomad on this earth, by faith looked for a permanent place that had “*. . . foundations, whose architect and builder is God*” (Hebrews 11:10). The man from the other side, Jesus of Nazareth, spoke much of the yonder world, making it a central, motivating theme of His visit among men. He began His preaching mission by centering His famed Sermon on the Mount on the “*kingdom of heaven*” themes (cf. Matthew 5–7). He spoke of His having come from the presence of God (cf. John 3:12–13, 6:38) and of His return as a forerunner of many who would be a prepared people for a prepared place (cf. John 14:1–3). Heaven was real to Him (cf. John 17:24) and His promises set the hearts of His disciples on fire with the hope of joining Him around the throne of God in the heavens. Peter captures that fire in saying:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time . . . who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him (1 Peter 1:3–5, 3:22, NKJV).

Paul spoke passionately about wanting “*. . . to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8, NKJV). He was convinced and guided by the Spirit to declare that Jesus had returned to the eternal home:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9–11, KJV, cf. Ephesians 1:20–23, Hebrews 1:1–3).

No wonder there would be a chorus of early disciples singing, “*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come*” (Hebrews 13:14, NKJV).

John spoke of inspiring and inspired pictures of heaven centered upon the exalted throne of God in heaven, of its unimaginable beauty, of its unmatched security and of its desirable company of just men made perfect by the blood of the Lamb, feasting in God’s presence and basking in the delights of the soul (cf. Revelation 4:1–11, 7:9–17, 21:1–22:17).

Focusing on heaven, our hope is enlivened and our destiny is defined:

For we know if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1, KJV).

Like Stephen, our faith must become so affirming and our hope so real that we can, even if dimly, catch his dying vision of our appointed destiny:

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, “Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God . . .”
(Acts 7:55–66, KJV).

Bringing the hope that stirred the hearts and efforts of the early Christians down to our times, what impact should it have on our beliefs and lives?

The Impact of the Hope of an Eternal Home on Spiritual Growth

The doctrine of heaven is one of the most enabling beliefs of the Christian faith. Its **simplicity**, compared to all other beliefs in an afterworld, adds to its irresistible call. Its **perfection** speaks volumes of its architect and maker. And its **completeness** appeals to all that is noble and needed in the hearts of men.

It Defines the Nature and Intent of God

What kind of a deity would invite a people to reside permanently in a “city” as described by John?

And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, “Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.” And he that sat upon the throne, said, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:2–5, KJV).

Before the towering, jeweled gates of that city and shut out by its impenetrable walls, all those ills of a fallen earth are halted. This God wants to share a “*presence*” with His people that is as perfect as it is complete, as pure and intimate as it is inspiring, and as noble and stable as it is permanent, ever new and fully satisfying.

There is no vindictive trace, there is no arbitrary shadow, there is no suspicion or greed, but undiminished acceptance, fullness of grace, and unlimited mercy because of a more than adequate, redemptive price paid by the Lamb of God. The Christian picture of the yonder world speaks of a divine architect that embodies all of the highest qualities of nobility, with the genius and power that defy human imagination and the deepest yearning for relationship with His earthly creatures. If the science of the earth boggles the minds of men, the greater grandeur and fullness of heaven lifts before us a God of infinite and limitless qualities of creative genius and unbounded love for man.

Seeing the intent and nature of the heavenly God, adoration, praise, and loving trust should swell our souls with delight and fill our lives with purpose and the pursuit of everything that is good.

It Guards Against Failing in the Christian Commitment

The Book of Hebrews calls on Judean Christians to pull back from the brink of failing in their commitment of faith. They were in danger of denying the covenant of faith based on greater promises (cf. Hebrews 8:6), of rejecting the divine, prophetic, and priestly Christ and the hope of salvation based on the higher sacrifice of Jesus. A reoccurring theme of the treatise is the call to keep their minds focused on the “*enduring possessions in heaven*” (cf. Hebrews 10:34) as a powerful, motivating means to avoid falling away. The ancient people of God failed to enter their promised resting place through disobedience (cf. Hebrews 4). The same danger faces the new people of God in failing to enter their promised rest.

. . . we desire that each of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those

who through faith and patience inherit the promises
(Hebrews 6:11–12, NKJV).

Battles one may lose, but the war against Satan is already won for those who remain engaged in the ranks of the faithful.

It Gives Purpose in All Struggles

The believer discovers he does not stand alone. He learns that his hope stands firmly on the immutability of God, confirmed by His oath, serving him as an anchor, sure and steadfast, reaching all the way into the presence of God (cf. Hebrews 6:17–20). By virtue of the offered blood of Christ and through His mediation, the called believer receives the “*promise of eternal inheritance*” (cf. Hebrews 9:15).

With such a destiny as dwelling so augustly in the presence of God, the Christian draws strength to endure in his struggles, to triumph in his battles, and go onward to the next challenge to his faith.

It Calls Out the Best in Everyone

One who is going home wants to be at his best. He dresses well for the reunion. The more desirable his home, the more care he takes to be a part of its environment. He discards unnecessary baggage, leaving distasteful habits and associates behind. The eternal Home of the soul is more highly to be desired than any human imagination in its salutary environment, in its kindly associations, in its certain security from any threatening intrusion, or in its promises of garden delights in an eternal day. With the eternal Father on His throne, the beloved Son at His side, and the Spirit of God providing the inextinguishable light, every believer counts anything that would hinder him from being in that select number as nothing and worthless garbage.

Paul understood the power of the ultimate victory calling out the best in him:

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the

loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:7–14, NKJV).

We are preparing to have an audience in the throne room of the King of kings and the assembled faithful of all ages. He surely loved us in our earthly rags and paid the incalculable price for our redemption. However, we have been given heavenly robes for just such an occasion. The least we should do is to go dressed appropriately for the gathering of the saints to honor the Monarch.

It Motivates Believers in Seeking Others for the Journey of Faith

Aside from the commission of Jesus to make disciples out of every ethnic group in every generation, even every creature in every place of dwelling (cf. Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16), the joy of sharing such a treasure should motivate us in speaking freely of heaven with whomever we meet. Even the condemned rich man wanted his sinful brethren to enjoy a better destiny (cf. Luke 16:27–28) and the lepers recognized the wrongness of gorging themselves on the Syrian bounty scattered over the countryside while their fellow countrymen starved in the city (cf. 2 Kings 7:8–10). One of the messages in Revelation 21 is that there will be plenty of room in the Eternal City for whoever and however many may want to come. Sharing what we are certain to

receive in abundance is the surest way to express our gratitude to God and our unselfish love for others.

It Enriches the Worship of God

Because the believer seeks a "*continuing city . . . to come*," he continually offers the sacrifice of praise to God, giving thanks to His name (cf. Hebrews 13:14–15). Salvation from sin through faith and obedience, having heard the good news of Calvary, along with all of a life-time full of blessings in the fellowship of the saints and worship of God, are beyond anything any of us deserve. To have such abundance out of God's grace and heaven too is too much to comprehend. A thankful heart, a grateful life, a submissive will, and humble adoration increases as one understands more of the Home of the soul, eternal in the heavens. The malady of our generation is the poverty of our thinking about a heavenly Home, resulting in a superficial and sterile worship of God. Those who intentionally and continually seek the "*continuing city . . . to come*" find the worship of God an increasing and uplifting reality.

It Builds a Bridge Over the River of Death

A profoundly deep chasm at death has frightened men of every age. They have searched the endless lengths of the chasm, finding no certain bridge that was secure by which to cross to the other side. The test of every religion is its answer to a passage over the deep chasm of death. All men die but few have spanned the ageless chasm. The remaining, untouched treasures left at their tombs for use in the afterworld belie the folly of their having found the bridge over the troubled waters deep in the chilling chasm of death.

The Christian believer has found the way to the other side, following Christ through the resurrection, leaving nothing behind to serve him in the coming age but laying up "*treasures in heaven*" against the day that he will be no more a part of the cities of men (cf. Matthew 6:19–21).

Conclusion

The hope of eternal life, a clear vision of heaven as revealed in Scripture, and an abiding trust in the proven promises of an immutable God drives the fear of death out of the daily thoughts of the believer. He sees the other shore as

a pleasant step away, with the joys awaiting him ready to crowd out all of the sorrows, pains, and threats of the brief life among men. He is home at last, the journey is ended, and the purpose of his creation and redemption is accomplished in full.

Part Two

Building Blocks in Spiritual Living

The following studies aim at grasping the message of the major documents of Spirituality. They take the student to the biblical sources of **Spiritual Living.**

Revisiting Documents of the Old Testament (1)

Two of the most inspiring documents in the Old Testament to give spiritual strength to the reader are the Creation Account of Genesis 1 and the Decalogue of Exodus 20.

Singing the Hymn of Creation in Genesis One

Spirituality Rests Solidly on the Sovereignty of God

Amid all the discussion on the Genesis account of creation and speculation about the origin of the earth and the universe, one monumental truth stands out: **God is Sovereign, the Creator** of all we see. He has the right, by creation, to determine our purpose, to set our course, and define our destiny. His designs should be the basis of our spiritual formation. We can avail ourselves of the same divine power with which He created the universe! The declaration, “*In the beginning God . . .*” from Genesis 1:1 remains through the ages as the cornerstone for understanding the universe and the basis of accountability for all human initiatives.

The first chapter of Genesis does not attempt to answer the many questions that trouble man: questions about the age of the earth, process theories, geological stratifications, presence of dinosaurs, or time calculations. The paramount point is that **God is the Creator of the universe**. How He did it, when He did it, the process He may have used, or were the “days of creation” literal or poetic are questions that are marginal to the summa statement that:

God is the first and an adequate Cause to explain the origin of the material world and the presence of all that is in the universe and upon the earth.

From the origin of the earth to the end of sacred revelation the one truth about the Sovereignty of God has subsisted,

“You are worthy our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Revelation 4:11).

Spirituality Thrives on the Foundation Truths of Genesis One

The Genesis account of the origin of the earth and man continues to be a monumental document that promotes the spiritual formation of a man of God. Any doubt concerning the message of this document spells problems on every succeeding page of the Bible. An abiding faith, resulting from long hours dedicated to plumbing its depths, serves as a foundation for spiritual living. It serves as a foundation in eight ways:

- **Foundation for Faith in God:** A Creator God, as described in Genesis 1, is seen as transcendent, independent of the earth, an adequate first cause for all that exists. Thus, He is omnipotent, omni-competent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is the explanation to all of the inquiries of all the sciences. He is in full control of all the vast forces associated with the earth. If He can create the earth, a small part of a vast uncharted universe, He can certainly respond to every human need. If He created all we see and perceive to exist, then all His promises have a basis to be believed and counted on.
- **Foundation for Faith in Scripture:** If the first verse of Genesis is true, then it is no stretch of credulity to believe in the lesser miracles recorded throughout the Bible, the multitudes of prophecies coming true, and the entirety of the Scheme of Redemption. Critics know how decisive faith in a creation account is in paving the way for a robust faith in the rest of Scriptures and have done all within their power to resist it being believed.
- **Foundation for Ultimate Questions:** The question of origin (Where did we come from?), the question of purpose (Why are we on earth?), the question of man’s

nature (Of what do we consist?), and the question of destiny (Where are we going?) begin finding their answers on the first page of the Bible. Apart from this first page, a world of fanciful speculation clamors to be heard.

- **Foundation for Moral Accountability:** A standard for human conduct, an accountability for behavior, and consequences for irresponsibility are defined from the beginning of human toil. Human beings are not given a democratic vote, neither are they left to do what they may choose without consequences.
- **Foundation for Trust in Jesus:** Genesis 1 and its corollary passages place Jesus, the Incarnate Word, as having been present and active in the creation of the world. Knowing the Father, coming from and returning to His divine presence, makes Jesus One to be trusted in all He preached and in the purposes of His earthly coming.
- **Foundation for the Worship of God:** Creation, alone, would make the Creator God a worthy object of worship and service. Pantheism, dualism, Gnosticism, deism, materialism, and liberalism all fall in shambles around Genesis 1, leaving God to be the rightful Monarch of faith.
- **Foundation for Evangelism and Service:** The God of Genesis 1 must be shared with all ages, nations, and cultures. People need to know where they came from, what their nature is, why they are on earth, what their destiny is, and how Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life, and their only Hope of salvation.
- **Foundation for Hope of Eternal Life:** One's certainty in creation leads to one's certainty in prophecy, strengthens one's reliance on God's promises, establishes a firm basis of faith in Jesus, in the Cross, and in His resurrection. The hope of eternal life thrives on such a legacy of faith, buttressed by the Creation.

Spirituality Finds Its Vigor in the Creator-Creature Distinction

Second to the sovereignty of God that overarches all of the Creation emerges a second, monumental truth: **man is a creature.** As simple as the statement is, it's violation is the

root of much evil. Adam longed to be something more and plunged us all into a world of trouble. All idolatry stems from worshiping the creature rather than worshipping a transcendent God. The deification of man or science or any philosophy is derived from forgetting the Creator and creature relationship. Romans 1 outlines the immoral consequences of forgetting that man is a creature, responsible and accountable to the Creator. At the risk of oversimplifying the history of man, most every human sin committed from the beginning of time in the Garden springs from man ignoring God as Creator or forgetting man's dependent nature on God. In similar fashion, every positive step to moral living, serving others, and reaching religious attainments in worship and service have come from a theology that recognizes and honors the Creator-creature relation. The recognition that Jesus leaped over the chasm between God and man, representing both the Creator and the creature, begins the surest journey into an intimate union with and final enjoyment of the eternal presence of the Creator of the universe.

Read: Isaiah 40:28–31; Acts 17:26–28; Romans 1:18–32; Hebrews 11:1–3.

Revisiting the Decalogue in Exodus Twenty

The Genesis account extols the sovereignty of God and provides the foundation for the growth of the spiritual life. The Decalogue makes an emphatic statement of the **authority of God** in the lives of the redeemed.

The Decalogue Must Be Seen in the Context of Redemption

The Israelites were suffering under the inhumane burden of Egyptian injustice. The national promises of a home land to Abraham seemed beyond hope. The people seemed doomed to endless generations of oppressive slavery. However, after a swift exodus from Egypt led by Moses and the marvelous crossing of the Red Sea, leaving the powerful, Egypt army destroyed in the sea, the Israelites stood before Mt. Sinai in Arabia. They were redeemed! Snatched from hopeless slavery! The promises to Abraham were fulfilled

(cf. Deuteronomy 6:23), by virtue of God's grace in delivering the Israelites. God defined the context in Exodus 20:1:

And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

The Decalogue Must Be Seen in the Context of a Covenant

As the Redeemer, God graciously established a covenant to define how He wanted the redeemed to act. Rather than use a democratic process or negotiated consensus, He wanted unilateral authority as their Creator and Redeemer (cf. Deuteronomy 5:33).

- The Decalogue demanded the response of love and gratitude (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5).
- The Decalogue led to fullness of life (cf. Deuteronomy 6:10–11).
- The Decalogue was the heart of the God-Israel relationship, with the ordinances being the commentary on the commands.
- The Decalogue gave direction to the people in the continuity of the covenant.
- The Decalogue called on the people to express their dependence on God, honoring His absolute authority.

The Decalogue Sets the Standard of Religious and Social Living, Based on God's Authority — “*I am Jehovah thy God . . .*” (Exodus 20:1, ASV).

- **The First Commandment:** “*You shall have no other gods before me*” (Exodus 20:3) — This commandment required Israel, though surrounded by idolatry, to categorically reject all other deities and exclusively bow before **Jehovah** God. The commandment was emphatic, leaving no discussion or room for arbitration.
- **The Second Commandment:** “*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything . . .*” (Exodus 20:4) — Nothing in the created order was to be placed above God for worship. Elevating the creature above the

Creator is the central weakness of humanity. Remembering that **Jehovah** God was in authority and operated out of love should preclude setting Him aside and ennobling a life-less, power-less representation of a creature.

- **The Third Commandment:** “*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*” (Exodus 20:7) — God’s name is reserved for the exclusive use of fulfilling covenant purposes. Giving authenticity to error or human threats by carelessly authorizing them by citing God’s name is strongly prohibited. Only certain truth can be associated with His name or approved by His authority.
- **The Fourth Commandment:** “*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy*” (Exodus 20:8) — The weekly day of rest was to call the people back to their origin and back to their Creator. God wanted the people to never stray far from the recognition of their dependence on Him. Spiritual growth is directly dependent on a systematic and periodic remembrance of God being the source of life and all things.
- **The Fifth Commandment:** “*Honor your father and your mother . . .*” (Exodus 20:12) — The continuity of the covenant is dependent on parents being honored in the obedience of the children. A solid family structure in which children are taught life values and faith in **Jehovah** is the hope of a nation, as it is of a covenant people (cf. Deuteronomy 6:1–10, Proverbs 22:6).
- **The Sixth Commandment:** “*You shall not murder*” (Exodus 20:13) — Life is sacred. Every human person has created worth and established dignity. No human creature, unless authorized by God, is to take the life of another person. Recognizing the worth of the individual is fundamental to fair treatment, encouraging achievements, and maximizing the giftedness of the individual. No society thrives on dehumanizing treatment or slaughter of the individual.
- **The Seventh Commandment:** “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14) — This commandment demands covenant faithfulness in the intimacy of marriage, but its principle could extend to every sphere

of life. Do not break promises. Do not be covenant breakers in any relationship. We serve a promise making and a promise keeping God who yearns, even demands, that we be like Him in our faithfulness in covenants.

- **The Eighth Commandment:** “*You shall not steal*” (Exodus 20:15) — The possessions of another, like his character, is an extension of his worth, the fruit of his labors, and the substance of his purpose and values. To steal is to devalue another person, even to hold him in contempt. The Hebrew word actually means “to kidnap,” which robs another of freedom and manipulates another for personal greed. Stealing is self-centered, being contemptuous toward God and man.
- **The Ninth Commandment:** “*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor*” (Exodus 20:16) — Integrity in personal relationships within the community of God is essential to cohesiveness and unity of purpose. God made each member of the community a custodian of truth and a guardian of the reputation of others. Recklessness in the handling of information is beneath the dignity of a covenant person.
- **The Tenth Commandment:** “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s house . . . wife . . . servant . . .*” (Exodus 20:17) — Secure relationships assume that each man honors the achievements of others and does nothing to lessen them. A neighbor’s world is safe when others do not act on selfish motives and greed. Keeping one’s heart free of envy through self-scrutiny and repentance honors others and all they can achieve.

The Decalogue Must Be Seen as a Continuing Basis for Spiritual Formation

The Decalogue was at the heart of the *Jehovah*-Israel covenant relationship, giving direction to the people in their response of love and obedience to the grace and sovereignty of God. A misunderstanding and misapplication of Colossians 2:14 in which Paul said, “. . . having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross,” wrongly discredits the principles of the ancient covenant. What was ended by the cross was a dependence on “Law keeping” as a basis of a right relationship with God.

The covenant of the cross defines and secures a new relationship with God through trusting in Christ for our salvation. Pressed by an urgency to find a proof text to expose the error of Sabbath keepers, we ignore the fundamental truths of the Decalogue (sovereignty of God, community responsibilities, and so forth). Without losing the continuing value of the Decalogue or the truths of Creation, there are other responses to Sabbath keepers. The Decalogue continues as a vital part of a mature, spiritual formation. What principle could be left out of those ten statements that define a right regard of God or a responsible role in the community of faith?

While we do not follow Moses, neither are we under the mountain covenant but under the leadership of Christ, the conditions we face remain analogous: God's redemption, grace, sovereignty, along with responsible behavior in the community of His people.

- **Religious Realities Remain Unchanged.** The Ten Commandments are not time dated. We still need to have full devotion to God and serve Him with all our hearts. He is still the object of our worship and service. We are to have no other gods. God still remains Sovereign in our lives. Nothing material, images or possessions, are to come before or between God and us. We still must be reverent in the use of His name, not taking His name in vain or using His name in a way that is worthless or distractive to His cause.
- **Man's Dependence on God Remains Unchanged.** The principle of the Sabbath has not changed, even if the practices and day have changed. We still need to have gratitude to God for life, redemption, and relationship.
- **Social, Community Realities Remain Unchanged.** Developing a strong family unity is the core strength of the Church and society. The acceptance of individual worth and purpose is the best deterrence of harm at any level. Being faithful and keeping promises mean more than just being sexually faithful, but strengthens every relationship. Honoring human freedom and dignity precludes stealing from others, but more than that, it promotes being sensitive and kind to others. Relationships are guarded with integrity and protected

- from selfish desires, with each member of the community desiring what is genuinely best for others.
- **Relationship Principles of the Decalogue Are Enhanced by Calvary.** Creation principles continue to speak to us about the sovereignty of God in caring for our every need. The Decalogue continues to speak to us of God as our Deliverer, the singular object of our worship, portraying the core religious and social values of the community of God. The Cross speaks to us of the heart of God in redeeming us from inescapable ruin.

Conclusion

While the New Testament speaks of all these abiding principles, they are best understood and emphasized by the monumental documents of Creation and the Decalogue. Spirituality is so deeply rooted in these historic truths that much time should be spent in Genesis 1 and Exodus 20.

Revisiting Documents of the Old Testament (2)

Three more Old Testament documents that provide a rich resource for spiritual formation are Psalm 23, Isaiah 6, and Isaiah 53.

Getting to Know the Shepherd of Psalm Twenty-Three

The Twenty-third Psalm declares in the clearest of terms that **God is a Provident God**. Anxiety is man's number one slave-master. The doubt, fear, loneliness, and guilt that anxiety infuses in man's every thought blinds him from seeing that there is a God who cares and can provide strength and deliverance. Psalm 23 is the most eloquent declaration that there is Someone who cares and is able and ready to intervene in every threat that faces man.

Psalm 23 provides us with a seven day plan for learning to trust in God. Begin each day by reading the Psalm and try reading from different versions. Memorize one verse each morning and repeat the summary statement noted below throughout the day. Look for and claim the promise of that particular verse throughout the day. To drive away anxiety, return again and again to shore up a sagging trust in a caring God. Storing up the treasures of the Psalm allows its potency to permeate one's thinking and behavior.

Summary Statements of the Twenty-third Psalm in a Seven Day Plan

- **Day One: The Lord Fills My Life Completely:** “*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.*”

This is the theme of the Psalm. More than memorizing the verse and believing it to be true, it is important to come to know the Shepherd of the Twenty-Third Psalm. The hymn of creation in Genesis 1, the crashing lightning and thunder of Exodus 20, the Cross emblazoned against the darkened sky, and Psalm 23 all draw our attention to the Person of the Shepherd: who He is, how He acts on behalf of mankind, how He cares for man in his own plight.

- **The Lord Thinks of My Simple Needs:** “*He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.*”

The Shepherd is leading His sheep to quiet waters and green pastures. He has already chosen the pasture and made sure it is safe. Sheep will not lie down until their hunger needs are satisfied. They will avoid rushing, dangerous waters and drink only from a calm and quiet place beside the water. A wise shepherd who knows his sheep will provide what best responds to their needs. Knowing the Shepherd of Psalm 23 brings the assurance that He understands and cares about us because we are His sheep.

- **Day Two: The Lord Gives Me Strength:** “*He restores my soul.*”

The Shepherd God, like every good shepherd, will watch over the well being of each sheep, noticing any sagging strength among His flock. He will notice every struggle against all adversaries. He will come to the side of and pick up the staggering or fallen sheep to give comfort and strength. He will do whatever is necessary to restore the struggling sheep to the healthy fold.

- **Day Three: The Lord Gives Me Purpose:** “*He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his namesake.*”

No worthy shepherd would become indifferent to wandering sheep. God will not allow His sheep to go aimlessly through life, without purpose or leadership. He has a clear pathway and purpose for each of us. His central purpose is that we have a right relationship with Him and aim

at doing only that which is for His namesake in such a way that we honor Him.

- **Day Four: The Lord Surrounds Me:** *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.”*

The Shepherd's purposes are focused on protecting the sheep while they grow. Following the leadership of the Shepherd God, we can be serene during any threat. We can be confident that He is surrounding us in all situations. Knowing the Shepherd brings us the certainty that He cares for us when we are vulnerable and gives us the confidence in fearing no evil.

- **Day Five: The Lord Delights in Me:** *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”*

Seemingly, without any mention of merit, the Shepherd of these sheep dotes over each one, young and old. He makes each one seem special and gives specific attention to giving each sheep a place of importance. In the fold of God, each sheep is cherished and given what seems to be favored attention. This would include the ones who previously were struggling and had been restored.

- **Day Six: The Lord Gives Beauty to My Service:** *“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.”*

The Good Shepherd never wavers in His high regard for His sheep, giving them every opportunity to be all they were designed to be and do. The Shepherd God follows even the mis-steps of His sheep, confirming His good will and tender mercies on their behalf. He can take our mistakes and make something good out of them.

- **Day Seven: The Lord Brings Me Home:** *“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

The conclusion of Psalm 23 is that no matter what comes, dwelling in the home-like presence of God is assured. Nothing can threaten the certainty of God's continual care. Nothing can threaten a victorious reception in the eternal Home of the soul. The person growing in spirituality will return often to Psalm 23 both to renew his spirit and to deepen his trust in the Provident God.

Visiting in the Temple of Isaiah Six

Seeing the Holiness of God in the Throne Room

This jewel of a scene, set in the Bible's most majestic, prophetic book, affirms the **Holiness of God**, in which we can find a rich resource for our spiritual formation. The people of Judah had lived under the long rule of King Uzziah enjoying peace, prosperity, joy in life, and confidence in their king. That confidence all began collapsing around them when Uzziah died of leprosy, imposed upon him for his defiance of God's law prohibiting entry into the temple. The people feared and even doubted the prospect of the son of the king coming to the throne. They saw him as defiant and irresponsible. Their grief in the loss of a great leader and man of peace was compounded by their anger, probably at God. Anytime people experience hurt, anger comes along swiftly.

Isaiah had a different kind of experience "*In the year that King Uzziah died . . .*" (Isaiah 6:1). Isaiah . . .

. . . saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings . . . And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke (Isaiah 6:1–3).

Isaiah's Response Described

Isaiah saw the Lord in all of His majesty. He saw **Jehovah** as the Holy God. He looked into the august throne room and saw God dressed in regal splendor, with the flowing garment carpeting the temple floor. He saw the matchless seraphim singing praises to the Holiness of God.

The temple was filled with the smoke of the presence of deity. Isaiah felt the weight of his sins and the shame of even pronouncing the holy name of God with such sinful lips. His experience could be described as follows:

- **Compelled:** Awe in the presence of God, a holy God who was superlatively above all gods and incomparably beyond all acclaimed deities.
- **Convicted:** Overwhelmed by the holiness of God, struck by the magnitude of his personal sin and of those in the nation.
- **Confessed:** Honesty in the recognition of personal sin, unworthy to be in God's presence.
- **Cleansed:** Rejoicing in the freedom from sin, his sins were no more, the direct work of God's grace.
- **Committed:** Eagerness to serve in an urgent mission, not by any merit as a young, intelligent, and fluent member of the royal family, but because he understood the joy of his salvation. He now had something of value to say to others in sin.
- **Commissioned:** Armed in the presence of mission, he now would speak by the highest authority in the land.
- **Confirmed:** Sobered in the presence of reality, a difficult people would resist him at every step, but his faithfulness was more important than his fruitfulness. Isaiah wanted God to give him a confirmation, because he knew the people were angry and in grief. God told Isaiah to preach until He told him to stop.

Application

The Temple experience, centered on **Jehovah** God in His holiness, must become the experience of everyone who preaches, being renewed as he deepens his spiritual life. Woe to a church who has a man in the pulpit and serving in their lives who has not gone again and again to the Temple. Every man in the pulpit needs to return to the Temple to be struck anew by the holiness of God, indicted by his own sins, humbled in confessing his sins before God, having drank deeply of his own cleansing, committing himself with even greater passion and surety of the commission to preach as his mission is confirmed in many ways.

The preacher who has not visited in the Temple presence of God will likely compare himself with other members or even other preachers. His most revealing and helpful comparison will be between himself and the Holy God. Having passed over his sins and leaving them unconfessed, results in hypocrisy and shallowness in a preacher's life and in his preaching. Not regularly being cleansed, even painfully as if by a burning coal, he will lack much in preaching convictingly and persuasively. However skilled his sermons, they will contain a joyless message. Being uncertain of his mission, receiving only scattered and questionable confirmations, will leave him without any strong sense of purpose or direction.

Isaiah 6 must be a major source of the growing spirituality of one who would dare preach the Word. The preacher will preach with humility, with conviction, with joy, and with commitment increasingly, as he becomes a frequent visitor of the Temple.

Further Research: See how other prophets had similar experiences. Look for patterns of spiritual formation within the lives of Job, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel (cf. Job 1–42; Joshua 5:13–15; Isaiah 6–66; Jeremiah 1:6–10; Ezekiel 1:28, 2:1–10; Daniel 10:5–12):

- ▶ Going beyond the knowledge of God to understanding His awesome presence and power.
- ▶ Being struck with one's own sinfulness and total inadequacy.
- ▶ Being transformed by cleansing and empowerment.
- ▶ Being assigned a new place or means of serving.

Meeting the Suffering Servant of Isaiah Fifty-Three

Among the great mountain peaks of Scripture, Isaiah 53 towers among the highest. It was one of the most revered promises among those in ancient times in their eager vigil for the promised Messiah. It was one of those most referred to among those who recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the complete and intentional fulfillment (cf. Matthew 8:17; Luke

22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–33; Romans 10:16; 1 Peter 2:21–25).

Isaiah 53 assures us of some of the most centrally important tenets for our faith out of which our spiritual formation springs. It declares the **sacrificial love of God** for His people.

The Fountain of our Spirituality

- **Spirituality Does Not Come from the Flesh (Isaiah 53:1–3).**

Men look for confirmation of greatness, even spiritual worth, in fleshly considerations: powerful origins, favored surroundings, trappings of wealth, attractive bearings, popularity, untouched by the burdens of humanity, and sought out and applauded by the masses. If the people waiting for a Messiah in the first century A.D. had understood Isaiah 53:1–3, they would have seen that none of the characteristics of greatness were to be expected of the Messiah. Though all such favorable circumstances were scattered across His distant history, Jesus did not come from a family of any immediate note or importance. His surroundings were so unheralded that it was generally doubted that anything of worth could spring from such a backward village. We, too, often look for spiritual formation in the wrong places, expecting to be shaped by unlikely experiences and practices.

- **Spirituality Comes Through Suffering (Isaiah 53:4–6).**

None of the benefits of the Gospel would have resulted without the suffering of the Son of Man. We would have been left crushed under the weight of our sins, afflicted by our grief, and overwhelmed by our unbearable sorrows. Our spirituality begins taking shape with dying to ourselves, identifying with the Man of sorrows in His death, and beginning a journey of faith full of the molding experiences that sometimes stretch, tear, hurt and, eventually, transform us into the likeness of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 (cf. Matthew 24:16). Desiring a spiritual life absent of His suffering and of our own suffering is to hold an empty sack at the end of the day.

- **Spirituality Comes Through Submission (Isaiah 53:7–9).**

Ten thousand angels could have been called to rescue Jesus, leaving us all unsaved and spiritually starved. Choosing to submit His will to the will of the Father and head resolutely to the Cross, with all of its shame, agony, and seeming defeat, formed the history that is to become our history of submission. Our refusal to submit will result in our rejection of the company of spiritual men of the ages, led by the Suffering Servant. Submitting daily opens door after door in the corridors of spiritual formation along which the Spirit leads us.

- **Spirituality Comes Through Serving Others (Isaiah 53:10–12).**

Through His suffering and submission, Jesus served the highest and most pressing needs of a lost race. His completed mission to make men righteous, justifying them before God, bearing the penalty for their sins, and facing the brutally blunt end of a transgressor put in place the foundation for our spiritual life. In the same spirit and for the same causes, through serving others and leading them to Jesus (cf. Colossians 1:23), we open ourselves to the work of God, making us holy and complete in Him.

- **Spirituality Comes Through Divine Empowerment (Isaiah 53:12).**

When our nature is a readiness to suffer, when our spirit submits to the will of God, and when our purpose is serving the crucial needs of others, regardless of the cost, God takes note. He fills our lives with the bounty of His grace, prolonging our days and influence as He sees fit, and prospers us in the virtues and values of His ways. Walking among spiritual giants inspires us to the true greatness of spiritual living.

The Messiah has come. He has accomplished His messianic mission. Yet, Isaiah 53 continues to chart the way for our spiritual formation through putting no faith in human schemes. Rather, our spiritual formation thrives in understanding that spirituality comes through suffering for Christ, through submitting to the will of the Father, through

serving others, and through the bestowal of the riches of God's grace.

Conclusion

Following after the Shepherd of Psalm 23, frequently visiting the temple of Isaiah 6, and knowing the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 are fundamental sources in the spiritual living of all preachers. Guided and cared for by the Shepherd, being a fervent and cleansed worshiper, and becoming a faithful member of the community of servant sufferers are the experiences out of which the spiritual life of a minister thrives.

Revisiting Documents of the New Testament (1)

The New Testament is such a rich storehouse of sources for spiritual growth. Singling out a few selected chapters does not diminish the power and beauty of the others. The following two documents are of particular importance in growing spiritually: the Kingdom Beatitudes in Matthew 5 and the Litany of Love in 1 Corinthians 13.

The Kingdom Beatitudes **Matthew 5:1–10**

The beatitudes in Matthew 5:1–10 are so rich they have been portrayed in many different ways: the self-portrait of Jesus, the ideals of Kingdom people, the pathway to happiness, the Magna Charter of Christianity, and so forth. In this presentation, their impact on spiritual growth will be emphasized. Each beatitude contains three components: a promise of happiness in its completeness or fulfillment, the quality that leads to blessedness, and the condition that constitutes blessedness. Essentially, from this perspective, Jesus asks if one wants to be happy or complete, tells him what he has to do to be filled with happiness, and describes what God supplies to complete him.

First Beatitude: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

“*Blessed are the poor in spirit*” is such a rich statement. Being one who is “*poor in spirit*” goes beyond being humble but easily includes that quality. It serves as much more than a contrast to the one who is arrogant precluding any yielding to God. Basically, the term describes those who are enthusiasts for “spiritual poverty.” It is one who not only recognizes that he does not have the spiritual resources of his own to save

himself or to survive in the evil world that surrounds him. He knows that he must place his full trust in the God who provides all.

One who is “*poor in Spirit*” is making a statement of absolutely trusting God. It means keeping one’s life simple, uncluttered by the dependency on many things other than the living God. The beatitude portrays a commitment to a simple lifestyle seen in Jesus, with priorities clearly set and carefully followed. One who is an enthusiast for spiritual poverty, though possessing much, is possessed by nothing and no one other than by God and for Kingdom purposes. To such a believer, Jesus is saying, “You will be happy when the kingdom of heaven invades your soul, when the Lordship of heaven controls your life, when you submit to the will of God.

- **Commentary:** One thinks constantly of the need for God and keeps his life simple, uncluttered, yielding faithfully to the Kingdom rule.

Second Beatitude: “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*”

“*Blessed are those who mourn*” describes the person whose heart is sensitively submitted to God by felt hurt. Hurt and mourning by themselves can become the occasion of one being bitter and retaliatory. However, a submitted believer who cries out to God for comfort will be strengthened. Being comforted by God enables the believer to turn to others who hurt. A believer mourns with others who suffer, grieves over the unrighteousness of others and over the lost in all the world. He mourns over what grieves the great heart of God.

- **Commentary:** One stays in contact with the feelings of pain, grieves over the tragedy of wrong, and cries to God for His comfort to be felt and His righteousness to prevail.

Third Beatitude: “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*”

“*Blessed are the meek*” describes people with a resolute spirit who commit to a difficult task and complete their commitment with a tenacious, but sweet and uncomplaining spirit. The word “*meek*” in the Greek language has a different connotation than the same word in the English. An

illustration of “*meekness*” would be a worker tasked with carrying a huge rock to an indicated location and doing it with an uncomplaining attitude.

True happiness comes to people who start and finish a commitment and who are uncomplaining of the difficulties they may encounter along the way. They are the ones who receive and enjoy the best that the earth provides: a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment of purpose, affirmation of worth and of making a difference. The happiest of people are productive people. They see their works are good and extending to oncoming generations and enjoy the grateful friends along the way. The commitment of Jesus to go to Calvary and suffer the agonies of the Cross is the best example of faithfulness and kindness of spirit under trial.

- **Commentary:** One thinks of the nobility of doing right and commits himself to fulfill his promise, with a sweet, uncomplaining spirit.

Fourth Beatitude: “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*”

“*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*” portrays the picture of hungering and thirsting for something that must be sought after, something far away. Once satisfied, one is free to feel better and see life as good. Spiritually, one cannot feel good when he is far from God, depending on human efforts to achieve a sense of well-being. Jesus knows our emptiness, shallowness, and our loneliness when the righteousness of His Father is not our daily experience, our source of well-being. He speaks here of the deep longing to be right with God as the key to the treasures of the Father. It comes through the spiritual disciplines that help us to yield to the Spirit of God who transforms our character and forms our spiritual life into something beautiful.

- **Commentary:** One thinks of the emptiness of a life without God and searches passionately to be filled with God.

Fifth Beatitude: “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*”

“*Blessed are the merciful*” refers to one who is able to understand others in a failing or hurtful situation and to

extend mercy. Even though we may know we are wrong and will need to correct our failures, we still long for someone, anyone, to show his mercy to us. That is one of the most powerful features of the Gospel — God understands, really cares, and is merciful to us. Mercy is an important part in building good relationships. Jesus, in modern terms, might be saying, “Being happy depends, in part, on building good relationships by being merciful to others.” Being arrogant, harsh, expressing diminishing judgments, making unkind remarks, or putting down another, even with humor, and spewing sarcasm do not build relationships.

- **Commentary:** One thinks of the deep need to be kindly understood and reaches out to feel the needs of others, treating them with understanding and mercy.

Sixth Beatitude: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*

“*Blessed are the pure in heart*” refers to one who clearly sees the forward path and is able to avoid the threatening darkness before him. Doing God’s will faithfully depends on knowing His heart. He can best be seen through pure thoughts and pristine motives. The promise is clear: God is to be seen through the clean, window panes of our hearts. Envy, jealousy, lust, resentment, pride, and other things blur our view of God and impede spiritual growth and service. Guarding against every thought that distorts our vision of God becomes a daily pursuit.

- **Commentary:** One thinks of the beauty of holiness and drives every impure thought from the mind.

Seventh Beatitude: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*

“*Blessed are the peacemakers*” describes one who brings harmony, balance, and unity of actions to others. A symphony conductor, a marital counselor, or a preacher in a growing church would be examples. The Lord is urging us in our enjoyment of life to invest in people, helping them reach their greatest potential by getting along well and being happily productive. Happy is the preacher, in leaving a location for a new challenge in ministry, who goes away with people thinking, “There goes a son of God. He helped us love

each other, see the good in one another, and become unselfish servants to each other.”

- **Commentary:** One thinks of the pain and loss in every conflict and works to bond others in the joys of friendship.

Eighth Beatitude: “*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

“*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness*” is the strongest blessing of all. Each beatitude has built on the preceding one. Here at the end, we come full circle. The first beatitude instructed us that the Lordship of God, the rule of heaven, would be the basis of true happiness. That is still true at the end of the beatitudes. Living the values of the beatitudes will put a believer at odds with the values of the world. Every beatitude is in conflict with the values of the world. The most common way that a distorted world knows how to act is to unleash its frustrations on a source of threat. However, instead of confusing the believer, persecution both affirms his faith and his submission to the rule of God in his life.

- **Commentary:** One thinks of the lofty values of right beliefs and considers the loss of personal comforts and life itself a small price to pay.

The Litany of Love First Corinthians Thirteen

Paul wrote the poem of 1 Corinthians 13 on love, its permanency, completeness, and superiority to all other virtues and actions. The love extolled by Paul is the *agape* love of responsibility. It is not driven by passion for the object (*eros*) but by passion for the need being met. It is not motivated by the pleasure of friendship (*philia*) but by the pleasure of service. Nor is it limited to a sense of kinship (*storge*) but reaches out to total strangers. It is the core quality of any Christian ministry or initiative (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1–3: language, prophecy, knowledge, faith, giving, sacrifice). Anything done without *agape* love is empty, useless, arrogant, and self-serving.

Fifteen qualities of love are listed below as they are found in 1 Corinthians 13 from the New King James Version. Can you put your name in the blank to accurately describe your practice of *agape* love?

- _____ *suffers long.* Suffering long with people or circumstances precludes snapping back, giving up too soon, or demanding instant gratification. Love motivates us to have a God-like patience and endurance even with stumbling, faulty people. It means keeping our promises through difficult circumstances and long after others lose their patience.
- _____ *is kind.* Kindness is actively engaged in doing good. It comes out of a heart of good will and a merciful spirit. Kindness is what mercy feels. Kindness adds warmth, sincerity, and tender regard to doing good to others.
- _____ *does not envy.* Envy leads one to be jealous of the progress and to begrudge the accomplishments of others, desiring to have what they enjoy, and usually without paying the price of the achievements. It leads one to demean another and to diminish the value of what they have done or who they are. It most often leads to anger and judgments against God for failing to recognize the efforts or desires of the envious one. Envy is an unhealthy motivator to do good. It destroys feelings of kindness, helpfulness, and appreciation that are so necessary in building friendships.
- _____ *does not parade itself.* The highest rank given in the Kingdom is a servant. A mature believer is often surprised, perhaps even offended, when someone tries to exalt them over others. While we all need encouragement and affirmation, our greater wonder is that God has decided to give each of us such gifted abilities to serve Him effectively and fruitfully. Drawing attention to ourselves and our works distracts from our dear Lord, who is the object of our worship and service.
- _____ *is not puffed up.* The man of God thinks little of his own importance or the significant things he has done. There are a mountain of other things and people who are more toward the center of his concerns. That is why he feels little to no offence when people do not know who

he is or what he has done or give little importance to what he may say. He is not driven to defend himself, believing that truth will have its own day. He does not struggle within himself when “*... led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*” (Isaiah 53:7).

- _____ *does not behave rudely.* Rudeness to any other person, for any reason, not only devalues the mistreated person but reveals a heart of arrogance, insensitivity, and some level of contempt. Rather, being courteous, thoughtful, tactful, and gracious to all reflects the qualities of love.
- _____ *does not seek its own.* Demanding to be first in line, insisting on others stepping aside, arguing for rights and privileges being promptly observed, showing little concern for others being served or their needs being recognized are daily experiences of one filled with himself. Not seeking one’s own interest first is all about being responsible, unselfish, interested most in serving rather than being served.
- _____ *is not provoked.* The mastery of anger is the mark of a mature person (cf. James 4:1ff). One who is “*... slow to speak and slow to become angry ...*” is more able to be a channel of righteous (cf. James 1:19). Angry responses reveal unhealed hurts and failure to forgive offenders. Unresolved anger is storing destructive acid within and expressing it can be like throwing acid in the faces of others. Mismanaged anger leads to the abuse of others and to the detriment of Kingdom purposes.
- _____ *thinks no evil.* Brooding over past hurts, keeping account of the failures of others, and continually looking for someone to mess up provides a storehouse of evil thoughts. A good place to stop evil thoughts accumulating in one’s mind is to never make or express any negative evaluation unless it is instructive. Setting an “around the clock” guard on our thoughts must be a priority item for every preacher. More preachers have rotted from the inside and fallen by acting on their evil thoughts than heresy in doctrine.
- _____ *does not rejoice in iniquity.* Preachers, among others, are custodians of truth and avowed enemies of

iniquity. They cannot be indifferent to those in sin, but rather, they grieve over their lostness. Iniquity is so foreign to everything in their lives that they find no pleasure when anyone or any religious group is exposed in doing wrong. Like a surgeon grieves over the sickness of a patient until the disease can be treated successfully, they grieve when others sin. Witch-hunting, in any group and rejoicing when a scent of sin is found and exposed, is void of the love of a truth-seeker. Denominational jealousies do not blind the man of God from recognizing truth believed and practiced by others. His rejoicing is in truth, truth preached or practiced by anyone, anywhere.

- rejoices in truth. A preacher's strongest bulwark is revealed truth. For it he searches as for a treasure. Loyalty to what truth he knows is his best evidence of integrity. He offers no apology for believing and preaching what God has revealed. He finds his greatest pleasure rejoicing over new discoveries and sharing the essential truth with everyone, young and old.
- bears all things. What a preacher is like when being insulted, abused, hurt, and disappointed may be the best measure of his love. It is easier to love the lovely, the loving, and loveable. Some fairly inexcusable things have been done to preachers, in and out of the church, but few have gone to the level of suffering at Calvary. Bearing all things precludes answering in kind, retaliating, or angrily rehearsing the episode on down the ministry trail. For the sake of the people of God and the honor of God, one counts afflictions as peripheral issues.
- believes all things. Gullibility is not the virtue being extolled in this statement about love. Love is not blind. Belief always predicates evidence. Love seriously considers evidence, handles evidence carefully, and responds to evidence responsibly. Believing all things involves an attitude of looking for the best in people and giving them the benefit of belief in the absence of contrasting evidence.
- hopes all things. The man of God lives by a vision of worthy purposes and good results. He has a resiliency about him that he sees hope when others cannot. With his hope he can pull good out of a hopeless situation. He refuses to take failure as a final outcome.

Others follow him because he exults hope and conviction and enthusiasm.

- endures all things. Beyond “*suffering long*” and “*bearing all things*” mentioned above, the endurance cited here is the final result. It speaks of outlasting everything and finishing triumphantly one’s journey. It is the being “*... faithful, even to the point of death ...*” (cf. Revelation 2:10). The overarching expectation of God of each preacher is that he be faithful. Faithfulness in serving was the message of God to Isaiah in his prophetic call (cf. Isaiah 6) and has been in every century.

Conclusion

Ministry maturity is not about how many baptisms, how many debates, how many churches, how many books, how many accolades, or how great the salaries and benefits there have been over the course of his ministry. Our becoming like the portrait of Jesus and His people in Matthew 5 and our faithfulness in serving, motivated always by love in acting like Jesus in 1 Corinthians 13, is at the heart of the spiritual living at its most noble.

Revisiting Documents of the New Testament (2)

The Harvest of the Spirit (Galatians Five)

Nine virtues are named in Galatians 5:22–23 that are the result of the Holy Spirit at work to form character in the yielded believer. They are a cluster of virtues that form a unit.

Careful and continued disciplines (prayer, fasting, giving, study, and so forth) favor or provide a healthy environment for the growth of these nine virtues. Yet it must be understood that they are derived from and produced by the Holy Spirit in the believer. They are called the “*fruit of the Spirit*”! The ripening of each of these virtues will be seen increasingly in the preacher who is growing. We are going to look at each virtue one at a time.

- **“Love”**

The Holy Spirit dwells in each believer to form the virtue of “*love*.” This is the *agape* love of 1 Corinthians 13. It is not the natural love that runs in the cycle of giving and expecting something in return. It is not the love that gives because of passion for the object (*eros*), the feelings of friendship (*philia*), or the feelings of a relationship (*storge*). The *agape* love is selfless, self-emptying, oriented to the need of another without expecting any fulfilling response.

While natural love flows more easily as long as a personal need is being fulfilled, *agape* love is much more difficult, on our own, to initiate and continue over a long period of time or over a series of circumstances. When our acts of love are occasional or do not last long, they are likely coming out of natural love that expects a return rather than

agape love. The ***agape*** “*love [that] is patient . . . kind . . . not proud . . .*” (1 Corinthians 13:4ff) is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

When our actions toward others are focused on the need of another and not on the merit of another, the Holy Spirit is forming ***agape*** character in us. When we can continue acting on behalf of another over a long period of time and without getting anything in return, we know the Holy Spirit is at work. When ingratitude and rejection is the only response we receive for helping another and we are undaunted in our loving, the Holy Spirit is making a difference in us. The Holy Spirit enables us to act unselfishly, untiringly, and to keep focused on fulfilling the needs of others. Without Him being free to work within us to form the virtue of ***agape*** love, we lapse back to natural, fleshly love that is limited to passion needs, friendship, and family concerns. If it is not ***agape*** love, a failure of those being loved to respond will limit how long or how well we continue loving. No one outside of those perimeters will receive much consideration. Only those with ***agape*** love will carry the Gospel across town and around the world. Only those with ***agape*** love will “. . . look after the orphans and widows in their distress . . .” (James 1:27).

- **“Joy”**

The history of humanity is the story of a human search after happiness, each man choosing the most promising path to happiness. The right of “the pursuit of happiness” is guaranteed by law as an inalienable right to all those who live in the United States of America. The “blessedness” of the Christian faith promised in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 shades human happiness into darkness. Jesus began the monumental sermon in Matthew 5 promising blessedness and illustrating the pathway to experiencing it. He stated that one of the reasons He came to the earth was to provide exuberant life: “*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10–11, NKJV). He stated that He had taught the Apostles so that His joy might remain in them and be complete (cf. John 15:9–11). “*Joy*” is a frequently reoccurring theme in the New Testament writings, especially in the letter to the Philippians. The early Christians greeted one another with the word “*joy*” (cf. Matthew 28:9,

Acts 15:23, James 1:1) as the Jews greeted each other with the word “*peace*” (cf. Jeremiah 6:14; Ezekiel 13:10; Luke 10:5; John 20:26). Against that emphatic background there is a reason to ask if the “*fruit of the Spirit*” of “*joy*” is a failing crop during our times?

“*Joy*,” numbered among the fruits of the Spirit, goes deeper yet to touch the deepest need and ecstasy of the human spirit. It goes beyond pleasure, which is a temporary respite, a soothing feeling. It even goes beyond happiness. It is happiness overflowing. Biblical “*joy*” is intrinsic to the nature of God. It proceeds from intimacy with the Holy Spirit of God. One begins encountering such “*joy*” in the deepening of his relationship with God who, by the Holy Spirit, ripens, matures, and harvests the fruit of “*joy*. ”

Defining What Spirit Endowed “*Joy*” Is Not

- ▶ Spirit endowed “*joy*” is not related to circumstance. It does not increase with possessions, promotions for hard or exemplary work or accomplishment, improvement of health, an increased circle of friends, or leaving behind difficult relations or heavy responsibilities. These sources of human happiness can be lost in a moment. Then what? People in the poorest situations, racked with pain and loss, seeing nothing but bleak results ahead, or being abandoned and rejected by the last of friends and loved ones, can drink deeply of the Spirit’s gift of “*joy*. ” “*Joy*” rises above the happiness that the world seeks relentlessly. Happiness is what results from “happenings.” “Happiness” happens when circumstances are favorable. Men think that by changing their surroundings, changing their clothing, changing their relationships, changing their positions or possessions they will be happy. There is almost a cult of “positive thinking” that promises happiness. The fact is that for most people the coming and going of happiness does largely depend on changing externals and how one reacts to them. Thus human happiness achieved through human effort can never be permanent or complete. Life just does not always turn out well nor do good times last very long. The urging of Paul to “*Rejoice . . . I will say it again: Rejoice!*” (Philippians 4:4) was not derived from

the circumstances of life. He wrote those words in a harsh, Roman prison in chains for preaching the Gospel.

- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” does not need to be deferred until better times. It can be a reality when those around us would count us the last candidate for joyfulness.
- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” is not the product of a humanistic effort to change our attitude to bring about different outlooks even though the Bible attests the value of laughter to good health (cf. Proverbs 17:22).
- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” is not a work of the flesh or even many works of faith. It is not even the gaining of much biblical knowledge and ministry skills. And it certainly does not happen just because our congregation has grown in members, contribution, size of building, or programs. These, too, can change in a short time. Then what?

Defining Spirit Endowed “Joy”

- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” begins when a person hears, is convinced, and then determines to claim the Lordship of Christ in his life, no longer trusting in his efforts to secure salvation. He welcomes the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit into his life (cf. Acts 2:38, 4:32). “Joy” is a gift resulting from yielding oneself to the sovereignty of God and staying in His love.
- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” is purposefully abiding in the love of Jesus, being secure and obedient in the Father’s will. (cf. John 15:9–11; Romans 14:17–18). As the believer continues to obey the Father’s commands, he remains in the Father’s love. In the Father’s love and yielding to the Spirit of God, “joy” is developed and becomes complete (cf. John 15:9–11).
- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” develops when the yielded believer steadfastly believes that he does not find his “joy” from external benefits but from serving Christ and pleasing God in the fellowship with the saints. He knows that “joy,” among other values, is a gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Romans 4:17–18).
- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” comes through bowing to the reign of God in one’s total person, opening every conclave of one’s being to the rule of God. The yielded believer continues to:

. . . live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God . . . joyfully giving thanks to the Father (Colossians 1:10–12).

- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” is the work of the Spirit generating inner contentment and security in the grace of God that cannot be effaced by any external circumstance.
- ▶ Spirit endowed “joy” is based on reasons that are unaffected by changing circumstances. Regardless of what happens on earth, God is still in the heavens on His throne. Christ is alive! He is still King of kings and Lord of lords. A great homecoming is still being prepared for the faithful.

Claiming the “Joy” of Christ

Jesus promised He would leave His “joy” with His followers. As “. . . a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering . . .” (Isaiah 53:3), what was the source of His “joy”?

- ▶ Jesus found “joy” because He could do something for humanity that no one else could do. Without His sacrifice humanity was self-doomed.
- ▶ Jesus found “joy” in knowing the blessings that His sacrifice would offer. He gave His life *for* the sheep, redeeming their souls. He gave His life *to* the sheep, giving them regeneration from sin (cf. John 10:11, 15, 17, 28).
- ▶ Jesus found “joy” in doing the will of God. This was the reason He came to earth. Whatever doing God’s will involved, His love for the Father motivated Him to do it with “joy.”
- ▶ Jesus found “joy” in fulfilling the long, prophesied promises of the Father. The Cross loomed before Him as the final battle for the souls of men, as a precursor of the victorious resurrection and the glorious coronation at the right hand of God. It was the “joy” of the culmination of much of heaven’s planning and preparations. Jesus:

*... who for the **joy** set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).*

- ▶ Jesus found "**joy**" in sharing the anticipation of its fruits with His disciples. Entering into the sweet will of the Father and seeing Him at work in His Kingdom of righteousness, enjoying the multiple blessings in the fellowship with the saints, and looking over on yonder shore promised endless "**joy**" to His disciples. The thought of giving His "**joy**" of anticipation to His disciples was something to pray about "... so that they may have the full measure of **my joy** within them" (John 17:13).

The "**joy**" we are studying speaks of what the Holy Spirit will do in the heart of the yielded believer. It is intended to be a never ending experience for the believer (cf. 2 Thessalonians 5:16). Reading the epistle to the Philippians one soon discovers the reoccurring theme of the book (cf. Philippians 1:18, 2:17–18, 3:1) with the grand finale in Philippians 4:4, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" And why shouldn't one rejoice when he knows his sins are forgiven and he has a secure relation with God through Jesus that he can share with others, helping them to heal broken relationships with God and others? Why not rejoice when he can bear burdens for the cause of Christ and die with and for his Savior?

- **"Peace"**

Many who call Jesus the "*Prince of Peace*" neither know the nature of the "**peace**" He gives or the pathway to His "**peace**." He did not come to put an end to all hostilities on the earth or bring all nations to the table of peace. Earthly battles cannot be waged in His name anymore than His banner can be lifted high in demanding the end of a war. His "**peace**" is not devoted to promoting one plan or another to achieve favorable circumstances (cf. Romans 14:17). Its aim is not to resolve the historic conflicts between the nations. He spoke of "... wars and rumors of wars ..." (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7) being the fabric of history, that He "... did not

come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34), and that He would be the source of conflict in families (cf. Matthew 10:35).

The "*peace*" Jesus promised was an inner "*peace*" for individuals in the midst of turmoil when the circumstances surrounding one are chaotic and threatening. The inner "*peace*" to which He referred was especially evident during His last week on earth. Everything and everyone were in confusion and turmoil, and evil at its worst was claiming its victories. He was grieved, torn, and humanly devastated with every nerve screaming out in protest to the evils of human greed and the horrors of the cruelty of crucifixion. Yet He found a "*peace*" that triumphed over everything. The "*peace*" He felt within was the same "*peace*" that He promised to give to his disciples:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

How Do We Describe the Spirit Given "*Peace*"?

The focus of Spirit-given "*peace*" is becoming of the same nature as God. There can be no "*peace*" with God while living according to the nature of evil and the works of the flesh mentioned earlier in Galatians 5. The promise of the angel at the birth of Jesus was that there would be "*on earth peace to men on whom God's favor rests*" (Luke 2:14). Those who have been justified through faith ". . . have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). While conflict with evil may rage on the outside, a right relationship with God produces "*peace*" in the inner man. The fact that not every preacher thrives in a peaceful relationship with God is no stranger than the fact that many of the slaves redeemed out of Egypt did not enter the promised land but fell in the desert because of they did not yield to the will of God (cf. Hebrews 3:19, 4:6). Without a radical renouncing of the acts of the fleshly nature and an equally radical yielding to the Spirit, the nature of "*peace*" will not flourish.

The major access, while sharing in the nature of God, is learning to communicate with God, even among the anxieties

and troubles that are common to all. By the Spirit, Paul relays a promise that “*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7). Paul describes the following pathways to “*peace*”:

- A saint needs to be alive to his world of needs, to the needs and hurts of people around him, to the opportunities to do good, and to the dangers and battles he is facing. How else could he have anything to communicate?
- A saint is to make his requests known to God, believing that He can make a difference. The approach to God should confess a need for God’s intervention.
- The act of praying begins with adoration and praise, adoring God for His essential nature and praising Him for His marvelous works. Any request absent of the recognition of who God is and what He does is self-centered and faithless.
- In the context of extolling God, it is appropriate to petition, or even beg, God to exert His mighty power in impacting the desire of the heart.
- ▶ The closure of the prayer comes with thanksgiving for all that God has done and will do about the matters presented to Him.

In effect, the Spirit-dwelt believer, knowing and loving living in and according to the nature of God, approaches God to exalt Him and thank Him, confident that a presentation of his needs will be heard and addressed by the Omni-God of the ages. That is the basis of rising to face every situation with an inner “*peace*” that man cannot understand. The believer feels guarded as surely as if he was in a garrison with high, impenetrable walls.

- ▶ The “*peace*” of the Spirit is intentional and persistent. From Psalm 34:14 we are admonished “*... seek peace and pursue it.*” In 1 Peter 3:8–9, Peter repeats that admonition and goes on to instruct us how to be intentional and persistent in seeking and pursuing “*peace*” with others:

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:8–9, cf. Matthew 5:9).

The prophecy of Isaiah 2 foresees a coming society where “*peace*” would prevail. Whenever brethren treat brethren according to the nature of God and yield to the presence of the Spirit, “*peace*” does prevail. When we are not intentional and persistent in our pursuit of “*peace*,” we divide into warring camps, divide over issues of lesser importance than the principle of unity, we insult one another with little compassion to others and with a poverty of humility in our hearts.

Scripture References: Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 12:14; Romans 12:18; 2 Corinthians 13:11.

- **“*Patience*”**

The more dramatic views of God picture Him creating worlds, destroying the two cities of the plains, sending plagues to Egypt, opening up the sea to deliver the Israelites, raising the dead and healing the sick, all of these things in short order and miraculously. The more common view of God is that He takes long days, years, centuries, and millenniums to bring about His desired results. Too often we want more of the first view of God, especially in becoming mature right away, getting something we desire or getting over a defeat. It is the second view that God invites us to build into our lives, being patient, waiting on Him to work according to His own time and way (cf. Isaiah 30:18). Being awed by the display of His power has its place in building faith, but “*patience*,” the control of exploding emotions, builds virtue, strength, and gains time to develop wise perspectives and to drink deeply of God’s grace (cf. Titus 2:11–14). Besides, “*patience*” saves us all from a world of misdirection, lost opportunities, embarrassment, and ruin (cf. Proverbs 14:29).

The reality is that not all problems have immediate solutions and not all desires have immediate gratification. “*Patience*” (gk. *makrothymia*) is holding in check the strong desire for immediate results. It knows how to wait for God to bring about a solution. It is a willingness to suffer or lack something, believing there is something more important than self. It is the capacity to look beyond the antics of difficult people to what they might become in Christ. It is the purposeful self-control that helps a person to suspend judgment and penalty to ask what need is being satisfied or what drives a person to act wrongly. “*Patience*,” as produced by the Spirit, impacts every segment of a preacher person and work.

What Would Happen in a Preacher’s Life and Ministry If “*Patience*” Was a Growing Virtue?

- ▶ After studying long and hard and preaching his heart out and some brethren either did not understand or did not care, the patient preacher would keep his frustrations and resentment in check and continue teaching with a sweet and tolerant spirit (cf. 2 Timothy 2:24–26).
- ▶ After seeing no response to urging his elders to dig down deep and find the courage to confront open sin in the lives of some members, the patient preacher would continue his life of prayer on their behalf and continue being faithful to his calling to do the work of an evangelist (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2–5).
- ▶ After struggling and failing in his own attempts to be a man of prayer, of Bible study, of soul seeking, and self-discipline in his virtues, the patient preacher would seek a trusted, mature brother to whom he could confess and by whom he could be held accountable (cf. James 5:16).
- ▶ After being wrongly accused, disloyally supported, or shown no recognition or gratitude, the patient preacher would remember he should expect no better than what was given to his Lord and ask the Father for their forgiveness (cf. Matthew 10:24–24).
- ▶ After knowing how much God had forgiven him, the patient preacher would be “*patient*” (longsuffering) with those who owed him much less and had not or could not pay (cf. Matthew 18:23–35).

- ▶ After an especially stressful day in ministry, returning home only to find everything out of place and disjointed, the patient preacher would keep his irritation in check. He would savor passages he had learned just for such occasions (cf. Psalm 86:15; Numbers 14:18).
- ▶ After any confrontation, the patient preacher would remember the virtues of God that have brought us all to repentance: . . . *kindness, tolerance and patience* (Romans 2:4).

It just might be true that the preacher calls upon the fruits of “*patience*” more often than any other virtue, at least in the difficult times of his ministry.

- **“*Kindness*”**

“*Kindness*” comes in many forms, expressing itself in many ways. It is universally recognized and appreciated. Kindness is shown by people in all walks of life, all traveling a different journey. Yet “*kindness*” must be an essential characteristic of the people of God, quick to be expressed and continued as long as it serves the pressing need. The preacher, as a Christian, must be kind. But as a leader, he must learn to model the sweetness of “*kindness*” in every relationship, in every situation, and before both the church and the world. The best of sermons soon lose their convicting and inspiring force when followed by any unkindness from the preacher.

How Does a Preacher Yield to the Spirit in Developing “*Kindness*”?

- ▶ Being alert to observe others to understand their need and going beyond relationships and shared values to help another.
- ▶ Putting oneself in the same position of need and defining what he would desire from others (cf. Matthew 7:12).
- ▶ Determining what personal resources are available and/or how others could be enlisted in helping to meet the needs of others.
- ▶ Being freely willing to face risks in committing to helping another in need, according to his need.

- ▶ Being ready to continue helping as long as possible and as long as the need continues.
- ▶ Not expecting any show of gratitude as a condition for continuing to help meet a person's need.

Each and all of these suggestions are vividly displayed in the story told by Jesus of the Good Samaritan (cf. Luke 10:25–37). In the context of the parable, being kind means being a “*neighbor*” to another in meeting needs. It is obvious that Jesus expanded the meaning of “*neighbor*” beyond proximity, beyond race, beyond religion, beyond profession, defining it as a person in need. The Spirit can mold such a yielded preacher to becoming a Christ like practitioner of “*kindness*.” His degree of “*kindness*” will be in evidence in his church relations, in his preaching, in his mentoring others, in his counseling, and in the ways he deals with the public. Instead of publically embarrassing others by exposing their ignorance and error, retaliating to inadvertent or unintended insults, or selectively showing “*kindness*” only to those who are kind in return, a mature preacher distributes his “*kindness*” whether it is wanted, appreciated, or even returned. He models his “*kindness*” after the perfect model of the Father in distributing his love indiscriminately upon all those in need (cf. Matthew 5:46–48). The sinful nature demands a grateful response, even notices for its acts of “*kindness*.” The mature preacher will not be pleased until “*kindness*” to others becomes a hallmark of his ministry, equal to his being a wordsmith as a speaker, equal to his scholarship in Scripture, or equal to his passion for lost souls.

The Centrality of “*Kindness*”

A preacher is impacted by the centrality of “*kindness*” when he understands that “*kindness*” is what compassion feels. “*Kindness*” flows out of loving compassion of others, feeling their pain, and having the humility of a servant to bear another’s burdens. It is associated in Scripture with the best of divine virtues: with the riches of God’s grace (cf. Ephesians 2:6–7), God’s love and mercy (cf. Titus 3:4–5), and the sternness of God (cf. Romans 11:22). The preacher, like all Spirit filled believers, is to be clothed with “*kindness*,” a “*kindness*” that makes forgiving natural, taking an insult less painful, and demanding recognition for

accomplishments a thing of his fleshly past (cf. Colossians 3:12; Ephesians 4:32).

- ***“Goodness”***

“Goodness” comes in many qualities and is seen in many degrees. It is subject to varying descriptions and seen from many perspectives. In other words, it is a relative term and used to denote a wide variety of actions. “Goodness,” for the Christian, is constant in its contrast to anything that is evil, anything that dishonors God, and anything that does not serve Kingdom purposes. “Goodness,” as a Spirit promoted fruit, always has God as its object, the progress of His Kingdom as its purpose, and service to others as its “joy.”

A Description of a Preacher Known Best for his “Goodness”

- ▶ He sees the needs of people in the church and gives generously of his resources.
- ▶ He has great insights into the potential of people and, as often as necessary, stands at their sides using his influence in opening incredible doors for service to them.
- ▶ He has such an unquestioned character that his recommendations are heeded by the church.
- ▶ He is recognized as such a strong and dependable person in building churches that he is entrusted with difficult, Kingdom assignments.
- ▶ He is genuinely evangelistic and a catalyst for Church growth.
- ▶ He works well with other people, even handling conflict in a positive, productive manner.
- ▶ He is global in his vision of the Church and is ready to be sent abroad to preach.

The preceding could be a description of Barnabas from the pen of Luke in the Book of Acts. Does “goodness” include these seven qualities? It did in the case of Barnabas. There was nothing evil, dishonoring of God or contrary to Kingdom purposes in what Barnabas did. Nothing but pure “joy” came as a result of him being a good man. These

activities were results of him being “. . . full of the Holy Spirit and faith . . .” (Acts 11:24).

Timely Observations

Men with ordinary, preaching ability, who are respected for their “goodness,” yield continuing fruit more than the golden tongue preacher without “goodness.” Something truthfully said but lacking the driving purpose of honoring God or compassion for people is soon forgotten, usually missing its mark. A passion to be right in life or doctrine that lacks “goodness” brings little, lasting “joy” either to the preacher or to the listeners. Hence, the first things to check before preparing for a sermon are not somebody’s book of sermons, commentaries, dictionaries, or favorite periodicals but one’s “goodness” of soul, heart, purpose, and attitude. The Holy Spirit of God wants “goodness” to be abundant in His harvest among those who would preach.

- **“Faithfulness”**

The Holy Spirit works to promote the thirst of “*faithfulness*” in each of us. It is the “*joy*” of dependability, being reliable, being trustworthy, being believable because of our determined commitments. Through John, God told the church in Pergamum to “*Be faithful even to the point of death . . .*” (Revelation 2:10). That may be the ultimate meaning of “*faithfulness*.” Being consistent with our promises in all aspects of life shows the fullness of “*faithfulness*.” Being faithful before the eyes of others must be a constant companion to being faithful when no one can see. Being faithful in church matters is not the full measure of being faithful. A preacher’s “*faithfulness*” goes beyond matters of doctrine. “*Faithfulness*” also involves how he uses his unwatched time during the week or how he treats his brethren. “*Faithfulness*” also includes how he behaves at home, in his marriage, before his children, before the computer monitor behind closed doors, and in paying his bills. Is he faithful, that is, is he reliable, dependable, even predictably true to his promises in every aspect in his life and ministry and in every relationship? It must be said of a preacher’s “*faithfulness*” that “What you see is what you

get.” More so, it must be said, “What you don’t see is every bit as reliable and worthy of trust.”

How Does the Holy Spirit Promote “*Faithfulness*” in the Life and Ministry of a Preacher?

- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” guides a preacher in his study of Scriptures to believe implicitly and rely absolutely on the “*faithfulness*” of God in keeping His promises. A core understanding of God is His “*faithfulness*.” One has not begun to understand God or to take on God’s essential nature until His “*faithfulness*” looms large before him (cf. Hebrews 10:23; 1 John 1:9; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 4:19).
- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” keeps a preacher’s eyes focused on Jesus, who faithfully fulfilled all of the Father’s redemptive plan for humanity, even to the extent of the Cross (cf. John 4:34; Hebrews 2:17, 3:2).
- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” keeps a preacher reminded of the hall of faithful men and women named in Hebrews 11 and throughout the Bible who relied on the promises of a faithful God as a firm basis of their own “*faithfulness*.”
- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” continues to renew a preacher’s “*joy*” in seeing the “*faithfulness*” of modern heroes of the faith who, even in the face of beatings, losses, and death, continue to be trustworthy with the treasures of faith they have received to share with the lost and bless the Church.
- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” reminds a preacher of his own promises made before many witnesses: at his baptism, at his marriage, in his sermons, in counseling sessions, and other things (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Timothy 6:11–12).
- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” calls a preacher back again and again to the careful reading and passionate study of Scriptures, the sole, reliable source of his faith and “*faithfulness*” (cf. Romans 10:17; 1 Timothy 4:11–16).
- ▶ “*Faithfulness*” freshens the “*joy*” and honor of being called to the ministry of “*faithfulness*” (cf. 1 Timothy 1:12).

The Plan of Jesus

The “*faithfulness*” of Jesus’ disciples was a central part of His plan. The evangelization of the world depends on our “*faithfulness*” (cf. Mark 16:15–16; Romans 10:13–15). The knowledge of the Holiness of God dims in a dark world with our lack of “*faithfulness*” in preaching and living (cf. Matthew 5:16). A paramount question of Jesus whether faith will be on the earth when He returns will be answered by the degree of the “*faithfulness*” of believers in all ages (cf. Luke 18:8). The preacher’s job is to be an inspiration to others by his own “*faithfulness*” and do his part that Christ’s plan will be accomplished through the “*faithfulness*” of the Church!

- **“Gentleness”**

Every century has cried out for “*gentleness*. ” The best response to harshness, thoughtlessness, selfishness, insensitivity, and unkindness is “*gentleness*” that is clustered with humility, meekness and mercy.

How Does A Preacher Practice “*Gentleness*” With Those In Search for the Truth?

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15–16).

Over the years, Peter had learned to guard his tongue from being so impetuous and offensive. His growing maturity beckons every preacher to temper his speech and attitude with “*gentleness*. ”

How Does a Preacher Treat Those Who Are Broken by the Harshness in Life?

“Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will

not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope" (Matthew 12:18–21; cf. Isaiah 42:1–4).

In "gentleness" a preacher, like his Lord, would proclaim justice but never in a quarreling or loud manner. He would never be harsh with those already beaten down by difficulties. He would make every effort to keep alive what little hope a discouraged person might have.

How Does a Preacher Treat His Brethren?

And Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:24).

Angry quarreling can hardly solve conflicts in the church, but "gentleness," with "patience" and humility, have been the means by which an able teacher is able to accomplish God's purposes.

How Does a Preacher Ever Become Known for His "Gentleness"?

Two men in Bible history were most known for their "gentleness": Moses (cf. Numbers 12:3) and Jesus (cf. Matthew 11:28). The pathway to "gentleness" for Jesus is well described in Philippians 2:5–11.

- ▶ Jesus chose to set aside rightful status and authority to rule in order to serve.
- ▶ Jesus did not insist on a superior reputation to lessen another.
- ▶ Jesus saw Himself as nothing, thus, unable to demand special treatment or recognition.
- ▶ Jesus did not claim any privileges or exceptions for obeying God.

There is no reason to wonder how the Lord of Glory could so gently wash the feet of mere mortals (cf. John

13:12–17). There should be no wonder how a preacher will develop greater humility, gently encouraging young and old, weak and strong, lost and saved.

- “*Self Control*”

The Christian virtue of “*self-control*,” as a virtue, is not a new thought. Ancient philosophers such as Plato, the Stoics, the Essenes, catholic ascetics, modern self-improvement authors, and health and dietary spokesmen have called for the practice of self-control. What sets “*self-control*” apart in the Christian life? Most of the above movements believe that self-control comes out of knowledge, a regiment of rules, secular, group objectives, or goals for personal well being. Christian “*self-control*” begins with a surrender to Jesus as Lord, the claiming of a new will, and the driving desire to take on a new nature with new and different purposes. This “*self-control*” looks outward in service to others and upward in a vigilance to honor God. It is more pervasive, even invasive, than all other forms of self-control. It comes from within to confront a threat. Most secular, self-discipline efforts have their motivations from without and crumble before the more difficult challenges. A Christian “*self-control*” is selfless, Christ-centered, and Spirit-driven. It is better described as Spirit-control.

For all Christians, especially preachers, “*self-control*” controls the content and tone of conversation and of thought. It guards against Satan breaching the moral walls and leaving the soul vulnerable to evil (cf. Proverbs 25:28). Any list of immoral, fleshly behavior is effectively and tenaciously combated by a Spirit-controlled person (cf. Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5). It keeps one from abusing others in any way or neglecting family or neighbors. It strengthens every resolve to wait for an appropriate time, to give time for mature responses, and gives an emphatic denial to what is wrong. It gives determination to obey God without delay. “*Self-control*” gives a leader the ability to lead a church through perilous times. It guides a preacher to be “... *instant in season and out of season . . .*” (2 Timothy 4:2) in the selection of preaching topics, in keeping his finances in order, in ordering his relationships with all, and in the fruitful use of his time. More preachers more frequently lose their

ministry, their marriage, their reputation, and some their souls through giving too little attention to “*self-control*” than they do to faulty doctrine or poverty of ministry skills.

Conclusion

Paul concludes the discussion on the harvest of the Spirit in our lives by reminding us of the three goals that are necessary for a prayerful, renewal of the work of the Spirit in us (cf. Galatians 5:24–26):

- Keeping our death to self as a centerpiece in our lives.
- Being pointedly committed to walking in cadence with the Spirit.
- Being devoted to a humble, servant life.

Revisiting Documents in the New Testament (3)

Becoming an “Elder-like” Man of 1 Timothy 3

First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 provide a portrait of a mature man. In these documents, the Church was given God’s plan for developing mature men, out of which they would choose Elders. From these pages, all men should be inspired to commit themselves to achieving masculine maturity, even as they pattern themselves after Christ. While there is a clear distinction between the work of an Elder and an Evangelist in the Scriptures, every preacher will be blessed setting his heart on becoming an “elder-like” man, whether he should ever be appointed to the work of an elder. The elder qualities will serve him well in everything he does as a preacher. The portrait in Scripture emphasizes the exemplary life of a leader in home relations, moral maturity, church relations, and community relations.

Home Relations Concerning a Wife

The statement “*the husband of but one wife*” in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 has been limited too much to a leader’s legal status. Discussions have focused too narrowly on what he should not be: not a celibate, not a polygamist, not a divorcee, or widower. It would be refreshing and insightful if we placed more emphasis on the quality of the marital relationship. This is especially true because the literal meaning of the phrase is “a one-woman kind of man.” To understand what a “one-woman kind of man” looks like would require a pointed study of other biblical passages throughout the Bible. For example:

Genesis 1–2: In the opening chapters of the Bible the fundamental values of marriage are clearly established.

- Marriage belongs to God, giving Him the sovereign right of legislation (cf. Genesis 1:27).
- Marriage is composed of diverse parties with different needs, outlooks, reactions, and roles (cf. Genesis 1:27).
- Marriage is designed to be a relationship of mutual service wherein both mates reach their potential in serving one another (cf. Genesis 2:18).
- Marriage seeks to achieve unity in the context of interdependence (cf. Genesis 2:24).
- Marriage is a commitment to a lifelong, unbroken relationship (cf. Genesis 2:24).

In this section the “one-woman kind of man” sees God’s emphasis on the person and place of the woman. Her diverse needs are to be identified and fulfilled. Her equal partnership, uniqueness, and value in the marriage are to be honored. She takes precedence over all other human relationships or concerns (cf. Deuteronomy 24:4).

Ephesians 5:21–23: To enjoy an obedient, submissive relationship with the Lord, the husband is to commit himself to love his wife.

- Love without reservation: loving her more than life itself, seeing and following the example of Christ Who gave Himself for the Church.
- Love with an eternal purpose: loving her in view of her eternal sanctification.
- Love unselfishly: loving her with the same awareness of need and with the same care as he responds to his own needs.

Experiencing such masculine affection, the wife is secure in the love of her husband and free to respond with dependency on him, trust or belief in him, recognition of his value, and praise of his accomplishments.

First Peter 3:7: The “one-woman kind of man” heeds Peter’s three point response to his wife:

- Lives with her intelligently: he studies how to be an exemplary husband, understanding that the passing

seasons of femininity call for added and different responses.

- He is considerate of her femininity, learning to speak the feminine language, understanding her different needs and responses, and honoring her God-assigned role.
- He honors her as a spiritual equal, treasuring her partnership in the Gospel, profiting from her spiritual insights and feminine ministry.

A “one-woman kind of man” remembers that God listens to his prayers only as he builds the right relation with his wife.

These three Scripture selections, Genesis 1–2, Ephesians 5:21–33, and 1 Peter 3:7, point the way for a husband to become a “one-woman kind of man” and able to be an exemplary leader in the church (cf. Hosea 2:19–20; Colossians 3:19). We must teach each husband how to be singularly devoted to his wife, committed to building an exemplary relation wherein both are being fulfilled in growing to their maximum, marital maturity. The effectiveness and durability of a marriage has direct impact on a preacher’s ability to serve long and well.

Home Relations Concerning Children

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Timothy 3:4).

An elder must be . . . the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient (Titus 1:6).

The statement, “*He must manage his own family well . . .*” has to do with standing before his family as a model. It is more than functioning efficiently in finances or making good use of time and other resources. The word “*manage*” comes from the same word as “ruler,” or literally, *one who stands before protectively*. In all matters in his life, his children should observe a model behavior that gives them a context of security, purpose, and affirmation. The emphasis of the text is on the impact his conduct has on his children. Orderly children who hold their father in high esteem reflect how a

man has “*managed his household.*” By his life decisions and his active teaching, he protects his children from the threats of this modern age. He guards them from associations that would lead them away from God. Both prospective elders and active preachers have felt the bite of the “*children who believe*” statement. Preachers who have raised heathen children (“*wild and disobedient*”) face serious distractions in their ministries and suffer diminished influence.

The phrase “*children who believe*” almost certainly includes more than outward conformity in church attendance, baptism, and doctrinal alignment. The word could be translated “persuadable, convincible, teachable.” That being the case, Paul would be emphasizing a certain mindset or attitude of children toward listening, being corrected, and learning. Such would lead to being an open minded, fair-minded, reasonable, easily informed, easily entreated person. They would have learned those attitudes from a maturing father who would be expressing the same qualities in his leadership role. As such, Titus 1:6 would be a one sentence commentary on the Book of Proverbs that urges the son to be eager to listen to instruction, to prize knowledge and wisdom above all treasures. The writer repeatedly emphasizes that the disposition to heed instruction saves one from untold moral failure, which is the emphasis of the statements of Paul to Titus.

Moral Maturity

As men develop toward leadership, they must become exemplary in their ethical and relational qualities that will determine the strength of their influence on others. They must have the following qualities taken from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:

. . . *temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money . . . He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap . . . are to be*

men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.
(1 Timothy 3:2–8, NIV).

. . . blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:7–9, NIV).

- “**Temperate**” describes a person who is calm, wise, cautious, vigilant. Such a person is not extreme in anything: work, play, pleasures, relations, and other things.
- “**Self-controlled**” (or “*Sober*”) describes one who is serious, under control.
- “**Respectable**” (or “*of good behavior*”) speaks of one who is organized, orderly. He is predictable. He can be counted on to be punctual, orderly in behavior, and decision making.
- “**Hospitable**” pictures one who enjoys helping the needy, who understands the plight of traveling strangers, who is unselfish in helping resolve the difficulties of others.
- “**Not Given to Drunkenness**” (or “*much wine*”) literally means “not sitting long at his cup,” which extols the virtue of self-control and resisting enslavement. Possibly, the New Testament prohibition of addiction to wine in a wine drinking society could authorize us to speak against addiction in any area of life: money, power, work, play, and so forth.

- “**Not Violent**” (or “*No striker*”) precludes a man being in the leadership who is contentious, quarrelsome, and hurtful in his treatment of others.
- “**Gentle**” applauds one who is fair, reasonable, not unduly rigorous or demanding, being sensitive to the feelings and needs of others.
- “**Not Quarrelsome**” (or “*Not a brawler*”) marks one who, perhaps, is not as hurtful of others as the “*striker*,” but is always finding a provocation to quarrel. He is easily offended, quick to be defensive.
- “**Not a Lover of Money**” (or “*Not covetous*”) literally means not fond of, not having a liking of silver. This phrase commends one who is free from greed and free to work for the good of others, not motivated by desire of the goods of others.

These relational qualities enhance one’s leadership opportunities to gain the respect and co-labor of fellow Christians. Most of the problems in leadership spring from deficiencies in these relational, moral qualities.

Church Relations

Beyond a man’s family relations and personal morality, Paul mentions two qualities that every leader must achieve:

- “**Able to teach**” requires one to have discovered and developed his potential as a teacher. While we have ignored this quality in our search and selection of elders, it is heavily expected for our preachers. If a preacher cannot preach, he will not get a chance to preach or will not preach long or well. The point here is that a preacher must keep growing in the art and science of preaching. His studies, his research tools, his abilities, his scheduling plans, and other things must be kept at a high priority for him to continue as an able instructor of the Word.
- “**Not a recent convert**” (or “*novice*”) literally means “not a recently planted tree,” emphasizing the pressing

need for maturity. A recently planted tree or one that does not mature is not fruitful. It cannot give haven to birds in its tender branches or comforting shade by its leaves. It needs, itself, to be supported to grow straight and tall and stand erect in a storm. Likewise, time is required for men to become giants in the forest of trees. Paul cautions us not to thrust men into prime leadership roles too early. That is, before they have demonstrated the deep root-age and fruitfulness of mature growth. For young preachers we need more Paul-Timothy relationships, greater eldership care and purposeful ministry training. For our maturing preachers we need more accessible and determined growth plans, ministry renewal programs, extensive reading, mutual sharing, and so forth.

A church thrives when its principle leaders are regularly being and becoming more and more mature and capable instructors of the Word. Conversely, a church cannot grow to the pleasure of God, being led by immature and inapt instructors of the Word.

Community Relations

The Church is not a secret or clannish fellowship. It is the “*... salt of the earth ... the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:13). The Church and its message are intended to be seen, heard, and examined in the world and by the world. Therefore, those leaders we put up front are required to be attractive and convincing in their relations in the community. They display before the world what Christ does in the lives of His followers. By looking at the leaders in our congregations, the worldly can find hope for becoming moral, building strong marriages and families, and becoming respected by one’s peers. Nothing is so contradictory and repellent to the world than to see spiritual leaders failing to live what is being regularly taught to others. Any hint of religious hypocrisy closes the door to serious inquiry. How a preacher is regarded in the community will determine how effectively he can penetrate that community with the Gospel.

Beyond his dealings with people in the community in matters of finances, the way a leader responds to stressful situations or lives morally, and his getting involved in the

lives and wholesome activities in the community opens multiple doors. A careful study of the open doors for service in the community is time well spent in making wise decisions that will impact people for Christ.

If a preacher is to aspire to being an “elder-like man,” he must become and mature as a model of family relations, moral relations, leadership maturity, and useful service in the community.

Part Three

Building Relationships in Spiritual Living

Spiritual men thrive on wholesome relations as wholesome relationships provide a context or laboratory for spiritual formation.

Choose to be a Noble and Loving Husband

Loving a Wife as She Was Designed to Be Loved

Not every minister should marry. Marriage is not a prerequisite to effective ministry. Being married could be a distraction, especially if the marriage is full of friction. Paul so states, at least, for the first part of the statement (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:32–33). Yet, being married fulfills some of the deepest longings in the human heart, provides opportunities to grow to greater fullness, and creates a potential partnership in ministry that can be fruitful and a blessing to many. To enjoy such a relationship, a preacher must learn to love his wife as she was designed to be loved. God has created within every woman a spirit of responsiveness. Her first inclination will be to respond in kind. She is at her best and in harmony with her feminine nature when she can respond to a loving, thoughtful, and trustworthy leader. She is constrained to be her best self when she must respond well to an unloving, thoughtless, and careless husband. When she is loved as God designed her to be loved, she blossoms as the most lovely and delicate flower, perfuming the marriage and all around in the lives of the children and of others.

What Does the Feminine Design Require?

All research confirms that a woman requires five activities from her husband to which she can best respond:

- **To Have a Good Listener, Being Attentive**

Women are first attracted to a man who listens often and well. She needs him to understand her feelings, to correctly interpret her feminine language, and to see what she sees in differing colors, shapes, situations, and

people. The more she senses that a man is making genuine and successful efforts to be comfortable in her world, the more she feels loved and fulfilled. This becomes a continuing and increasingly more proficient pursuit of the husband who is committed to loving his wife to honor God. This is not natural to a man. It is a skill he must learn, hopefully begun at home with a mother and sisters or near kin. He learns the value of maintaining direct and warm eye contact as his wife speaks, to ask questions that encourage continued sharing, to withhold anything but instructive criticisms and make them sparingly and when clearly necessary. His comments are enriched responses, full of compliments, encouraging observations, and emphasis on what she regards as her strengths. She becomes an equal listening partner in response to how well the husband listens to her.

- **To Have Affectionate Regard, Being Affectionate**

Male affection fulfills some of the deepest longings of a woman. A worthy husband learns what makes his wife feel most loved. Those expressions of love most commonly cited by women are endearing words, physical touches, not necessarily associated with sex, flowers, meaningful cards or notes, thoughtful gifts and gestures, unsolicited compliments, and taking special time to attend to desires, especially those not verbally expressed. Then, a husband must crown anything he does or thinks out of genuine delight and a simple and singular desire to show how often and how much she is loved. Husbands beware. A woman can sense ulterior motives and surface affection miles away. A husband's deeply felt and sincerely offered affection is poetry of the highest quality to a wife.

- **To Have Affirmations of Value, Being Affirmative**

Femininity flourishes when a woman's sense of personal value is affirmed by a loving husband. If a woman has been affirmed by her father in a healthy father-daughter relationship a fortunate husband can and must build on that strength with his own, well chosen affirmations. If a woman has been diminished and/or abused by her father or a significant male in her early years, she will need

much wise and affirmative expressions from the husband, first to heal and then to grow. Blessed is the woman, in either case, who has chosen wisely in marrying a man who is confident, competent, and intentional in joyfully helping her be all that God has designed her to be. His affirmations are more valuable to her than material considerations.

- **To Have Assurance of Security, Being Assuring**

A wife thrives in a secure environment. Taking risks, especially without purpose, is not a part of her basic nature. For that reason, a wise husband is careful not to plunge his wife into selfishly and carelessly caused debt. He leads his family members around the threats to their well being and is prepared to shield them from hurtful attacks. His business affairs are organized, the future is secured, and problems are kept at a distance through good foresight and planning. Security assurances might include simple things like keeping the car and home in serviceable condition, making provisions before going on a trip and leaving the family alone, and assuring the wife that a carefully planned budget is in place and funded. A woman is not at her best in living from paycheck to paycheck, fearful about not being able to meet the needs of her children and seeing nothing but a dismal, retirement future. A man can robustly face an uncertain future. It is challenging to him. It is accelerating to compete and win! His wife does better fulfilling her role in more secure terms. He needs to learn how to win and keep her confident and secure.

- **To Have an Achieving Partner, Being Active**

A wife can do incredible things. She usually can do them better if she does not have to carry both her responsibilities and those of her husband. She can be a patient person, especially if she is confident in her husband's love. She usually can be more relaxed and productive if she does not have to wonder when or if the husband is ever going to get around to doing what he has promised. If the husband is healthy and known to be able, he needs to be achieving his and the family's goals with predictable regularity. His dependability in keeping promises and even going beyond reasonable

expectations enriches a marriage and builds the wife's trust and dependency in her husband.

The five A's of a harmonious marriage, **being attentive, affectionate, affirmative, assuring and active**, feed the deepest and most persistent needs of a wife. When done well by a knowledgeable and able husband, she feels loved even as God designed her to be.

God Has Spoken and We Listen!

Before men had even begun their research and formed conclusions from their observations, God, the marriage Architect, had spoken:

- **At the Beginning God Revealed His Plan for Marriage (Genesis 1–2)**

God laid the foundation of marriage. Everyone who builds wisely upon the five layered foundation is assured that his marriage is well on its way to be what God envisioned.

- ▶ **Marriage Begins with God (Genesis 1:27–28)**

The home was instituted in the design of creation. It was to be constituted by diverse genders and later assured its greatest order with male leadership. It was seen as a reproductive unit and primary in the order of creation. God was, by reason of design and creation, the uncontested legislator and promised provider. He, then, would have the right to determine the purpose, the longevity, and the result of marriage. With the long practiced authority of Fatherhood, He chose the partners in the first marriage. Man, the creature, would do well to yield to His design in all such matters, even today.

- ▶ **Marriage Is Founded on Diversity (Genesis 1:27)**

The composition of marriage was intentionally diverse in gender. Each gender is an incredible collection of very different traits, potentials, and needs. Part of the diversity is what initially attracts each to the other. If understood and developed, all parts of the diversity further draws the male and female together, bonding them in a fulfilling and productive relationship. They are

different in language about the same subject, the way they think and arrive at a conclusion to the same problem, the way they feel and value the same things and situations, the way they respond to the same stimulus, and what concerns they invest in the same relationships. The choice a couple makes of what to do with the wide range of diversities can lead to division or convergence. The husband, God's appointed leader, must take the leadership role in learning the feminine language, understanding the feminine thought process, initiating a plumbing of the depth of feminine emotions, and determining the values his wife places on relationships. He bridges the diversity, entering into her world so she can safely explore his masculine world. A happy marriage is bi-lingual, multi-faceted, and culturally enhanced. Though the couple started as former strangers, who from birth came from different worlds, in marriage they can use their adversity in discovering comfort and purpose together.

► **Marriage Thrives on Mutuality of Service (Genesis 2:18)**

In the process of creation, an unmet need was noted. Man was alone, in need of someone to complete him, comparable to him in his creative nature. Creation became complete in its design when woman was brought from man and given back to him for divine purposes. Other than sexual fulfillment and reproduction, there are so many ways that a woman, in her creative diversity, completes a man. So many virtues come easier, so many insights emerge, so many values explode in meaning, and so many relationships deepen by the touch of a woman. Marriage becomes even sweeter when a man recognizes the vast differences his wife makes to the relationship and to his own fullness. When he recognizes her value, he treats her differently. Even more so, he treats her differently when he fully sees that there is no one and nothing that compares to her worth. The corollary to his incompleteness without a wife is equally true of her incompleteness without him. They each supply the unmet needs of the other. Knowing of God's design, their lives take on a mutual, servant spirit in searching out and fulfilling the needs of the other.

- ▶ **Marriage Is Driven by a Shared Purpose (Genesis 2:27)**
Companionship, sexual fulfillment, security, and shared accomplishments are fruits of a productive marriage. The one, overarching purpose of marriage, other than honoring God, is that the two very diverse genders, through mutual understanding and service, grow to be one. They grow to be one in endeavors, one in values, one in visionary pursuits, one in triumph or defeat, one in losses or gains, one in joy or suffering, and one in procreation and parenting. Their journey is ongoing as they unselfishly share resources. Their evenings are times of renewal and casting of visions. Whether in summer or in winter their endeavors are mutually shared and pursued. Friendless in a strange and threatening world, their mutual devotion remains the same, even growing to meet the new challenges.
- ▶ **Marriage is Cemented by a Lasting Commitment (Genesis 2:27)**
Marriage was designed to be life-long, indissoluble, strong against everything but death itself. Keeping such a commitment would require guarding against distracting thoughts, keeping desires dedicated to one's mate, making sure that one's needs were intentionally and singularly met in the faithful embrace of the one, chosen mate. The keeping of such a commitment provides security and needed affirmations, gains the time and conditions to make lasting accomplishments and, nearer the end of the journey, gives a world of satisfying memories. Like a lush vine embraces a mighty oak as it bears the storms of life or even if it falls to the forest floor, so is the wife faithful to death. As the mighty oak takes on the tender embrace of the vine and provides strength and acceptance, so is the husband faithful to death. In the end the covenant making God is glorified by covenant keepers at their best.

- **God's Clear Reminder of What a Good Marriage Looks Like (Hosea 2:1-20)**

In speaking of his spousal relationship with Israel, God gave the clearest and most complete description of marriage at its best. He set the standard for every

husband in listing seven qualities that characterized his marital commitments.

Context of Hosea 2:1–20

Israel had gone wayward after God had mightily redeemed them from the land of Egypt. In romantic language, He speaks of how He won Israel back, surrounding her with affection, security, and hope. So much so, that she began to sing of her happiness as though she was young again, not having ever followed after Baal. Having won her heart, God proposed a covenant of intimacy, a relation in which He would be loved as a husband (cf. Hosea 2:14–18). The covenant was a seven point commitment of love:

*“Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the desert and
speak tenderly to her.
There I will give her back her vineyards,
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will sing as in the days of her youth,
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.
In that day,” declares the LORD,
“you will call me ‘my husband’;
you will no longer call me ‘my master.’
I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips;
no longer will their names be invoked.
In that day I will make a covenant for them
with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air
and the creatures that move along the ground.
Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land,
so that all may lie down in safety.”*
(Hosea 2:14–18).

► An Everlasting Covenant.

As in the beginning, God designed marriage to be a life-long commitment. In such a secure relationship there is stability. There is the context where the best of personal qualities have time to develop and the most fruitful, shared endeavors can flourish. In such a safe environment, children can grow to be healthy adults. Both partners have daily incentives to invest deeply in the relationship, knowing it will last throughout their life times.

► A Covenant of Righteousness.

When a man is committed to doing the right thing in every circumstance, the wife can be free to trust. She lives above the fear of loss through the wrong behavior of her husband. Embarrassment and shame never enter her doors because of the foolish mistakes of her man. She feels honored by his leadership and confidently trains her children to follow his example.

► A Covenant of Justice.

In the hard decisions of a leader and in the daily dealings in the family, the husband who follows God promises always to be fair, impartial, and balanced. The wife never has to wonder if her husband is being selfish, devious, or thoughtless. She is assured that his discipline of the children will be fair, always keeping a balance between the expectations that have been communicated and the capacities of each child. She supports him in fair responsibility and clear accountability.

► A Covenant of Compassion.

When the charm of courtship ends, the God-like husband continues and grows in his feelings of kindness toward his wife. His compassion for her is expressed in kind actions. It is more than being courteous, sensitive and thoughtful. It is best described as loving kindness, wanting the sweetest and most needed goodness to happen to his wife. It is devoting himself to giving her his tender love by which "*she will sing as in the days of her youth*" (Hosea 2:15). A woman who feels she is loved will blossom into the fragrant flower for which God designed her. No one can make this possible more than a loving husband.

► A Covenant of Mercy.

Mercy does what kindness feels. When a husband deeply loves his wife, all of the qualities of mercy follow: patience, understanding, tolerance, care, insight, and other things. Mercy overlooks or gives little weight to faults. Mercy leads to quick and effective forgiveness. Mercy never looks back, is never harsh, and is never accusatory. A woman who knows that she lives with a husband who is forgiving, supportive, and understanding is free to be a woman at her best.

► A Covenant of Faithfulness.

A man who has chosen God as his model in marriage both promises and is true to his promise to be faithful throughout the years of his covenant. We first think of faithfulness in terms of sexual integrity. The man keeps his thoughts, his eyes, and his arms devoted to the one woman in his life. He never gives his wife any reason to doubt his marital integrity. Yet, faithfulness, goes beyond the avoidance of illicit, sexual relations. It speaks of making serious promises and keeping them in all areas of the relationship. It includes being faithful in wisely managing finances, in careful parenting, in honest labor, and in building relationships.

► A Covenant of Intimacy.

Depending on the translation for Hosea 2:1–20, the passage speaks of having a close relationship, even sexual intimacy. The marriage bond brings two into deep understanding of each other and a joyful acknowledgment of the intimacy between them. A committed husband is never far, very long, from the covenant lady of his life, physically or emotionally. She is certain of his closeness and longing and sure return at the appointed time. Every preacher will excel in his marriage as he follows the clear model of God in his pledged conduct in marriage.

● Christ Provided the Model for Building a God Honoring Marriage (Ephesians 5:21–33)

The way Christ loved His bride, the Church, points the way for every husband in loving his wife, all the days of her life. Christ knew and fulfilled the needs of His Bride, laying the ground work for our love and loyalty to Him.

► Christ loved the Church submitting Himself to her needs.

Much is correctly made of the duty of the wife to submit to her husband. However, Ephesians 5:21 makes submission to be mutually extended. The husband is to submit himself in serving the needs of his wife. Christ, worthy of worship, came to meet the needs of His bride, the Church. He not only taught servanthood in bowing to wash feet but in willfully becoming the sacrificial

lamb to redeem His people. A husband at his best is a servant to his wife, searching out and fulfilling the needs of his wife.

► **Christ loved the Church unselfishly.**

Even on a human level, the first thoughts of Christ were not for His own comfort, not for His own convenience, and not even first for His own needs. That the Church be saved, that it become holy, and that it become an instrument for global evangelism overshadowed anything that related to Him and His well-being. The wife of an unselfish husband who places her desires and needs above his own will be both fulfilled and motivated to respond in kind.

► **Christ loved the Church more than He loved Himself.**

He struggled in the Garden to frame a statement of the extent to which He would go in loving the Church and all humanity. His labored response left no doubt as He set His path, irreversibly, toward Calvary. He would die for God's people. They were more important to Him than life itself. No woman is looking for a martyr as her husband but she has to conclude, based on the many sacrificial efforts on his part, that her husband values her more than he does his very life.

Calvary will always assure believers of the love of Jesus. The sacrificial, loving actions of a husband over the continuing years of marriage assures his wife of the extent he would go in loving her, making sure that the best always happens to her and those she loves.

The absolute and minimum needs of a woman are to have the masculine affection and assuring security of the love and faithfulness of her husband. Jesus provided both of those needs to His Bride. The faithful husband sees his mission as knowing and serving the needs of his wife, doing it thinking of her needs first and loving her more than himself, even throughout his days and to the point of death. Spiritual living, as it develops in the life of a preacher, places more and more focus on loving his wife as his Lord loved His Bride.

● **Peter Draws a Portrait of a Fulfilling Marriage (1 Peter 3:7)**

After speaking six verses to women of the importance of her submitting spirit in fulfilling the needs of her

husband, Peter loads up one verse with some of the most demanding requirements of a husband who really wants to be all that God envisions for him:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers (1 Peter 3:7).

► **Peter pictures a knowledgeable man.**

He instructs husbands to “*live with their wives according to knowledge.*” Men are to dedicate themselves to learning how to be husbands. Much of this should come early from good models in their family and church circles. However, learning is to be intentional in its pursuit, resourceful in its purpose, and practical in its application. He learns that a woman passes through seasons of femininity, with each period of her life being needful of different knowledge and skill-sets.

► **Peter pictures an insightful man.**

Peter instructs husbands to “*consider her femininity.*” Her needs are different than his, her insights are other than his, and her responses vary from his. She is more delicate (“*weaker partner*”), more sensitive, and more relational. He begins to understand how listening, feeling, responding more softly, even learning to speak “femininese,” will stir the emotions and well-being of his wife.

► **Peter pictures an understanding man.**

Peter instructs husbands to realize the spiritual equality of a wife. Leadership does not make the man superior, just more responsible. The woman has equal access to the Father. She has spiritual insights, often different but just as profound. She has ministry gifts just as rich and varied. She has as valid a claim on eternal life as he does. His treatment will be different in relating to a peer as he might in relating to an underling. Peers become partners, treating each other with mutual respect and applaud.

► **Peter pictures a man of effective prayer.**

Peter shows how precariously ineffective prayers become when lifted by men who are careless in their relations with their wives. Building a marriage on ignorance, giving little thought to the rich diversity of his wife, and treating her with detachment and of lesser value will annul a husband's communication with God. Perhaps, the Church is not growing and the Gospel is not circling the globe because God is no longer listening to the prayers of preacher husbands!

Conclusion

Marriage is an awesome decision and opportunity! In every age, the Patriarchal age, the age of the prophets, in the ministry of Christ, and in apostolic teachings, God has spoken about marriage. Through the marriage relation, incredible good can be accomplished. Satan tries to turn the marriage of every preacher into a spectacle of shame, into a heart breaking experience, robbing the Gospel of power and purpose before a critical world. Marriage and spiritual formation are inseparable. Marriage is the context for the other. Spiritual formation is an agent of change and growth in the other.

Choose to Honor God With an Affair Free Marriage

No age has ever been a safe zone for marriage. Despite the marital ideal that God declared at the beginning, the Mosaic protections that were anchored in the mountain top law or the voices of prophets and apostles, and the model of Jesus himself, men have struggled in offering to God a marriage full of integrity and faithfulness to promises. The age through which we are journeying is full of pitfalls, distractions, and deceptions. Even getting too busy in Kingdom serving has resulted in neglecting the precious relationships in marriage.

How can a fruitful preacher end his days in the arms of the wife of his youth? How can he show those who follow his same path how to continue being a “one woman kind of man?” Should he fall, how can he rise again and succeed wherein he once failed?

Choosing an Affair Free Marriage

Spiritual living and extramarital affairs are mutually exclusive. They must be regarded as completely incompatible. Any step in the direction of marital infidelity is contradictory to everything for which a minister stands. This is easily said, but failing to keep one’s marriage free of sexual entanglements may prove to be among the top three ministry killers.

● Why Do Ministers Cheat?

Why do ministers break marital promises to the ones who are so dear? Why do they disappoint those in the faith family who have trusted them? Why do they risk years devoted in training and in ministry for a few hours of risky pleasures? Why do they tear down what they have worked hard in building? Why do they drag

another person into sin, defeat, and ruin? Why are they so thoughtless as to what a doubtful world will think of the Church and its ministers? Where is a consideration of God in all of this senseless folly? It all comes down to some critical choices.

At the base of all such faulty decisions is a heart of greed, selfishness, thoughtlessness for others, and an unsubmitted will. The picture of a minister who breaks marital promises is an ugly one. Hypocrisy is only the beginning definition of his moral collapse. To different degrees there is a denial of knowledge, ingratitude for heavenly blessings, devaluing of spiritual triumphs, and a contempt for truth and right. Why then do otherwise good men do such despicable things?

There is no defense. There is no justification. However, there is some understanding. To some extent, all men have to face personal struggles in human sexuality. Ministers are more open to attack by the very nature of the ministry choice. Men overly burdened in serving or stressed in conflict can become emotionally deficit and in need of affirmation. An affair, as illicit as it is, can seem to supply a need. Ministers who have failed to mature a marital relation in which their full, masculine needs are met or have made some immature marital choices could become vulnerable to an extramarital relationship that promises to fill the void. Most ministers are servants at heart and reaching out to a woman in pain, without exercising boundaries, can easily end in a hurtful involvement. Men, by creation, long to please specific women in their lives and hunger for their acceptance. The failure to know oneself and read the signs of exceeding the boundaries of healthy relations can hardly stop short of shameful behavior.

- **The First Lines of Defense**

- ▶ **Older Ministers Must Serve as Mentors.**

Whether an older minister has been fully moral or less, he must help younger men to deal with their youthful passions to find purpose and strength in rising above our common humanity. Paul gave that exact consideration to Timothy and Titus (cf. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus). He knew the human struggle in fighting against the

unnamed tests and temptations in 1 Corinthians 9:27. He urged that his response of self-discipline be practiced by all.

► **Elders must shepherd the moral lives of ministers.**

The ample provision of financial means, the clear definition of ministry responsibilities and accountabilities, and frequent and purposeful prayer time with and about a minister's morals are basic considerations of congregational shepherds. Attentive elders can stop developments before they have time to destroy a preacher and his family, and with it, a congregation. This ministry care is intrinsic in their leadership charge (cf. Acts 20:28–32). Upon entering a new work, every minister needs to verbally submit himself to the Shepherds, inviting their scrutiny of his life, his marriage, his relations, and other things in his life as a part of their fervent prayers.

► **Ministers must place holiness as a high priority in a committed life.**

Thinking, feeling, and doing exactly like Jesus must be a daily commitment. Everything a minister studies should be exhausted to define what he ought to believe, to understand what he ought to desire, and to know what he ought to do. As he matures he must clearly see how holiness applies to every facet of his life and is lived out in every relationship. He must eagerly learn how to delight in righteousness in holy living. There is no more certain test of his growing holiness than how he keeps himself pure in thought, alert in relationships, and exemplary in daily living. Regarding every woman only as mothers and sisters, in absolute purity, is the advice of Scripture (cf. 1 Timothy 5:2).

► **Ministers must place a fulfilling and a fulfilled marriage as a high priority in being a minister.**

Counting baptisms, filling pews, increasing the budget, getting known in the brotherhood, being paid comfortable salaries, writing books, championing causes, or building a resume filled with big churches all dim in importance to being a loving and faithful husband and singularly devoted to the wife of his youth. All of the above initiatives take time. None should preclude or diminish the work of building a marriage

relationship in which the wife feels secure in the love and unquestioned faithfulness of her preacher husband.

- ▶ **Congregations must place a healthy marriage high on the list of expectations in considering and sustaining future preachers.**

Not only would such care and scrutiny serve notice to preachers of the necessity of building a strong marriage but the constant vigil in sustaining it in the congregation. No preacher should be given the confidence of a church if he has a disease that would be hurtful to the spiritual family. That includes doctrinal disease, moral disease, or marital disruptions. Too many churches know little more about an incoming preacher than how entertaining or how skillful he was in his try-out sermon.

- ▶ **Our Brotherhood must place ministry renewal high on our list of urgent needs.**

Ministers are men. All will struggle and some will fall. Who is there to give counsel and understanding? Who picks up a fallen minister? Who will help him to become believable again and wiser from his failures? Should one lost battle end a fallen minister's war against sin? Should we waste both his ministry gifts and endanger his soul by leaving him defeated and abandoned on the battle ground? Worse, should we shoot our wounded? Having safe places where skilled counseling can be appropriately found and ministers and missionaries can be renewed from the rigors of battle is one of the most urgent and necessary initiatives facing the modern Church.

- ▶ **A minister must envision the day he can look back over a long career in an affair free marriage.**

With a goal of a life-long faithfulness in marriage set early in one's life and ministry, a preacher would work daily to be true to his marital promises. Numbered among the joys of an elderly minister who has served well and fruitfully should be the joy of having nurtured and loved his wife as God designed her to be loved.

- **Consider Some Ways a Minister Can Keep Himself Pure and Free From Sexual Entanglement.**

► **Construct a collage and keep it available in his wallet.**

On that collage there would be a picture or symbol of the following ones who would be hurt by a marital affair: parents, wife, her family, children and grandchildren, colleagues, churches and brethren served, converts, those yet to be taught if one remains faithful, the woman and her family who would be crushed, an unbelieving world, a reveling Devil, and the Lord of Glory. Somehow, a man who goes into an extramarital affair has to forget all of the relations in his life to selfishly indulge in hurtful behavior. Reviewing his “collage card” frequently and praying for God’s protection will give immeasurable strength to a minister. Renewing his pledge to holiness and marital faithfulness will help guard him when the Evil One tries to find a crack in his defense.

► **Keep a tight, inner circle of confidants (fellow ministers, loyal friends, trusted elders) to whom to be accountable.**

We regularly keep check on our good health and go to professionals when perceived health problems emerge. More care than ever needs to be given to our spiritual health. We need to renew our faith, keep our doctrine pure, and keep our thoughts and morals wholly in the light. Having select persons to whom one can be accountable, if one is honest and courageous to share openly, is a strong shield against infidelity. That fellowship of caring brethren could include pledging to covenant together in one of the Internet programs that flags a person that enters a pornography site.

► **Use discretion and self-discipline in using Internet programs.**

In every age Satan finds a way to allure God’s men to sin. In this age the most insidious is pornography on the Internet. No man can regularly watch pornography without preparing himself for inappropriate and sinful behavior. Teasers are found on most Internet servers: swimming suit pictures, sports’ cheerleaders, and Hollywood celebrities. Finding hardcore pornography is just a click away. Paul described his effort to avoid sin as “*I buffet [discipline] my body*” (cf. 1 Corinthians

9:27). Similar efforts can keep a preacher out of the lethal rapids of pornography.

► **A complete “outing” of self before God.**

The wise, affair free preacher will have spent choice time with the Father with the following appeals:

“Help me guard my thoughts and motives”
 (cf. Psalms 139:23–4).

“Help me choose my friends”
 (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33).

“Help me keep a close rein on my actions”
 (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:27).

“Help me to love only the wife of my youth, all of my years” (cf. Proverbs 5:18).

“Help me to regard, with all purity, the dear women in the faith only as sisters and mothers” (cf. 1 Timothy 5:2).

► **Invest deeply and continually in one’s marriage.**

The best way to avoid looking to wrong people, in wrong places to fulfill one’s needs is to continue investing in promises already made. A preacher must lovingly encourage a wife to stay healthy, vibrant and attractive, providing the budget and the sensitive incentives to keep her motivated. Affirming her at the center of his affection and keeping her needs as the highest priorities of his life (cf. Ephesians 5:21f) keeps the marriage both enjoyable and fulfilling for both partners. A rose blossoms and fills the air with fragrance when given the right attention. A preacher’s wife will do no less when her attentive husband treats her as God designed her to be treated (cf. 1 Peter 3: 7).

The Final Discussion Points

● **Being Holy Because God Is Holy Is the Bottom Line of an Affair Free Marriage.**

God has not asked much of us, especially when considered with the abundance of His grace. However, what He has asked is fundamentally essential and not subject to negotiation. Along with “believe...repent...confess...and be baptized,” there is the “...be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16). Holiness has always

been at the heart of the covenant with God (cf. Leviticus 11:44–45, 19:2, 20:7). Nothing has brought more pain to the great heart of God than for His people to live beneath Kingdom privileges and moral commitments. When a preacher mingles impurity of thought, suggestive comments, improper advances, culminating in sexual encounters and an attempted cover-up, he has set himself on a pathway of sin that saddens the heart of God. It is King David all over again. The only solution is for another Nathan to call out, “*You are the man*” (2 Samuel 12:7) and for the accused preacher to be broken in heart for having broken the heart of a loving Father.

- **Pulling Out All Stops to Keep a Marriage Free of Affairs and Healthy Is Reflective of the Spiritual Relation With Christ.**

A preacher’s best sermon on the Church being the beautiful and radiant Bride of Christ must be his own marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:21f). His best counsel to young lovers is the way he loves his own wife and is faithfully protective of his marriage. His strongest affirmation about recognizing and rejoicing in the value of his saved relation with Christ is how fully he values his covenant with his wife. All the opposites are true if affairs encroach on God’s land. More specifically, affairs and all roads leading to an affair begin bordering on disdain for the Church, disregard for one’s relationship with Christ, contempt for a marital covenant made in good faith, and callousness to all those who will be hurt by such an act of personal greed and lust. With the charming mask of a marital affair ripped off there is nothing pretty, nothing but ugliness, betrayal, and hurt.

- **Covenant Keeping Has Been Given Its God Honoring Place in Marital Faithfulness.**

God is a promise making and a promise keeping God. We are sons of the Father and share His central concerns. Like priests in the days of Malachi (cf. Malachi 2:7), as preachers, we are specially engaged as custodians of covenants. Our assignment is to call all men to the covenant house of God and to keep the covenants fresh and assessable, calling the forgetful to remember the promises they have made with God (cf. 2

Peter 1:12–15). The honoring of his marriage vows is the preacher building a monument of praise to the Covenant God. The priest of Malachi's day were severely condemned for despising the name of God as seen in the sickly sacrifices they laid on the altar (cf. Malachi 1:7–8). Everything a preacher does should be his laying it as a gift on the altar. How would God regard a marital affair laid on His altar of praise? Malachi all over again!

Conclusion

By a preacher's faithfulness in his marriage he reaffirms his love for the Church and his valued relationship with his Savior. He recommits himself daily to the covenant with his wife and renews it frequently before the covenant keeping God. He sings again and again the song of holiness and confirms his deep longing to be like his God in His holiness. He guards every association, every relationship in the faith, and every thought that they will only keep him true to his promises. He will keep his affection singularly focused on the wife of his youth, help her to be all that God designed her to be, and chooses to find his needs fulfilled only in the one-flesh relationship of his covenanted marriage.

Choose to Make a Father's Imprint

Molding a Vessel of God

In most cases a man was a father before he progressed very far in ministry. Fatherhood was an early priority that did not lessen in a decision to preach. Becoming a successful minister is no justification for being a poor father. Yet, preachers have many demands made on them, plus their own self-expectations, that could become distractions from molding a vessel of God. The failed parenthood of preachers is probably not any greater than other occupied fathers, but the notice given to it is much greater and the consequences can be graver. While the message that his effective parenthood sends is important, the greater concern is that his children are matured into the image of Christ. Preaching and parenting can be compatible and mutually supportive.

Foundational Principles Of Parenting

There are some Biblical basics that will guide the discerning and dedicated preacher-father to begin right and continue well in developing children. Long after a congregation may have forgotten a preacher's sermons, it will remember his effectiveness in parenting.

- **The Original Plan of Parenting (Genesis 1:27–28)**

Effective parenting begins with the recognition that God is the author of the original plan of the family. He authored marriage as a union of diversity, mutuality, unity, and permanency. He designed the sexual relationship as an expression of marital love and procreation. He planned that conception would begin life and child birth would usher an infant into this world. He foresaw the development of children, each of them being a special gift and mission to parents. The preacher

must preach the original plan of God and effect it in his own family development.

- **The Law of Parenting (Deuteronomy 6:1–9)**

The Magna Carta of Parenting is seated in God's historic address in Deuteronomy. God established that the fundamental responsibility of parents is to teach a prescribed curriculum. Children raised with these subjects deeply ingrained in their spiritual values are ready to embrace an adult faith.

- ▶ The first curriculum responsibility of a parent is to teach his children that God is One: the unity of God. Because God is One, children can come to believe that He not only is the only object of their trust, worship, and service but that He is intact, consistent, and unified within Himself. This truth gives the children confidence in the integrity, credibility, and dependability of God. He can always be trusted to be for them yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- ▶ The second curriculum responsibility of a parent is to teach his children of the sovereign authority of God. Because of God's singular authority, He has the sovereign right to tell a child what to do, including obedience to parents. Every child must learn that the world does not revolve around him. Despite what a child may see around him in the permissive society, he must learn that obedience to God, and hence obedience to his parents, is to be expected. Respect for authority, beginning in the home, is the cornerstone of responsible adulthood.
- ▶ The third curriculum responsibility of a parent is to teach his children that God is a covenant making and a covenant keeping God. This truth not only assures a child that God will be faithful to His promises but that He expects the child to be true in his promises. Faithfulness is at the center of the covenant with God.

In this address on parenthood, God even prescribed the methodology. He emphasized instruction by audio-visual means, making it repetitive and life related, with the parents exemplifying each lesson.

- **The Seasons of Parenting (Proverbs 22:6)**

The often quoted and sometimes poorly interpreted passage could be better translated:

Give everything a child needs at every level of his development and the passing of years will not deface the imprints that are made.

This passage basically says that there are optimum seasons of parenthood when some subjects can best be taught. The danger facing all parents is failing to teach what is needed at a particular time and trying to teach it when the best time has passed. Child development experts have fairly well defined that attitudes about self, others, things, and God are best taught in ages zero to five. Values such as ethics, work habits, and dependability are best taught in ages six to ten. Modeling, positive or negative, is most effective in ages eleven to fifteen. A child will do his own testing in the sixteen to twenty years range and will best be served by being given a safe environment. Time spent with a child teaching what is required in each season will have the greatest impact on what the child becomes.

- **The Goal of Parenting (Luke 2:50–52)**

A slice in the childhood of Jesus gives the best summary to be found anywhere of the goals of parents.

- ▶ Obedience to parents is the foundation of the parent-child relationship and for the building of all subsequent relations. A parent does a child a serious disservice, a life damaging blow, if the child is not taught respect for authority in the home. Jesus was in submission to His parents.
- ▶ The development of wise insight sets an emerging adult apart. Wisdom begins with comprehensive and accurate knowledge that one learns to apply well in life situations. A parent should keep the child in an intriguing, healthy learning environment. A parent should guide each child daily in being alive in his world and in wise decision making. Jesus grew in wisdom.
- ▶ Good health is the key to the most productive and enjoyable work. Through conscientious modeling, careful nutrition, exercise, and protective care a parent

must give a child every opportunity to develop a strong and vibrant body. Jesus grew in stature.

- ▶ Social relations will determine much of what a child becomes throughout his life. Being likeable, considerate, dependable, responsible, and virtuous defines a person and gives greater assurance that he will do well in life. Jesus grew in favor with people.
- ▶ Spiritual relations with God is the bulwark of what will count in life and in eternity. Keeping the emphasis and priority on spiritual concerns is the best gift a parent can give a child. Jesus grew in favor with God.

- **The Strategy of Parenting (Ephesians 6:1–4)**

The Apostle Paul gives a full, college course on parenting by making five points on the strategic goals of parents:

- ▶ **Teach the child to be a good listener.** The word “*obey*” means to “listen under.” A child is to be taught to humbly listen and learn, respecting his subordinate role as a child. A “know it all” child becomes an obnoxious and rebellious adult.
- ▶ **Teach the child to perceive value.** The word “*honor*” suggests that one “determines values.” A child is to be taught, early on, to weigh what is of value or what is of lesser importance, or even detrimental. Teaching a child to determine value is one of the best insurance policies a parent can purchase for a child.
- ▶ **Remove all obstacles that block growth.** A specific obstacle to healthy growth is frustrating or confusing a child. A parent’s uncontrolled and sometimes unjustified anger ranks high on the list of the things that embitter a child, causing him to lose his trust for a parent. Preachers, overly distracted by ministry concerns, often are impatient, vent their frustrations, and take too little time to model self-control and to lavish affection and affirmation on their children.
- ▶ **Actively teach the total child.** Nurturing involves hands-on instruction, modeling, application, and show-and-tell approaches to teaching. Admonition involves verbal instruction, systematic teaching. Together, nurturing and admonition, the two components embrace the instructional needs of the total child. He needs to

see, hear, feel, smell, and taste the truths that make a significant difference in his life and work. All that is taught the child is “*of the Lord*,” to achieve His purposes and to honor His name. Strategy using Ephesians 6:1–4 produces a responsible adult.

The Pillars Of Parenting

The following six pillars of parenting that are to be erected on the foundation principles are crucial to a preacher being effective in one of his primary roles: a father who preaches.

● The Commitment of Parenting

Every parent should make a commitment, prior to becoming a parent and periodically renew it along the way. The following would be included in the parental promises.

- ▶ **I promise to accept the “gift package.”** Nothing, not the gender, not the health, not any special needs, not the timing, diminishes the fact that every child is a gift of God and is to be cared for with dignity, joy, and purpose.
- ▶ **I promise to understand diversity.** Every child will be different in his rate of growth, in his motor skills, in his intellectual pursuits, in his interests, and so forth. Not one is to be compared with another, but treated with individuality and respect.
- ▶ **I promise to acknowledge the role of channeling.** A child is not to be forced to be someone contrary to his own giftedness just to please the ego needs of a selfish parent. The parent has the obligation to guide a child to be what God designed him to be. He must accept his parenthood as a ministry assigned to him by God.
- ▶ **I promise to foresee adult potential.** Early on every child is broadcasting what he can best do in adult life. The wise parent is alert to all the signals a child daily sends. A parent must discover the child’s giftedness and build on the strengths of the child.
- ▶ **I promise to learn the skills of parenting.** Parenting is more than a biological outcome. Parenting skills are essential to developing responsible adults.

- ▶ **I promise to offer my parenting as a gift to God.** As all gifts of worship, parenting is to achieve God's purposes and to rebound to His glory.
- ▶ **I promise to commit my parenting to God to do what He wills.** Whatever the outcome or whatever the child decides to do, the godly parent continues to pray for God to intervene in the life of the child to accomplish His will.

- **The Full Spectrum Parenting**

God created man and woman, both for mutual companionship and meeting needs and for giving birth and fully developing children. Full spectrum parenting is each parent putting his and her imprint on the child. Each parent is designed by God, when functioning well, to give his or her imprint to supply all that a child needs to grow to adulthood. The father best gives a child a capacity for autonomy, detachment, independence, self-confidence, daring, adventure, and risk taking. The mother best gives a child a capacity for attachment, dependence, affection, sensitivity, tenderness, family connection, and community awareness. A preacher must not get so busy serving the people of God to forget to put his masculine imprint indelibly on each of his children. Each child must be affirmed, confident, and able to take purposeful initiatives throughout his life.

- **The Discipline in Parenting**

In every biblical text referring to children and in every balanced book on parenting the discipline of children is underscored. It must be important! If thoughtful, purposeful, and measured discipline (that is, instruction) is given, most of the other acts of parenting go much more smoothly and result in positive outcomes. The following are some general guidelines:

- ▶ Evaluate a motive rather than a result.
- ▶ Determine the need being satisfied before correcting or improving the method.
- ▶ Distinguish between willful disobedience and youthful awkwardness.
- ▶ Establish priorities and communicate them clearly.
- ▶ Differentiate between training and punishment.

- ▶ Use praise more than blame.
- ▶ Focus on behavior rather than the person ("bad boy" or "bad action").
- ▶ Anticipate developing problems before conflict explodes.
- ▶ Be fair: give punishment or praise as measured by the action.
- ▶ Encourage rather than nag.
- ▶ Listen to explanations before drawing a conclusion.
- ▶ Be consistent and flexible, depending on the situation.
- ▶ Establish a mutual approach to discipline between parents.
- ▶ Avoid ridicule, sarcasm, irony, and diminishing humor.
- ▶ Give explanations for disciplinary decisions whenever possible, not to get agreement but to show an effort at fairness, reason, and other things.
- ▶ Set definite, clear limits of behavior, avoiding a detailed, "rule book" home.
- ▶ Guard against oral or corporal discipline when angry, weary, or tense.
- ▶ Be slow to make hasty, absolute decisions, showing the importance of studying a matter.
- ▶ Keep a promise (decisions, appointments, and so forth).
- ▶ Consider individual differences in children (ages, personalities, abilities, and other things).

- **The Environment of Parenting**

If mature, responsible, God-fearing children are to be the results of spiritual parenting, the environment becomes most important. A strong, cohesive, functional, family environment includes the following qualities:

- ▶ Family members appreciate each other and express it often.
- ▶ Family members arrange and guard their schedules to have time together.
- ▶ Positive communication patterns are regularly practiced.
- ▶ There is a high level of commitment to family values and family pursuits.
- ▶ There is a pronounced, spiritual orientation, weaving God into all activities.
- ▶ There is an ability to deal positively with crisis and effectively resolve conflict.

- ▶ There is a balance of pleasure and growth, service and family needs.
- ▶ There is open, honest communication of needs, joys, and dreams.

Achieving such an environment requires purposeful intention by the preacher who is trying to help many other families build a healthy, home environment for their children.

The Skills Of Parenting

There are skills that parents are to model and teach their children to insure that a child becomes a responsible adult.

- **Listening.**

People learn by listening well. People avoid hurtful consequences by listening carefully. People show value and appreciation to others by listening sincerely. People connect with others and bring others together by listening attentively. People can help others in finding a solution to their problems by listening alertly.

- **Conflict Management.**

Most failures in relationships and human endeavors occur because the participants did not know how to resolve conflict. Having developed the skills of communication, being free of excess baggage, learning how to define conflict, and being able to process the hurts in a conflict situation keep the damaging results of conflict at a minimum and leads to conflict resolution and reconciliation.

- **Time Management.**

Everyone has the same time allotment but not everyone makes the best use of his time. It is a skill to be gained to the benefit of every person. Being objective minded, setting priorities, organizing efforts, keeping oneself motivated and disciplined, foreseeing results, sharing and celebrating accomplishments are vital parts of managing time well.

- **Financial Management.**

Having sufficient income through skilled and dedicated industry may be the beginning of good financial management, but efficient use of whatever amount one has is equally crucial. The method of management is not as important as the skilled discipline in developing a budget with built-in accountability and well defined responsibility. Staying disciplined in the regular management of the designed accounts is the life-blood of sound finances.

- **Relationship Building.**

Building productive and wholesome relations starts with being responsible, healthy, and whole persons. However, there are skills, including the four skills above, that are essential to building life-long and enjoyable relations. The valuing of others, keeping commitments, exhibiting the servant spirit and the spirit of always wanting the best to happen to another, being ready to acknowledge wrong, and having the humility to ask for help and express gratitude are the stuff from which good relationships are born and prosper.

Conclusion

Because of the importance of the life-task of parenting children, the world is filling up with books on the topic. This summary is intended only to encourage preachers in an admittedly difficult assignment in balancing effective parenting and fruitful ministry. The joys of preaching are immense and long lasting. The joys of parenting children into a mature, responsible adulthood are indescribable. When done well, with God's grace, parenting opens doors to a sense of fulfillment in one of the preacher's most important ministries. Good parenting is along the same pathway as growing spiritually.

Choose to Embrace Grand Parenthood

Ready or not, the age of grand parenthood looms just over the horizon. No matter how busy a preacher may be, one day he may wake up and be a grandparent. Beyond all the grandparent probability, gifts, pictures, bragging, overnighters, and trips that will result, just how spiritual the preacher will be is the issue now in discussion. Becoming and being a grandparent is a part of a preacher's spiritual growth. Purposeful grand parenting is one generation reaching forward meaningfully to a third generation. It is a period of service in passing on the torch as it is a continuing period of spiritual growth.

Necessary Steps Toward Grand Parenthood

The preacher-parent has done the best he could in guiding his children through the four growth stages (attitudes, values, models, testing). Before each child enters the fifth growth stage of personal realization, there will be some preparatory changes required of parents to ease the transition in their parenting adult children.

● Rounding out His Parenting Job

- ▶ There must be a transition from an authority figure to an accepted counselor.
- ▶ There must be a more determined respect for the autonomy of the adult child, with the liberty to make autonomous decisions.
- ▶ There must be a “non-aggression” pact to be observed whereby the parent does not invade the life of the adult child.

- ▶ There must be a recognition and acceptance of the freedom of the adult child without absorbing the guilt for errors of the child.
- ▶ There must be a determination not to reassume the life responsibilities of a capable child.
- ▶ There must be a benevolent readiness to help if the assistance does not diminish responsibility or does not enable a child in returning to a dependent state.

All of these changes will promote a good parent-adult child relationship if the parent has prepared the child and encourages the child to “... *leave his father and mother . . .*” (Genesis 2:24) in an eventual development of an intimate, interpersonal relation in marriage. The child must not have been diminished and so completely controlled in childhood that he/she cannot think for itself or is so fearful and insecure that he/she is terrified to be independent of parents.

- **Making Grand Parenthood a Rich Reality**

Few parents ever regret having been parents. Many parents may have wished for a time when there were no more dirty diapers. Then, they wish for no more endless questions and toys on the floor. Then, they wish for no more smart juniors or teenage struggles and decisions. However, all of these wishes finally coming to fruition do not end parenthood. There is no retirement for parents. Few would really want parenthood to end. When children leave home and start a new home and family, parenthood simply moves to another depth. Parents are intent on seeing each child achieve a fullness of life. The first twenty years are preparatory and involve the parents in an intense teaching ministry. If the job is done well the child is ready to assume effective direction of his/her life. The second twenty years of parenthood features three areas of activity:

- ▶ **Supportive initiatives:** The ministry of prayer, the strategy of praise and encouragement, comradeship, and counsel when desired are supportive initiatives. The adult children greatly need selective assistance in life needs when appropriate and an example that people can achieve security and happiness in marital and parental life.

- ▶ **Teaching ministry.** Now is the time for a parent to help children apply what was taught in their youth about marriage, family, and life (cf. Titus 2:2).
- ▶ **Devotion to becoming exemplary grandparents.** Happy, secure grandparents are the best source of the sense of permanency, purpose, and fulfillment to young adults.

In the third twenty years of parenthood (that is usually sixty to eighty years of age) a parent should excel in the ministry of prayer, praise, encouragement, and counsel. Parenthood is now more distinguished by presence and fulfillment than by direct activity. The real fact is that not even death will interrupt an effective parenthood as it lives on through the generations.

- **Day-To-Day Guidelines in Being a Grand Parent**

Common sense works well for grandparents. The following suggestions are down-to-earth ways to make grand parenting both enjoyable and profitable:

- ▶ Whether the choice of a child's spouse, the timing, or the reasons were agreeable or not, one must determine these circumstances will not diminish grand parenting attitudes or efforts toward grandchildren.
- ▶ One must determine that his time schedule in having children will not be made the standard for his children's parenting decisions.
- ▶ One must determine not to make his methods of parenting an issue.
- ▶ One must determine not to be selfish, distractive, or jealous relating to the other set (s) of grandparents.
- ▶ One must plan to be as near and concerned as possible without threatening another's home.
- ▶ One must learn to be sensitive that gifts and assistance fill a need or desired purpose.
- ▶ One must determine that selfishness will be excluded as the reason for any action.
- ▶ One must learn to be humble even though he has the most beautiful and intelligent grandchildren in the world!
- ▶ One must determine to be mature so as to avoid diminishing a parent before a grandchild.

- One must rid himself of any attitude to buy the grandchild's affection.
- One must determine to find beauty and value in each grandchild.
- One must determine to guard against thoughtless or offensive expressions of partiality and personal preference among the grandchildren.
- One must be mature enough to understand that he is not the constant or immediate concern of his children's families.
- One must be the more mature in times of conflict in assuring that there is a continuing flow of understanding and affection.
- One must be sure to reinforce the good in each grandchild by sincere praise and affirmation.
- One must be careful to promise only what he intends to do and keep every promise.
- One must act his age but work at communicating with each grandchild.
- One must realize that the usual shortness of time with a grandchild requires the best use of the opportunity to reinforce right values, express affection, and affirm the value in each grandchild.
- One must be careful not to make grandchildren a "battlefield" with the parent.
- One must avoid any repeated action that communicates disinterest, dislike, or disgust to the grandchild.
- One must build a firm, happy trust in God and let it flow from the center of his life as his richest legacy for each grandchild.
- One must maintain a clean, orderly, and purposeful life style before the grandchildren, even learning new skills and acquiring new interests.
- One must work, even in older years, in excluding accumulated habits and mannerisms that could embarrass the family.
- One must have learned to be accomplished in the mature art of forgiving and communicating acceptance.
- One must keep present in mind how he would want to be remembered as a grandparent years after his decease.
- One must continue to beg God's direction and help in becoming his best as a grandparent.

Biblical Examples of Grand Parents

We can learn much by observing the successes and failures of others. One of the great values of the Bible is the study in character. We can see people through the “eyes of God.” From the limited number of specific references to grand parenthood we gain some valuable insights to be more spiritual in our grand parenting.

- **Laban** (Genesis 31:43): Laban cited his concern for the welfare of his daughters and grandchildren as the reason he would not punish Jacob for his deceitful break from the family nor repossess the herds taken by Jacob.
- **Jacob** (Genesis 46:7, 48:11): The nomadic tribes or clans like that of Jacob were constantly moving together with their herds. The tribal head, the patriarch, determined the overall life of the tribe. Thus, when Jacob was invited by Pharaoh and instructed by the Lord, he went to Egypt and led his eleven sons and their families as well. His concern extended to “grandsons and granddaughters.” When he arrived in Egypt he rejoiced to see his son Joseph, thought to be dead. His joy was even heightened to see Joseph’s two children as well. Only grandparents can feel the emotion of the moment. To recover a lost son and learn that there were also grandchildren overwhelmed the old patriarch.
- **Joseph** (Genesis 50:23): The author of Genesis gives a striking emphasis to grandparenthood. He records that Joseph, in living 110 years, had the joyful experience of living among his grandchildren born to both of his sons. In fact, he saw the third generation of Ephraim’s sons (great, great-grandchildren) and the second generation of Manasseh’s sons (great-grandchildren). They were *“brought up on his knee.”* He maintained an active interest and nearness in all their lives, even being present at the birth of some.
- **David** (Psalms 103:17, 109:9, 128:6): By reading his Psalms, one can understand the feelings of the kingly grandfather. He extolled God in reaching out to and remembering grandchildren. He considered a man to

suffer a severe curse if his children were fatherless, depriving him of the joys of grand fatherhood. He considered a man's higher joy to live to see his "*children's children.*"

- **Solomon** (Proverbs 13:22, 17:6): Two of Solomon's proverbs paint a beautiful picture of grand fatherhood. He saw a close relationship between a grandfather and his grandchildren. So close that a good grandfather will be certain to leave an inheritance to them. Considering his comments in Ecclesiastes and other proverbs, the inheritance to be left to grandchildren was most likely to be a good memory and faith in God. The Bible's richest statement on grand parenthood is, "*Grandchildren are the crown of old men*" (Proverbs 17:6, KJV). The royal achievement, rich with honor and satisfaction, is to live long and well to be surrounded by grandchildren.
- **Ezekiel** (Ezekiel 37:25): The prophet's inspired view of the Messianic age of peace includes a scene dear to the heart of every family: fathers, sons, and grandsons dwelling together in peace.
- **Lois** (2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15): The potential and expected influence of a godly grandmother is seen in Lois transmitting her sincere faith to her daughter Eunice and on to her grandson. So pronounced was her faith that her grandson, Timothy, from childhood, was well grounded in the Sacred Writings. No greater inheritance could Lois have given her grandson than to surround him with the knowledge which was able to give him the wisdom "*for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*"

Good Grand Parenting Is Knowing What to Pass On

"A good man leaves an inheritance to his children . . ." (Proverbs 13:22). The more intensely felt a value is the more one wishes and works to prolong it beyond one's own life. Few persons would be comfortable with the thought that all the good produced in life would end with one's own life.

The word “inheritance” has assumed a narrow and superficial meaning in our materialistic age. Many determine to leave fortunes, lands, and things, overlooking the greatest wealth that could be left to a third generation. The values a preacher should think about passing on to his grandchildren should include the ageless values that are found in the immediate context of Proverbs 13:22–25:

- **Honest Industry.** The man who honestly works, even in an unjust world, has abundance. The “ethics of honest toil” is a rich principle to pass on. Blessed is a third generation person who has been taught by parents and grandparents the goodness, beauty, and value of honest work. It is a third generation’s best hope to enjoy its assured needs being met.
- **Diligent Discipline.** The greatest human values are molded by discipline. The greatest loss that can be sustained by a person is not having received the inheritance of discipline. Families who stumble along, generation after generation, failing to give discipline that is diligent, unsparing, and loving leave little good worthy of being passed on. Discipline teaches the qualities that insure the best results in one’s life.
- **Simple Living** (v. 25): A life with few or no desires beyond the essential life-needs has time to enjoy the real beauties and blessings of life. It is free from anxieties, unmet demands, fear of loss, and the emptiness of unfulfilled dreams. The richest fortune to pass on is contentment growing from a simple life style. Out of such a life style of simplicity grows the spirit of the psalmist, “*The Lord is my Shepherd, I have need of nothing*” (Psalms 23:1). It is the substance of the first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, “Happy are those who are poor in spirit” (cf. Matthew 5:3) lovers of a simple lifestyle.

When these three treasures are passed on to the oncoming generations, there will be happy, useful, and peaceful people. All are conditions that cannot be bought or retained by financial wealth or earthly power. An overarching value to pass on is found in the larger context of

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. It is the wisdom which grows out of the reverential fear of **Jehovah** (cf. Proverbs 1:1–7). The heir of this great truth will reach man's greatest pinnacle of value in identifying the purpose of life on the earth and the only means of fulfilling it.

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is, “Fear God and keep His commandments”; For this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Knowing How To Deal with Defeat

Even for the most dedicated of preachers, not everything will turn out as he desires at the time. He may feel defeated in some of his deepest hopes for his children and grandchildren. In life one must learn both how to win and how to lose. Children and grandchildren can fail in their life choices. They are not always all that grandparents, in their wiser years, know they should be. Even preachers, as parents and grandparents, might feel and see much pain and seeming defeat.

In the face of seeming defeat the preacher has some trustworthy resources. By this point the preacher has learned to find extra strength to bear a heart-rending defeat. As in all situations in the past, his continuing belief in God being above and beyond the shadows of defeat and keeping watch over His own, will sustain him when children and grandchildren make mistakes. In difficult times, he starts looking for values to be gained and lessons to be learned (cf. Romans 8:28). He knows that God can use a seemingly, bitter defeat to hand out a greater gift. He has learned not to concede defeat easily, not until every resource has been used. He is determined to make Satan pay for every inch he hopes to gain in any battle. He knows the difference between “losing a battle but winning the war” and taking a step backward to leap forward. It is a hard, but a necessary lesson to learn to be humble in accepting a defeat and asking for help from friends. Through it all, coming out of the supposed defeat, the preacher/grandfather determines to be a better, more useful servant of the Lord. He has to apply what he has told many that suffering pain is not the same as suffering defeat. One must accept a defeat that cannot be re-fought, then go on to the next battle wiser and more dependent on God (cf. Ephesians 6:11–18). As soon as possible, one must

put a defeat in the broader context of life. Ten years from now, amid many victories, a single defeat will be seen very differently, maybe even changed into a victory. Even in the case that the defeat has come from personal fault, the preacher, like all those he has taught, needs to repent and go on living free from guilt. He must not help Satan claim a victory in loading guilt on himself that could destroy him in ministry. The preacher knows that in the end a real defeat is when one has salvaged nothing good from a life experience. A preacher grows spiritually when he can rejoice and thank God for every wind that blows.

Knowing How to Enjoy Grandchildren

Enjoying grandchildren is most and first of all about putting joy in the lives of the grandchildren. Grandparents, as the best examples of our humanity, should not be selfish, especially toward grandchildren. On the practical side, this means that wherever a grandparent goes, whatever he does, says, or gives should be meaningful to the grandchild. Grandparent enjoyment is earned by having invested in the younger lives in the third and fourth generations and receiving a loving response from the grandchildren. It means collecting together time, money, and energy, with forethought, in planning visits, events, and expressions of love. Grandparent enjoyment results from planning to be available to show grandchildren how important they are, giving them hugs and praise, and making the little and growing person feel warm inside. Grandparent enjoyment results from affirming and passing on the beauty and value of life to another generation. Leaving material things at death is hardly to be compared to the joy of imprinting life principles during one's lifetime and leaving a legacy of memorable love.

Conclusion

Grand parenting is intended to bring out the best in a preacher as he pours out his unselfish love for his grandchildren. It is intended to occur in the height of his spirituality and in the harvest ripeness of his ministry. Grandchildren are twice blessed because they are intended to see the best examples of humanity, overcome and shaped by grace. The preacher/grandparent can see the culminating purpose of all of the parental efforts of his wife and himself

and can now drink deeply of the pleasures of passing the torch to another generation. The imprints they leave on their grandchildren will likely be among the most treasured memories that the grandchildren will pass on through their lives to others. The fruitful, spiritual minister will impact the lives of many. Few should be impacted more deeply and lastingly as a preacher's grandchildren.

Choose to Love the Brethren by Loving the Bride of Christ

The Church, in its local expression, can either be the seed-bed for a preacher's spiritual growth or a graveyard. Churches tend to have a history of raising up and growing spiritual giants or of stunting the growth of preachers. However, not a little depends on a preacher, wherever he serves, determining to love the brethren, the assembly of God. The choice a preacher makes can be a key to how he grows in spirituality.

The Ground Work of the Choice

In essence, the preacher's best choice has already been indicated by the choice of God. To have any other spirit toward the brethren than love would be setting oneself against God. It is so radically clear that a preacher must learn to love the brethren or leave preaching and even turn his back on God. If a man preaches, he must love God's family members, each one! A few facts demand the choice:

- **The Church Is the Core of God's Eternal Plan.** All the planning and the unfolding of the Scheme of Redemption throughout the ages pointed to the Church. It was not an afterthought to be corrected in a speculative, premillennial era. It was an integral part of how God wanted to deal with lost man (cf. Ephesians 1:3–14).
- **The Church Was Given Life and Purpose by the Sacrifice of Jesus.** The preciousness of the Church is clearly stated in the price God paid for it, His own, darling Son (cf. Acts

20:28). Its purpose became the extension of the purpose of Jesus on earth: “...to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

- **The Church Is the Assembly of the Saved.** Wherever the Gospel has been preached, churches blossomed. The believers drew together on a regular basis to celebrate their salvation, to worship their Savior, to encourage one another, and to know the mind of God in their historical setting (cf. Hebrews 10:19–25, Acts 20:7).
- **The Church Is God’s One and Only Plan to Prepare People for Heaven.** One of the greater perplexities is how much confidence God has in His people to accomplish His plan of the ages. The more God-like enthusiasm a preacher can discover in his love for the Church, the more effective he will be in accomplishing his heart’s desire in helping the Church grow. Granted, some churches are easier to love than others, but the spiritual man of God makes loving all the brethren his aim (cf. Philippians 1:3–11, Colossians 1:3–8).
- **The Church Is the Face of God in a Dark, Cold, and Fearful World.** Outbursts of nature, evil conniving of men, careless accidents in life, ravages of age and disease, all cause darkness, coldness, and fear to seep into the human corners of life. Human benevolence and governmental agencies can only go so far in touching the deeper needs of humanity in travail. Only the Church, touched by the hand of God, can give the heart, hand, and a message of lasting hope. The preacher is a spokesman of that hope and often the more prominent voice and face for God in His Church (cf. Romans 10:13–15).

The Preacher’s Motivation in Loving the Brethren

In addition to God’s view of the Church to motivate the preacher to love the Church, the preacher has some personal motives:

- **He Owes His Own Salvation to the Outreach of the Church.**
Someone, sometime from the Church reached out to him with a call to salvation. What makes any preacher think that, on his own, he would have found the truth so well defined and accessible? Timothy can thank a grandmother and mother for having been given a knowledge of the Scriptures that led to his salvation.
- **He Owes His Growth in Knowledge, Training, and Polished Skill-sets to the Programs of the Church.**
How many of a young preacher's fledgling sermons were listened to by patient brethren? How many false starts were endured by brethren who saw potential beginning to blossom? How many resources were sacrificially given by many that any one man might become a spokesmen of the Lord? How many brethren did it take who believed in the "*teaching faithful men*" principle of 2 Timothy 2:2 for any preacher to join the preaching ranks of the ages?
- **He Owes the Calling to the Most Rewarding Mission Known to Man.**
How can any mortal man, outside of preaching, wish for any greater work in which he can make such an eternal difference in the lives of so many? Whether in the heat of the battle, after the glow of the harvest, or in the evening tide of a preacher's life, there is incalculable joy. The Church is God's best environment for spending a life well.
- **He Owes the Sustaining of His Life and the Support of His Family to the Faith and Generosity of Devoted Members of the Church.**
Outside of preaching, the preacher may have been able to earn a better salary, ending up with more financial benefits and a more secure retirement. Yet, people did commit sizeable amounts of money over the years and dedicated much time to supporting the needs of the preacher and his family. Hunger, poverty, or decided limitations are seldom the experiences of preachers in the bosom of the Church.

- **He Owes the Preservation of His Soul to the Protective Arms of the Church.**

Every preacher knows that he has ventured further a field in thought or fact than he should have safely done. Most have quickly found refuge in fraternity, in faith, and in church love and discipline. However, the constant awareness of who a preacher is, who owns him, to whom he is accountable, and who will be hurt by his misbehavior are like guardrails keeping him directed and motivated in serving God. That is the Church at work in his regard.

How the Preacher Can Best Love the Brethren

Much can be said about a preacher loving the brethren by affirming each with affection and praise, listening with genuine interest and understanding, and identifying with the joys, sorrows, and needs of the members. What a joy to a congregation who is blessed to have a preacher who is skilled and eager to genuinely give significance to each member, affirming their worth, and encouraging the gaining of competence and purpose. However, there is more a preacher can do in loving the brethren to give substance, delight, and fulfillment:

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Worshipers.**

Worshiping God in “*. . . spirit and in truth . . .*” (John 4:24) begins with knowing God as He reveals Himself in the Word. The preacher will open up the meaning of the words that God uses to identify Himself and will traverse the whole of Scripture to see God at work in planning and bringing to fruition His promises. He will help each believer to drink deeply of God’s saving grace and to delight in his own salvation (cf. 2 Timothy 4:1–5, Acts 20:17–21, 26–27).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Healed Forgivers.**

Having been forgiven by God opens the door for the believer to learn to heal and forgive every offense. It is inconsistent with the grace of God and incompatible with the faith in Christ to receive so much from God and

then refuse to forgive the trivial hurts of others (cf. Matthew 6:14–15).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Peacemakers.**

Being peacemakers, promoting harmony instead of conflict, is what sons of God do best (cf. Matthew 5:9).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Gifted Servants.**

God has given a ministry treasure to every member. Someone would do well to help each believer discover, develop, and employ the array of gifts God has given (cf. Romans 12:3–8, 1 Peter 4:10). A loving preacher is advantaged to be the one who gives this gift of love.

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Dreamers.**

Every growing church must have a vision that clearly enunciates its purpose. It must have clearly stated goals and systematic plans to lead to the desired outcomes (cf. Philippians 3:12–16).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Healthy Saints.**

Churches that best seize the opportunities are filled with an increasing number of people who are maturing in their character and personality traits. In his preaching and counseling roles, the preacher can help members, one by one, be whole in every trait (cf. Colossians 1:28).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Convicted Believers.**

A dominant feature of unity is in the shared beliefs that convict a group. The core beliefs about God, His Son, His Spirit, His Plan for saving man, the distinctive nature, purpose, work and worship of the Church, holiness, and end-times must be constant themes in preaching and instruction. A preacher shows his love in helping the brethren find unifying strength in their common, revealed biblical beliefs (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4–10).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Spirit-filled Followers.**

Knowledge filled and Spirit filled are not synonymous, but they are two sides of one truth. Preachers who love the people work hard at making sure that each member knows the fullness of truth and yields to the Spirit to mold each life. The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is not harvested in ignorance or in an arrogant, unyielded life.

- **Help the Church Become a Community of Soul-winners.**

Worshiping God, growing in holiness, remaining faithful in truth, and helping the needy are incomplete without the urgent effort to call the nations to the Son. In ever widening circles, the local church must be spurred on by an evangelistic-minded and involved preacher (cf. Matthew 28:19–20).

- **Help the Church Become a Community of End-time Hopes.**

The best spiritual efforts become secular without a pulsating hope in the final coming of the Lord of Glory. No greater love can be expressed by a preacher for the Church than for him to help it prepare and eagerly wait the coming of the Lord (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10, 2:19, 3:11–13, 4:13–18).

What a preacher contributes to a church becoming each of the above qualities is a measure of his love for the brethren. To leave a church having grown stronger because of the love of a preacher is a tribute to his spirituality and prepares for the coming of another man who, likewise, will love the brethren.

In substance, the preacher who loves the brethren will help the Church achieve the three, towering, testimonial benchmarks of the Christian faith:

- ▶ **Love each other as Christ loved us all** (John 13:35). Jesus made this spiritual achievement as the badge of Christian living and of our testimony in the world: “*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

- ▶ **Be fruit bearers** (John 15:1–8). Jesus defined fruitfulness as our way of glorifying God and the means of being identified as His disciples: “. . . *showing yourselves to be my disciples.*”
- ▶ **Be united** (John 17:20–21). Jesus made oneness among believers the reflection of Divine Oneness and declared our unity to be the confirmation of his divine mission among men: “. . . *that the world may believe that You sent me.*”

Day by Day Love for the Brethren

Most congregations consist of less than two hundred members. The preacher can know every member and every family very well. With systematic planning, even in larger congregations, the preacher can touch the personal lives of the majority of the members. Loving the brethren is one of the most productive initiatives of any preacher in any size of church. The following is the beginning of a long list of efforts that any preacher can take to open his heart to every member.

- Following the church directory, pray for every member, week by week, until all are brought before God. Like Jesus, tell each one you are praying for them and the topic of the prayer (cf. Luke 21:31–32).
- Develop a systematic plan to be in personal contact with every member in the shortest time possible. The opportunities would include visits in their homes, opening up one's home to some, hospital visits, special events (weddings, graduations, funerals, honor banquets, and other special events), ball games, senior pot lucks, youth rallies, life groups, visiting people at work when such is possible, meeting people over lunch or coffee, and so forth.
- Compliment each person at the assembly, by phone, or by a note who participants in the work, worship, and fellowship of the church, expressing gratitude for the effort and noting its value in the life of the church.

- Focus on encouraging young people and giving mature attention to children, with special praise to teachers, helpers, and parents.
- Consult with the elders and older members about things they liked that other preachers did to show genuine love for the people.
- Be in contact with fellow preachers on how they are reaching out to the brethren in a loving way.
- Be genuinely open to people, being available as a good listener and making people feel comfortable and valued when in conversation.

What Loving the Brethren Means to the Preacher

In truth, loving the brethren is not about the preacher. It is about honoring God in seeing a leader love His children. It is about seeing one son love another son or daughter. It is about good things happening to God's children. It is about the world seeing the power of brotherly love and the beauty of the family of God (cf. John 13:34–35). It is about needs being met and opportunities being captured to the glory of God. Yet, though not on purpose, the preacher is impacted by the outcomes that flow from sincerely, unselfishly loving the brethren. Some blessings include the following:

- Loving the brethren, even the difficult ones, the preacher identifies with God and shares in the sacrificial love of the Savior. That association impacts him in attuning him to God and His purposes for man.
- Loving the brethren, as an act of obedience, opens the preacher to the manifold blessings from God reserved just for those who obey Him.
- Loving the brethren, more often than not, builds meaningful relations that continue throughout a preacher's career.
- Loving the brethren enhances every aspect of the preacher's efforts.

- Loving the brethren will bring a returned love to surround him with the loving help that he will inevitably need in his trials and defeats.
- Loving the brethren will work toward his family being treated with thoughtful care and esteem.
- Loving the brethren will prolong his labor in any one place and make it effective and fruitful wherever he goes.
- Loving the brethren will prepare for the days when the preacher looks back on his life of service with fond memories and fulfilled purposes.

Conclusion

Loving the Church as suggested above assumes, even demands, that the preacher is growing in each spiritual area of his life. His clear model strengthens the impact of his teachings. However long he may work with a church, the imprint of his life and teachings in these areas will speak loudly and clearly of his love for the saints.

Part Four

Vehicles of Spiritual Living

**A Minister of the Word has many well walked
avenues of the spiritual giants of old to
grow tall in his spiritual life.**

Choose to Pursue the Presence of God in Prayer

Discovering the Pathways of Prayer

One thing in common among all spiritual giants is prayer. One thing in common among all those preachers who aspire to spiritual maturity is a longing to be strong in prayer. Most have found it to be a journey full of conflicting emotions and experiences. For some it has been a journey of regret that so many years have passed away and so many opportunities have been squandered. For others prayer has been a journey of shame that so many other things of lesser value have been placed over prayer. For still others it has been a journey of frustration that many prayer methods have been tried and many books have been read but there is still an emptiness in prayer. Some have felt prayer has been a journey of futility in thinking that mortal, sinful man could find intimacy with a God who is blessed, immortal, invisible, and worthy of all honor and power (cf. 1 Timothy 5:15–16). Yet, it is encouraging to learn that many have experienced prayer as a journey of fulfilling a hunger to feel God's presence and to bask in an intimacy with the Divine. When that happens, prayer brings unspeakable joy, life, renewal, meaning, empowerment, and purpose.

How Can Prayer Be Described?

Prayer is man's ultimate quest for intimacy with an immortal, universally existent, all-knowing, and all powerful God. Prayer is thinking God's thoughts, desiring God's desires, loving what God loves, willing the things that God wills, seeing what God sees, and doing what God does. It is progressively becoming like Him in all things, at all times, and with all people. Prayer is accepting an invitation from the Father to come home and share one's deepest thoughts, one's most felt needs, and one's every concern. It often

erupts in lavish praise and adoration, gratitude, commitment, and petitions for self, for others, and for the Kingdom enterprise. Bible Study transforms the mind, meditation transforms the emotions, fasting transforms the will, and giving transforms the purpose. Prayer transforms the relationship with God, bringing one into the august, throne room of God.

Prayer Can Be Taught and Learned

Hearing and feeling the power in the prayers of Jesus, the disciples asked to be taught to pray (cf. Luke 11:1ff). Jesus often taught followers to pray.

- **Listen to the Teacher (Matthew 6:5–15).** Jesus stresses giving attention to **motive** (to give glory to God), to **conduct** (not put self on display with a loud voice and much speaking), to the **form** (simple, brief, and comprehensive) and to the **content** of prayer (reverence, dependence, thankfulness, purpose).
- **Learn From a Parable of a Widow (Luke 18:1–8).** Prayers are to be **specific** (the widow begged for protection under the law), **courageous** (the judge was fearsome), **persistent** (she returned again and again) and **passionate** (her appeals were fervent).
- **Learn From a Parable of a Publican (Luke 18:9–14).** In prayer one should acknowledge God in reverence, acknowledge one's sinfulness with honesty, and acknowledge one's need of divine mercy with humility and expectancy.
- **Watch the Master in His Prayer Life.** Jesus prayed sentence prayers and all-night prayers. He prayed often (fifteen times are recorded in just thirty recorded days). Subjects of his prayers varied (Kingdom, people, will of God, self, and so forth). The frequency and fervency of his prayers speak of his consistent practice and belief in prayer.

One Must Learn The Basics of Prayer

Like all bodies of knowledge and all skills, there are some basic principles that must be learned to start well and to build a prayer life.

- **One must Acknowledge a Personal Need for Growth in Prayer.** The following passages could help guide one in conducting a reality check on his need for further growth in prayer:
 - ▶ “*...far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you*” (1 Samuel 12:23).
 - ▶ “*Let everyone who is godly pray to thee in a time when thou may be found*” (Psalms 32:6).
 - ▶ “*Therefore, because he has inclined his ear to me, I will call upon him as long as I live*” (Psalms 116:2).
 - ▶ “*Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God*” (Philippians 4:6).
 - ▶ “*Lord teach us to pray . . .*” (Luke 11:1).
 - ▶ “*We do not know how to pray as we should . . .*” (Romans 8:25).
 - ▶ “*You do not have because you do not ask...you ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.*” (James 4:2–3).
 - ▶ “*Pray without ceasing . . .*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).
 - ▶ “*Men ought always to pray and not faint*” (Luke 18:1).
 - ▶ “*Let us come boldly before the throne of grace . . .*” (Hebrews 4:16).
- **One Must Acknowledge the Awesome Greatness of God (*Elohim, Jehovah, Adonia*).** Frequently, a preacher must go back to the Temple scene in Isaiah 6 to tremble anew with the prophet standing before the Almighty, high and lifted up. Finding himself in the awesome presence of a Holy God, the preacher needs to capture all of the feelings expressed by Isaiah: awe, contrition, being overwhelmed, and other such emotions. No prayer begins well without the Temple impact. A prayer life will fail in reaching its heights by lingering only in the outer courts of the Temple.

- **One Must Learn the Dynamics of Prayer.**

- ▶ The power of prayer is in its **faithfulness**: in believing steadfastly in its efficacy, in guarding its practice from any intrusion, in reserving a place and even establishing set times for core praying. It is keeping covenant with God in never missing a prayer appointment with God.
- ▶ The naturalness of prayer is in its **frequency**: the golden rule of learning is repetition. The regularity and the more often one prays the more ingrained and natural prayer becomes. Even in prayer, frequent and disciplined practice makes perfect. Frequency means never slacking, never letting other concerns crowd out the commitment to pray, and never abbreviating a prayer to rush off to something of lesser importance.
- ▶ The increasing efficacy of prayer is in its **forethought**: Spontaneity does not preclude preparation. When speaking before a great audience or in speaking to an important person we would not leave our presentation to chance and random thinking. We would prepare well. Effective prayer requires our best readiness in mind, in heart and in words.
- ▶ The heights of prayer are best reached in its **fervency**: Considering the importance of the conversation with God, acknowledging the need of the exchange, understanding the greatly desired outcome of the prayer, and grasping the beauty of the relationship, then prayer cannot be anything but fervent. Emotions are stirred, aspirations are heightened, purposes are renewed, and thoughts are overwhelmed in the presence of the Monarch of the Ages.

Thus, as the dynamics of prayer become the engines in driving preachers to their knees, churches will prosper even the more and spiritual giants will walk our lands. Being faithful in the belief of prayer, praying often and regularly, giving serious forethought to every prayer appointment, and praying with all one's might, mind, and heart pushes a preacher deeper and deeper into the adventure of prayer.

Learn to Walk the Pathways of Prayer

To faithfulness, frequency, forethought, and fervency of prayer, the **fullness of prayer** should be added. Fullness of prayer means learning to use all eight elements of prayer in addressing the Father of Lights. Those who pray, all too often, walk but a few of the available pathways that make the journey to the throne of God so rich and so full of blessings. Regularly walking all eight pathways of prayer provides access to all of the Kingdom privileges.

- **Adoration — Standing in Awe of Jehovah's Essential Qualities and Divine Person.** Genuine adoration and the most uplifting aspect of a mature prayer is to joyously acknowledge the Person of God, being overwhelmed by and rejoicing over who He is in His very nature. To adore God in prayer requires a study of all the essential qualities revealed in Scripture and a falling in love with the Person of God. He is Holy, meaning that He is superlatively above, incomparable to, and fully distinguished from all proclaimed deities. There is none like Him. He is omni in all His traits: omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and omni-competent.

Scripture References: 2 Samuel 22:2–3; 2 Chronicles 29:11–13; Psalms 8:1, 36:5–9, 57:5; Jeremiah 10:6–7; Revelation 15:3–4.

- **Praise — Marveling at His Works That Tower over Man.** One of the aspects of prayer at its fullest is praising God in the exercise of His essential qualities. In reading the pages of creation and of divine revelation and seeing God at work in the lives of people and in the affairs of nations, the human response should be one of marvel, erupting in praise. God is to be praised in His redemption of man and in His preparation for an eternal destiny for the redeemed. Praise is man's way of applauding God for jobs well done!

Scripture References: Psalms 103:1–5, 71:19, 104:1–32, 145:10–20; Isaiah 24:1–5; Revelation 15:3–4.

- **Thanksgiving — Gratefulness for What He Has Done on Our Behalf.** Every minute of a preacher's day, every turn of the road, and every rising and setting of the sun is an occasion for expressing gratitude to an ever-giving God. The gifts of God are copious and fit for our every need. "Thank you God . . ." should be the constantly, repeating refrain of the preacher's life.

Scripture References: 1 Chronicles 29:13; Jonah 2:2–9; Matthew 26:26; Luke 24:30; Acts 27:35.

- **Confession — Acknowledging Our Need for Him.** Confession means to agree with. One who prays fully must be in constant and contrite agreement with God of his failures and needs. Such a prayer recognizes that God is always right, is always able, and is always ready to intervene according to His will. A trusting, dependent spirit finds comfort and strength in full supply at the throne of grace. A preacher who rejoices in his confessor relationship with the Most High finds it easier and more rewarding to "*. . . confess your sins . . .*" to his brethren (James 5:16).

Scripture References: Genesis 32:11; 2 Chronicles 20:12; 2 Samuel 24:10; Ezra 9:6; Psalms 54:1–4, 40:17.

- **Petition — a Call for His Overruling in the Affairs of Men.** Most often a petition is a statement of a need or a cause bigger than the petitioner and an urgent request for a specific outcome. A petition is not a demand of the strong but an appeal of the lesser to the greater. A petitioner's prayer addresses what God can do over and above anything the petitioner might do. A preacher's petition is his call to God to overrule in the affairs of men to achieve a specific and deeply desired outcome.

Scripture References: Genesis 15:2; 1 Kings 3:9; 1 Chronicles 4:10; Nehemiah 1:11; Psalms 31:1–4; Lamentations 5:21–22; Jeremiah 64: 1–2, 9; Daniel 9:15–19.

- **Intercession — a Plea on Behalf of Another.** Concern for others and wanting the best for others, usually takes the form of an intervention on the person's behalf. Calling on God is a preacher's best and quickest way to get something moving that is beneficial to those in need. Jesus interceded for Peter (cf. Luke 22:31). Paul interceded for brethren in Ephesus (cf. Ephesians 1:15–16), Philippi (cf. Philippians 1:3–4), and Colosse (cf. Colossians 1:3). He urged brethren to pray for him (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Fraternal relationships are built when brethren know that the preacher regularly talks with God about them. Intercessory prayer is a vital part of a brother-to-brother covenant.

Scripture References: Genesis 18:23–32, 25:21; Deuteronomy 26:27; 1 Kings 13:6; 2 Kings 6:17–20; 1 Chronicles 29:18–19; John 17:1–26; Acts 7:60; Ephesians 1:15–23.

- **Commitment — a Promise of Our Responsible Participation.** There can be no relationship with a promise making and a promise keeping God if men will not be ready to make promises and exhaust all opportunities to keep them. Salvation thrives on an appropriate human response to divine initiatives. Seeking divine favor is completed by gratefulness and responsible commitment on the part of the human recipient. For the more that is given, the more will be required (cf. Luke 12:48). No one in the Kingdom enterprise receives more of God's blessings than a preacher. His prayer life should be full of promises made and promises faithfully kept. Prayers of commitment should burst with promises of our responsible participation.

Commitment in the Model Prayer

Note how commitment is an expressed and clearly a part of the model prayer of Jesus (cf. Matthew 6:9–13, KJV):

*“Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.”*

- ▶ A commitment to honor and exalt God the Father.

*“Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven”*

- ▶ A promise to work to make the Lordship of Heaven more real to others.

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

- ▶ A promise to be both an industrious worker and a frugal, grateful steward.

*“And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.”*

- ▶ A promise to forgive all others for offenses.

*“And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.”*

- ▶ A promise to rebuff all temptations and fight against the most cherished, personal sins.

*“For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
for ever. Amen.”*

- ▶ A promise to recognize, extol, and honor the exalted position of the Father.

Commitment in prayer is a partnership with God. Thus, the preacher prays fervently, promises faithfully like everything depended solely on God, and then gets up and works diligently like everything depended on him.

Scripture References: 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalms 39:1, 51:13, 104:33, 145:1–2; Jeremiah 20:12.

- **Communion — a Pouring of Hearts, a Sharing of the Spirit.** Prayer is not just bowing our head, closing our eyes, raising our hands, and speaking out to God. Prayer also includes quiet reflection, earnest meditation, humble listening, and waiting on the Lord. Prayer is waiting on the Spirit of God to translate into heavenly terms what

we feel deeply but cannot express appropriately to the Father (cf. Romans 8:26–27). As often between husband and wife, so there is with God a communion of the spirit in deeply felt devotion, affection, trust, and longing.

Scripture References: Psalms 42:1–11, 55:1–8, 57:1–2, 102:1–11, 139:23–24; Isaiah 26:9; Lamentation 3:48–55.

A Preacher in Prayer

Some of the initiatives that a preacher can take to enhance his prayer life might include the following:

- **Keep a Prayer Journal, with Prayer Goals.** Write down petitions to God and record eventual answers. Set goals and hold to the promises.
- **Form a Prayer Circle.** Choose area preachers, select accountable friends or the elders, and meet regularly for intercessory prayer.
- **Pray Regularly with One's Wife.** Set aside a regular period, free from all intrusions, and petition God for matters that are most dear to both.
- **Focus on the Nature of God.** Study the names and attributes of God and make each one the topic of adoration in daily prayers.
- **Keep a Fresh In-flow of Thoughts on Prayer.** Read at least a new book on prayer every quarter and some of the great devotional classics as often as possible.
- **Preach and Write on Prayer.** Once some aspect of prayer has been mastered, share the prayer challenges with the brethren.
- **Consult Other Preachers.** Call other preaching brethren about their discoveries in prayer and what they have done to help the brethren in their prayer needs.

- **Impact the Lives of Others with Prayer.** Tell a group of people each week that they will be the objects of prayer and ask them about their needs to be brought to the Father.
- **Focus on Prayer and Praying People in the Bible.** The daily reading program could well include special note of those great prayer warriors in the Bible and how God intervened in their lives in answer to prayer.
- **Incite Others to Be Serious in Their Prayer Lives.** Ask members what prayer means to them, what they have recently learned, or how God has responded to their prayer life.

Conclusion

A preacher's life, including his prayer life, needs to be such as to inspire others and be what others can emulate. Whatever a preacher is known by or whatever legacy he leaves a church, along with noble ethics and sound words of truth, he greatly needs to be remembered as a man of prayer. Whenever he is remembered, his **faithfulness, forethought, frequency, fervency, and fullness** in prayer should come readily and happily to mind. Among the overshadowing initiatives in which he should have led a church, becoming a praying church should be among the most evident and appreciated.

Choose Self-Discipline in Life

Choose Self Discipline in a Life of Purposeful Giving, Fasting, and Meditation

Purposeful giving, fasting, and meditation are not high on the list of spiritual formation in modern literature and church practice. All three disciplines, along with prayer, have been considered as the leading pathways to spirituality in past centuries and still are today in Eastern thought. In all three cases, the pursuit for spirituality is the poorer for the losses. The thoughtful preacher, at least in his personal life, needs to lead in recovering the lost disciplines.

The Lost Disciplines and Spiritual Formation

Whenever, across the centuries, spiritual formation has been spoken of or written about giving, fasting, and meditation are always among the leading disciplines. Different centuries have placed varied emphasis on each discipline but each has always been considered important in the pursuit of spirituality. These disciplines are not simply acts of obedience or mystic gadgetry, but as pathways that lead deeper into the presence of God and throwing the yielded worshiper at the foot of the Throne. When done as “commandment keeping” and being duty driven, they are as nothing and yield little. Spiritual hunger and thirstiness, yearning to be closer to God, are the better motivating dynamics.

Jesus included **giving** among the spiritual disciplines in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 6:1–4). He spoke of the God-centered vs. self-centered motive in one’s giving. Drawing attention to one’s generosity nullifies the value of the gift in the main purpose it should be offered. Concerning

fasting, Jesus did not say “**if** you fast” but rather, “**when** you fast” (cf. Matthew 6:17). That little word difference between “**if**” and “**when**” speaks eloquently of His expectations of fasting by His disciples in being spiritual people. Then He proceeded to tell His disciples how one should fast (cf. Matthew 16–18). His **fasting and meditation** in the desert clearly prepared Him for the fierce test of His mission and for the victory over Satan (cf. Luke 4:1–13). Both were preludes to the greatest of tests in the Garden and at Calvary.

The important centrality that Jesus gave to the disciplines in the mountain-top sermon and His practice of the disciplines in His personal ministry set the context for all of His followers in their pursuit to be like Him.

Purposeful Giving

There are more references in the Bible to God’s expectations of purposeful giving than many other more popular topics as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or the Second Coming. In the Old Testament the manner, the kind, and the amount to be given was specified. In the New Testament, rather, the spirit, and the purpose of giving is more emphasized (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1).

The statement of Paul in Romans 12:1 sets the context and extent of Christian giving,

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service [worship] (NKJV).

Such a consummate gift of one’s body would mean that all that a preacher has, will have, or can ever do already and fully belong to God. Giving time or energy or financial resources from the overflow, spending the bulk of income on self and material pleasures, or haggling over percentages hardly seems to be consistent with the spirit of having given oneself wholly to the Lord. Against the backdrop of the Old Testament tithes, animal sacrifices, and offerings and the recognition in the New Testament of the better covenant based on better promises (cf. Hebrews 8:6), generous and purposeful giving should be the impulse of the soul. It should

need no contrived reasoning of how we should exceed “... *the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees . . .*” (Matthew 5:20) to set the standard for giving. However, the national average of giving 2% of one’s gross income surely does not fit in the Romans 12 context.

Purposeful Fasting

Fasting has never been commanded because it is a natural response of a soul in anguish, in need of concentration, and self-discipline. It is both a spiritual and physical initiative to regain lost control or to rise to an unusual challenge. For the Christian, it is a purposeful, voluntary abstinence from food so attention can be devoted to accomplishing something for God. Because of its benefits, every Christian should include fasting in the promotion of spiritual formation.

- **What Are the Spiritual Values of Fasting?** While there are physical benefits to judicious fasting, the primary concern for fasting should be achieving spiritual benefits.

Isaiah was a proponent of the spiritual values of fasting in Isaiah 58:5–8 (KJV):

“Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and the righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.”

Thus, purposeful fasting provides the conditions for sharpening one's discernment in deciding priorities, in gaining sober insights into Scripture, and in becoming more acutely aware of the needs of others. Like Anna fasting in the temple (cf. Luke 2:37), one can push aside so much clutter and see spiritual realities more sharply. Fasting provides the opportunity to focus on God and embrace His solutions to problems and fears. Fasting is the appropriate response of humility when we are convicted of sin (cf. Ahab, 1 Kings 21:27–28; Nineveh, Jonah 3:5–10). Fasting is the human response to difficult situations as David did in fasting before the death of his son (cf. 2 Samuel 12:22–23) or Esther before appearing before the King to make her appeal (cf. Daniel 6:18). Fasting is wisdom at its best when needing God's guidance for difficult decisions as Nehemiah and Ezra did in deciding about problems in Jerusalem (cf. Nehemiah 1–2; Ezra 8:21–23) or as the Antioch church did in launching mission work into Asia (cf. Acts 13:2–3). Fasting is a plea to God to bring healing to those seriously ill or to a nation in sin (cf. Isaiah 58:8; Jeremiah 36:8; Daniel 9:3–5). Fasting accompanies an urgent and fervent search for the truth and spiritual freedom as seen in the case of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:30).

- **Fasting Can Take Many Forms.** Abstinence from food and sometimes drink is the usual form of fasting, but consider a day or more of abstinence from “besetting sins” (the sins that most often tempt, Ed.) as a form of fasting.
- ▶ Some preachers would do well in determining to abstain for a day of **criticalness**:
 - Being judgmental of others.
 - Learning how little their criticisms matter to others.
 - Being struck by how being critical closes one's eyes to seeing and appreciating any good in the one or thing being criticized.
 - Lamenting how a critical spirit precludes encouraging others or being grateful for what another has done.

- Seeing how little is built on criticisms or how few things last in the context of diminishing criticism.
 - Delighting in seeing how love, joy, hope, and affirmation can replace a critical spirit and make a significant difference in encouraging others in doing good.
- Some preachers would do well in determining to abstain for a day from **pride**:
- Having an arrogant, self-sufficient spirit.
 - Learning how people will begin to let down their defenses and be drawn with less fear of being hurt.
 - Being amazed how much easier it becomes to see potential and good in others and to encourage them.
 - Being humbled with how more open one will become to suggested improvements and how much more meaningful it will be to acknowledge wrong or need.
- Some preachers would do well in determining to abstain for a day from harboring **resentment**:
- Refusing to forgive someone for an offense.
 - Being surprised how much easier it will be to get started again in practicing what has been preached to others about forgiveness.
 - Being struck with how little the offense really is that was so huge just days before.
 - Being delighted when the rays of love, respect, and longing begin to creep into the corners of his heart about the accused offender.
 - Being renewed as reconciliation and meaningful relationship begin to seem a possibility.

Whether or not such abstaining from “besetting sins” is accompanied by abstinence from food or drink is not the core of the suggestion. The core needs to be determining that one will let God have His way for a day or so, and then seeing what amazing benefits emerge. Fasting from a flaw in character might not be resolved in a day of fasting but it is a step in the right direction. Such a day of fasting should be

accompanied with fervent praying that God will accept one's repentance and forgive such a despicable sin (that is criticalness, pride, resentment, and so forth), help in claiming the promise of forgiveness, and will help in a new beginning.

- **Expect God's Intervention.** Whether one wants to call God's intervention His providence, or angelic guardianship, or the working of the Spirit, God has a long history of intervening when His saints call on Him. Angels came to Daniel, to Elijah, to Jesus and to Cornelius in their fasting. God's intervening love is promised to His children in Psalm 91:11: "*He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all of your ways*" (NKJV, cf. Hebrews 1:13–14). In the spiritual warfare in which all saints are engaged, God's children must seek security under God's protective wing. By fasting and prayer they will be overshadowed in God's defiance of the Evil One and his devices.

Purposeful Meditation

How often has a church included purposeful meditation in a minister's job description? Our modern churches put the emphasis on action, getting things done, not on time spent purposefully in thought. Meditative or contemplative ministries are too rare among the churches. Some of the greatest works of the Church on earth and the surest road to spiritual formation await preachers taking full advantage of a meditative ministry.

- **What Is Meditation?**

Christian meditation is not Yoga or Eastern or Transcendental meditation. It does not seek ecstasies, raptures, or "feelings better felt than told." It does not empty the mind. It is an active, progressive discipline that fills the mind with God's thoughts. The word itself is defined as "musing, muttering, murmuring, to ponder, to reflect, to consider." For the Christian it is to concentrate, to be attentive in the Word. It is encountering Christ in the Word and capturing His view of us. One meditates to let the Word penetrate his mind, his emotions, and his will. Study is more focused on gaining knowledge and information. Meditation

goes deeply into the emotions where hurts and feelings reside and into the will where decisions are made. Meditation involves weighing every situation in the light of Scriptures as Jesus did in the desert temptations (cf. Luke 4). It aims at making us conversant with the will of God. It is reflecting so much on the Word that it trickles down from the mind to the heart, becoming such a part of us that its words jump to attention before every need. All of our faculties can become involved in purposeful meditation. Our mind helps us understand the words of Scripture as we study them in context. Our memory helps us recall the words and their meaning in our lives. Our imagination provides the pictures created by the inspired writers. And our emotions help get us in contact with the characters described in Scripture.

Meditation at its best is when such contemplation on God's love fully frees a person to reveal the deepest secrets of the heart, the greatest longings of the soul, and to freely fall before God in contrition, joyful freedom, and unreserved surrender. The road of meditation leads one to embrace the thought that God loves us beyond our most extravagant hopes.

David speaks of his meditations in Psalms 63:6, 119:15, 23, 48:

*On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night . . .
I meditate on your precepts
and consider your ways . . .
Though rulers sit together and slander me,
your servant will meditate on your decrees . . .
I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love,
and I meditate on your decrees.*

● How Does a Preacher Purposefully Meditate?

Fruitful meditation does not come easily. There is a price to be paid. One who follows Jesus at a distance, who is only urgent in his faith when troubles arise, or who is committed only to the point of squeaking through on the day of judgment will never begin to drink of the fresh fountain of meditation. This kind of person is never willing to pay the price. Their own ambitions, projects, and desired outcomes occupy their time and command the use of their resources.

Most all preachers are already past these bare minimum trappings of the faith. What specifically can a preacher do?

- ▶ **Know well the subject of meditation.** Some time needs to be dedicated to the study of a Scripture selection to exegetically understand its contextual meaning or a monumental truth to put it in its life setting. Meditation will be pondering more deeply into the core thoughts and application in an effort to see their meaning through God's eyes.
- ▶ **Be ready to make every meditative period a rich, rewarding experience.** "What is worth doing is worth doing well" is, likewise, true of meditation. Doing it well means finding the right time and right place where no distractions are likely to intrude in the hour of concentrated thought. It means "casting one's burden on the Lord" and having mind, will, and emotions fully disposed to go into the presence of the Most High. Being clean through repentance, confession, and forgiveness is a prerequisite to purposeful meditation.
- ▶ **Be determined during the meditation period to be yielded to God.** Meditation is a time to be fully humble, contrite, and entirely honest. Meditation is a time for pondering on the Word and letting the Spirit facilitate a conviction of the truth (cf. John 16:8).
- ▶ **Accompany meditation with prayer.** Meditation gets stuck at times and begging for God's strength and direction can open another depth of thought and discovery.
- ▶ **Keep a record of the fruits of meditation.** The Parable of the Sower teaches us what Satan does to unattended seeds (cf. Matthew 13:18–23). Careful notes can be the source of continuing meditation and sharing with others to stimulate growth.
- ▶ **Mentor others to drink of the fountains of meditation.** While meditation is a God-on-one discipline, others can be encouraged to encounter Christ in the Word. A meditative community of believers is a powerful force for good in the world.

Conclusion

The recovery of these disciplines in the modern Church, encouraged by spiritually mature preachers, is one of the greatest needs of post-modern times. Without sacrificial and joyful giving, the global enterprise and doing good to all men is precluded. Without a willingness of the saints to set aside time in fasting to focus on the great needs in the Kingdom and the renewal of the soul and the battle against sin, the Church will lack the depth of commitment and the vision of eternity. Without a growing deepening of the spirit that only comes through meditation on God and His Word, the Church will be shallow in its roots and superficial in its spirituality.

The grave concerns in the churches, the peril of souls, the battles to be fought, and the hard decisions to be made are plenty enough reasons for the spiritually minded preacher to quietly devote himself in purposeful giving, fasting, and meditation.

Choose to Claim the Gifts of God in Ministry

The minister is often looked to as a model in the areas of piety, Bible knowledge, servant skills, moral living, and family development. His skilled leadership in serving is crucial to the growth and expansion of a local church. Key to his fruitfulness is the discovery, development, and employment of his own God-given, ministry gifts.

The biblical imperative for the use of ministry gifts has long been overlooked. Its reality explains why the early Church exploded in expansion and inner growth. Evangelism, teaching, ministry, stewardship, and shepherding were fundamental activities of the early churches. Underlying each activity was a God-given empowerment: ministry giftedness. The modern Church will be transformed when its ministers lead in identifying, developing, and employing the same God-given ministry gifts. The transformation will be as dramatic as fire was in transforming civilizations. It is breathtaking to consider what a small number of believers could do if each discovered the marvelous, ministry giftedness from the Lord. Literally, the Church would be set on fire!

Greater numbers of the members would be starting new ministries.

Greater distinction would be seen between right and wrong.

There would be a quintupling of people taught and converted.

More people would be nurturing others.

More helpers would be ready for every good work.

More skilled, practical teachers would instruct the members.

There would be greater depth in Bible studies.

There would be an increased number of benefactors.

Ministries would be more efficiently organized and administered.

Greater numbers of trained people would be reaching out to the needy.

There would be more people available to lead in the global conquest.

The Biblical Basis for Ministry Giftedness

The Apostles taught early Christians to recognize their rich giftedness and to use their ministry gifts in serving the Lord. Paul wrote the following to the Romans:

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness (Romans 12:6–8, NASV).

This statement begins with the affirmation of giftedness. The word “since” declares the fact of giftedness. There is a multiplicity of different gifts that gives depth and richness to our ministries. The source of the gifts is by the grace of God. Gifts are not derived by superior intelligence, more diligence, or by the chance of the draw. They come from God according to His sovereign choice. This fact precludes arrogance over one’s giftedness or jealousy of another’s array of gifts. Each gift is an assignment from God that calls on its recipient to responsibly develop and exercise it. Each gift is to be exercised according to its purpose and according to the need to be served. In the listing to the Romans, Paul noted seven ministry gifts:

- **Prophecy** is “forth telling” more often than it is “foretelling.” It is speaking or writing the Word of God with authority. It is confrontational in its nature. It is proclamation, usually in a public setting. It speaks with contrasting language, sharply distinguishing the issues in discussion. It is urgent. It is distinct in nature and tone

from counseling, comforting, and mentoring. It is to be done “... according to the proportion of faith” (Romans 12:6, KJV). The prophetic person is to speak within the limits of his studied convictions or limit his speaking to the boundaries of revealed truth. In either case, restraint, carefulness, and integrity are conditions of his prophetic declarations. With training the minister with this ministry gift is particularly strong in public proclamation, sharply defining the truth against a background of darkness and calling the erring to repentance.

- **Service** is the search and discovery of needs to be met, people to be helped, and things to be done. The humble spirit of denying self to make a difference for others is at the heart of this gift. This gift thrives in a preacher who has no need for recognition or public display but who rejoices in something of value being done to bless others. Manual skills, physical energies, and community interests become avenues of spiritual benefit to others.
- **Teaching** is opening doors of knowledge to willing students. From one’s own studies, a gifted teacher finds purpose and value, as well as delight, in helping another in his journey of knowledge. A teacher-rich minister has a passion for study and learning and cannot wait for the opportunity to share the fruit of his study with others.
- **Exhortation** includes teaching, but takes a step further by encouraging a person to act on his new knowledge. Teaching becomes valuable when the foundations of facts are translated into practical, life applications and the hearer is urged to become a “*doer*” of the Word (cf. James 1:23–25). A preacher with this gift is likely to be an inspirational speaker, an effective seminar leader, or a welcomed mentor.
- **Giving** with liberality is acting beyond a sense of duty or as an act of obedience. There is a responsibility in giving monetarily that every Christian bears. The gifted giver finds a mission in giving, a life purpose, a particular delight, and a sense of being driven to find new,

extraordinary ways to bless the lives of others. The gift of giving is not based on being wealthy or able to give from a superfluous overflow. In poverty, one could be a gifted giver from the little that is possessed as the widow giving her mite (cf. Mark 12:42). A preacher with the gift of giving is prompt in seeing needs and sharing what he has with others.

- **Leading** is providing direction, assembling resources, removing obstacles, and providing safe environments for growth and service. To be effective the leadership must be constant, diligent, well informed, and purposeful. The gift of leadership thrives best in a life devoted to spiritual growth, fervent worship, moral living, and humble service. A preacher with this gift as one of his primary ministry gifts will be particularly strong in visionary planning, organization, and administration.
- **Mercy** giving is being drawn to the suffering, to circumstances or to the needs of others, putting oneself in their place and feeling their pain. A mature mercy giver is non-judgmental. He can distinguish between acceptance of a person or a situation and approval of what he sees. His acceptance does not equal or require approval. Acceptance is understanding and a willingness to help, despite the merit of a person. A preacher rich in mercy giving finds it easier and more authentic to reach out to those whose sins and bad choices have broken or shamed them.

Paul adds three different gifts to the seven gifts on the Roman's list in his letter to the Ephesians:

*It was he [Christ] who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **pastors** and **teachers**, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13).*

While there is a charismatic aspect to the apostolic and prophetic gifts, the practical and functional aspects are featured in this passage, along with pastors/shepherds, teachers, and evangelists.

- An **Apostle**, as the word indicates, is first one who is sent on a mission with authority to act on behalf of another. He speaks with the authority of the sender. His mission is defined, deliberate, and purposeful. Thus defined, every preacher is authorized with a mission to preach in all times and circumstances. Likely, our modern day missionary most fully fits this apostolic description.
- A **Shepherd** or “**pastor**” is one who cares for, sustains, and protects the flock given to his charge. The gift of shepherding includes fostering a nurturing spirit, gaining a knowledge of the needs of the flock, gaining a grasp on the sustaining resources, and developing the protective courage to keep the flock safe. While every Elder of the church should have this gift as a primary gift, a preacher with this gift will be active in a ministry of nurturing, sustaining, and protecting the church with his teaching, vigilance, and involvement with members.
- An **Evangelist** is one whose life and ministry is centered in telling every person possible the Good News about the salvation that is freely given in Jesus Christ. While every Christian is a beggar telling other beggars where to find food, the gifted evangelist has a burning passion to search out the lost. He easily can start a conversation that quickly leads to his evangelistic purpose. To him, a person is either lost or saved, with no shades in between. He encourages the lost to be saved and, with the same fervor, encourages the saved to stay saved.

The gifted preacher is both effective in his serving and is eager to urge other believers to understand God’s promises in respect to the ministry gifts God empowers. He knows how these gifts enhance their service. Consult other “gift” passages in 1 Peter 4 and 1 Corinthians 12.

Giftedness Begins With Attitude

The beginning place for understanding one's giftedness is to define and embrace the servant attitude. Attitude is defined as one's mindset or one's response to a person or situation. It speaks of one's position, vantage point, or how he views things or persons. Attitude is derived from one's values. One may treat another with kindness and care, even a difficult person, because he values all for whom Christ died. A believer with a servant attitude (mindset, response, position) is different than one who expects to be served, who demands special treatment. All believers are potentially gifted but not all have matured in their servant attitude. A preacher may have developed his ministry gifts to a high degree but have an antagonistic, hurtful attitude.

- **Claiming an Attitude from the Sermon on the Mount.** Jesus drew a portrait of a mature servant in Matthew 5:1–8 in the eight beatitudes. The following questions come out of the beatitudes:
 - ▶ Would I describe my life as simple and uncluttered?
 - ▶ Am I easily touched by the defeats and pains of others?
 - ▶ Do I complete commitments in an uncomplaining way?
 - ▶ Is being right with God more important to me than life itself?
 - ▶ Are building and strengthening relationships at the center of my service?
 - ▶ Do I drive away any thought or concept that would hinder me in seeing God?
 - ▶ Am I passionate in helping people become whole, well balanced?
 - ▶ Are my convictions strong enough to carry me through conflict?
- **Claiming an Attitude from Kingdom Principles.** A servant attitude thrives when the following principles are chosen as guideposts:
 - ▶ Jesus, though soon to be appointed King of kings, came to serve (cf. Matthew 21:17–28).

- ▶ The highest ranks in the house of God are for those who serve (cf. Matthew 23:11; Mark 9:35).
- ▶ Servanthood combines faithfulness and goodness (cf. Matthew 25:21–23).
- ▶ Forgiveness and servanthood are inseparable (cf. Matthew 18:23–32).
- ▶ A true servant of Jesus the Lord does not expect better treatment than his Lord received (cf. John 15:18–20).
- ▶ Lowering oneself in service to one generally thought to be a less worthy person is characteristic of a Christian servant (cf. John 13:13–17).

- **Claiming an Attitude from Apostolic Testimony.**

A servant attitude, modeled after Jesus, is cited as the choice of the gifted servant as Paul instructed in Philippians 2:3–7:

- ▶ *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,*
- ▶ *but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*
- ▶ *Each of you should look not only to your own interests,*
but also to the interests of others.
- ▶ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*
Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality
with God something to be grasped, but made himself
nothing,
- ▶ *taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human*
likeness.

- **Claiming an Attitude of Apostolic Testimony in 1 Corinthians 13.**

Putting the statements of the great chapter of love in the first person provides a rich source for fostering a servant attitude:

I am patient and kind. I do not envy or boast. I am not rude, self-seeking, or easily angered. I keep no record of wrongs. I do not delight in evil, but, I rejoice in the truth. I always protect, trust, hope, and persevere.

A preacher's credibility opens doors. He can best influence people to trust him by his loving attitude. He will

not only be able to serve more effectively with love at the core of his heart and ministry, but he will have increasing opportunities to serve fruitfully.

Giftedness Takes Form in the Discovery of a Motivating Passion

A second part of understanding ministry giftedness is to identify one's ministry passion. The motivating passion that drives a gifted person can be determined by defining one's deepest concerns. Every gifted person is drawn, motivated by a kind of person or a ministry circumstance. While all of God's works are good, one feels more deeply about some opportunities more than others. That feeling is of God. God authored it to help one be more enthusiastic and committed in his ministry involvement. A preacher cannot adequately take advantage of every opportunity to serve. God helps in stirring a concern for select areas of ministry or kinds of people. Perhaps the following questions could help one focus on a ministry passion:

- With all restrictions removed (age, health, distance, and other things) what would you most want to do in serving others?
- If you could determine how one-half of your regular contribution was used, where or in what activity would it be spent?
- If you were at the end of your life:
 - ▶ What would be the servant results in which you would find most fulfillment?
 - ▶ What are the servant activities in which you wish you had been more involved?
- How would your friends describe your deepest concerns?
- What do you most enjoy doing for others?
- What kind of people would you most like to help?

- What situations most concern you?

From one's answers some similarities, patterns, or themes should emerge such as ages, kinds of people, situations, needs, or strong feelings. Motivating passions become clearer as one responds to a flow of ministry opportunities.

Giftedness Blossoms Upon Discovery of the Ministry Potential

A third part of understanding one's ministry profile is identifying the major areas of one's gift potential. While most preachers will respond to any and all of the ministry opportunities and develop multiple skills, God has gifted each one for exceptional fruitfulness in specific areas of ministry. In a preacher's area of primary giftedness he will learn better, be more fruitful, stay more committed, and be more fulfilled. Each preacher will be gifted in three-to-four primary areas, and three or so in his secondary, and tertiary areas of ministry giftedness. He will learn skills in most areas and even serve in multiple areas, but he will do best in the specific areas God has assigned him for his major areas of service. It is his major responsibility to identify, develop, and employ his primary ministry gifts.

A general approach to discovering one's giftedness potential is to daringly engage in a wide ranging, variety of ministries. Along the way, one should determine which ministries were the most enjoyable. The affirmations of others will help in determining which ministries were done with greater authenticity and fruitfulness. One should read extensively about gifted people and their rich ministries and sense which one is most inviting. In the end, a number of ministry profiles have been developed to focus one's attention to specific areas of ministry giftedness. One should be discerning. Some profiles focus on charismatic gifts that should be limited to the apostolic era. Others focus on ministry tasks. Only a few focus on the biblical gifts designated in Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and other passages.

Conclusion

A ministry gift is God's Kingdom assignment. A faithful steward of God's gifts will determine his primary areas of ministry giftedness and give priority time and resources to mastering those areas. God wants every preacher to be both faithful and fruitful and a happy, fulfilled servant. Serving with a Christ-like attitude, focused on his motivating passions, and keenly informed about his primary areas of giftedness, the man of God will be all that God designed him to be in his informed choices of ministry.

Choose to Transform Conflict into Unity

By constitution and purpose, the church of Christ was founded to be a community of peacemakers. Though human conflict within and conflict with the world without are inevitable, peace is the ultimate goal. From the beginning moment of conflict, a faith-based reconciliation is the goal. Spiritually driven preachers must be the catalysts, the models, and the skilled leaders in conflict resolution.

A Christian Vision of Peacemaking

The prophetic picture of the Christian era was the transformation of antagonism and conflict into peace and participation:

*. . . they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall
not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they
learn war anymore . . . The infant will play near the
hold of the cobra, and the young child put his hand
into the viper's nest (Isaiah 2:4, 11:8).*

The prophet amplifies the picture of reconciliation as a victory over conflict.

The New Testament picture of the Church as a community of peacemakers is breathtaking in the light of what happens all too often:

*Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God
(Matthew 5:9).*

*. . . I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you
have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be*

patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1–3).

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness (James 3:17–18).

Conflict Is Inevitable

While conflict resolution and reconciliation are the goals in every dispute, conflict is to be expected at times, even among the sons of God.

- Until purposeful communication can take place there may be diversities in the facts of a case.
- Between any two people there may well be diversities of giftedness that lend themselves to different emphasis on what is most important in ministry.
- In most cases there will be diversities in background, training, values, and orientation.
- Frequently, the communication skills will often be different or lacking.
- In religious discussions the possible diversities in fundamental beliefs will be the source of contrast and conflict.
- The diversity of goals and desired outcomes are often at the root of conflict.
- The lack of a developed conflict management strategy or environment provides the context of much conflict.
- Contrasting and ineffective conflict resolution styles hinder peacemaking.

Conflict inevitably happens when people are competing for the same space or resources or their well-being is being threatened with the loss of place, resources, or relations. The reality of conflict should not be surprising to anyone. The failure to resolve and reconcile conflict should be surprising to all Christians.

Pathways to Peacemaking

There are some clear steps to becoming an effective peacemaker. Every preacher must master these or other similar steps to develop unity and harmony in the church.

- **Step One: Develop a Conflict Management Environment.** Agitation, sniping, suspicion, jealousies, unresolved resentments, and lack of candor will doom any peacemaking effort. A church must be brought to understand five basic environmental principles.
- ▶ **Understand the mind of God.** The Father does not want His children to fight. He wants His causes to be forward-going and not to be detoured by a church fight or valuable resources of time, people, and finances to be squandered in foolish disputes. He does not want the Church, his Bride, to be maligned in a wicked world.
- ▶ **Understand the nature of humanity.** Humans are born self-centered, self-consumed, and will stay that way unless influenced by the Gospel to become unselfish, caring, sacrificial servants to all. Most conflicts are about “me, myself and I.” Looking out for the proverbial number one stands close to the beginning of most conflicts.
- ▶ **Understand the reality of conflict.** With so many competing interests, differences in the understanding of the facts, and diversities in skills, styles, and values, there should be no surprise that conflicts will arise.
- ▶ **Understand the basic mindset of Christ.** Jesus, on the mountain, described the virtues of mature citizens of the Kingdom: humility, compassion, commitment, merciful, hunger for righteousness, purity of heart, peacemaking, and being courageous for God. Unresolved conflict is diametrically opposed to the mindset of Christ and His longing for His people.
- ▶ **Understand the power of affirmation.** Speaking well of one another, encouraging each other, affirming what is right in each other, believing the best of one another, seeing the potential in each other all develop an environment where eventual conflict can be managed well.

- **Step Two: Develop Communication Skills.** Unskilled communicators will at best miss opportunities to manage a conflict effectively. At the worst, an unskilled communicator will worsen the inflamed situations like pouring gas on the fire. There are seven considerations in developing effective communication skills:
 - ▶ In every conflict each disputant has an **objective**. It is well at the beginning of a discussion to identify the goal each one wants to achieve. Knowing one's goal can help frame the discussion and, in many cases, efforts can be made to help fulfill each goal.
 - ▶ In every conflict a **healthy cycle** should be pursued. A message must be accurately communicated containing all of the necessary facts, feelings, and needs. It must be accurately received, processed, and understood. The sent and received messages must be effectively acknowledged and an affirmative response must be accurately returned to the sender. This cycle can be made more effective by listening attentively, asking informational questions to aid understanding, verifying understanding, looking for options of resolution, prioritizing what is most important to both sides, affirming the desire for resolution and unity, confronting with grace if necessary, and supporting the conclusion.
 - ▶ In every conflict the full range of the verbal, tonal and corporal **vehicles of communication** should be used as needed. It would be well to remember:
 - **Verbal communication** conveys about 7% of the message.
 - **Tone** of the words convey 38%.
 - **Body language** conveys a full 55%.

Words should be judiciously chosen but how they sound and the expression and movements of the body drive them deeply into the perception of the communication partner.

- ▶ An important communication skill is the ability to recognize how far the comfort zone of another extends

and to honor the boundaries. The invasion of one's comfort zone, either physically, verbally, or perceptionally, further threatens the exchange.

- ▶ Going into a conflict situation, one needs to understand where he is on the mind-ladder of the other person. People's reception of what is communicated to them has much to do with the credence, the acceptance, and the approval of the other. Age differences, gender differences, racial differences, political differences, physical differences, and the like, impact initial perceptions. One has to be aware of the position he may hold and the impact on the other in dispute. A negative position perception may be overcome and minimized, but unheeded it might adversely influence the on-going communication.
- ▶ Perhaps, the neuro-linguistic skills are too exotic to some, but they are worth considering. Studies have indicated that people have a mental floor plan that causes them to be more open to communication that comes to them visually, verbally, by feeling, or by analytic reasoning. Once it is determined what one's primary neuro-linguistic skill is, the communicator speaks that language to insure greater reception and comprehension. There are optical indicators:

- **Visual** communicators look up to the right or left while speaking.
- **Verbal** or **auditory** communicators look to the right or left.
- **Feeling** communicators look down to the right or left.
- **Analytical** communicators look straight forward.

There are verbal indicators: They each use verbal language consistent to their neuro-linguistic orientation:

- ▶ The **visual** communicator says, "I see . . It looks like . . . Let's focus . . ."
- ▶ The **auditory** communicator will say, "I hear you . . . Sounds to me . . . Tell me again . . ."
- ▶ The **feeling** communicator will say, "I feel . . I sense . . you touched me . . it feels right."

Solid Principles of Communication

Without a doubt, the best list of communication skills is found in Ephesians 4:15, 25–32. Fifteen solid principles of communication are listed with the stamp of inspiration on them:

- . . . speaking the **truth in love**, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.
- Therefore each of you must **put off falsehood** and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.
- “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.
- He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.
- Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- Get rid of all bitterness
 - . . . rage
 - . . . anger
 - . . . brawling
 - . . . slander
 - . . . along with every form of malice.
- Be kind
 - . . . compassionate to one another,
 - forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- **Step Three: Develop Effective Styles of Conflict Management.** Somewhere in his life every person acquires a style of confronting conflict. Most styles are inefficient.
 - ▶ **Dominant Style.** Some are so strongly goal oriented, insistent on getting what they want or think is best, that they will push past the thinking, feelings, or needs of others. Goal achievement is more important to them than

relationships that might be strained in the process. Their dominance may be for a perfectly good cause but their style is to overwhelm any resistance. They may use skilled arguments, an array of well ordered facts, and marshal sizable support from authorities. The bottom line is they are determined to get everyone to comply to their views.

- ▶ **Avoidance Style.** Some refuse to insist on their views being adopted or will hardly state them if it is going to result in a conflict. They run from conflict. They are willing to settle for less to avoid any dispute. This avoidance is not from humility or a spirit of servanthood, but from a low goal orientation and an unhealthy and excessive regard for maintaining a relationship.
- ▶ **Accommodation Style.** Some will state their views and desires but will relinquish them easily to maintain a relationship. Achieving a goal they may even feel strongly about is second to maintaining a relationship.
- ▶ **Compromise Style.** Some feel determined to achieve a goal but are willing to negotiate and will settle for getting some of what they want. They are willing to let others get something of what they want if a workable solution can be found and all are reasonably satisfied. They are content with lowering their desired outcomes and knowing that others are not fully satisfied for the sake of moving forward.
- ▶ **Collaborative Style.** Some feel that through open and skilled communication that productive and shared solutions can be found and goals and relationships can be honored and kept intact. Of the five styles, a shared, collaboration of parties is the most effective and most desired among Christian communicators.
- **Step Four: Develop a Principled Approach to Conflict** (candor, courage, care, covenant). When the four C's are present in any conflict situation, there is hope for a positive resolution. The collaborative style above employs these four principles as the backbone of conflict management.
- ▶ **Candor.** Truth stands at the center of any successful conflict resolution. No successful communication can

occur with any mingling of dishonesty with truth. Truth in fact, truth in motive, truth in desired outcome, and truth in the treatment of others are essentials to freeing up the discussion to become productive (cf. John 8:32). Every participant in a conflict must earnestly want truth to prevail over personal losses, personal views, personal agendas, personally desired outcomes, or personal needs.

- ▶ **Courage.** Telling the truth sometimes hurts. It could mean yielding to others. It could mean admitting wrong. It could mean abandoning desired outcomes. It could mean humbly joining others in things once opposed. Telling the truth could mean needing to tell a dear friend, as Nathan did David (cf. 2 Samuel 12), that he is wrong. It could mean running the risk of losing a friend, a job, or a business deal. Silence sometimes is golden, but it is sometimes yellow, lacking courage. The greater threats to the well being of a nation, a church, or an individual are men who know the truth but remain silent for lack of courage.
- ▶ **Care.** Courageously telling the truth without caring about those affected is lacking a needed quality. "*Speaking the truth in love . . .*" (Ephesians 4:15) is what makes any communication effort most effective. Love tempers the tone, the choice of words, the expressions of the body (eyes, hand, position, and so forth), the motives, the end results, and the follow-up discussions and affirmations. Love causes greater sensitivity to others, less harshness in judgment, greater intent to understand, and more readiness to see good in others.
- ▶ **Covenant.** When there is a bonded relationship, based on honored promises, confrontation is different. There is no desire to hurt, to diminish, or defeat another. The best preparation for conflict management is to build covenant relationships in times of peace. Mutual covenants not only preclude most conflict but give strength when conflicts intrude between friends.
- **Step Five: Promote the Growth of Christian Virtue.** The greater the maturity of the people in conflict, the greater will be the early resolution of the conflict. Immature people are limited in how quickly and surely

they can work through problems. There are nine areas of needed Christian growth:

- ▶ **Serenity in stressful times.** How one copes with stress greatly impacts remaining stable and responsible in a time of stress or crisis. Agitated people keep a church, a marriage, a friendship, or a working partnership walking on egg shells. Usually stressed out people suffer from lack of trust, either in the people in their life, in the world around them, or in God. Learning to trust in God and freeing oneself from suspicion is the beginning of stress management.
- ▶ **Hope in anxious situations.** Anxiety is feeling out of control. It is caused by doubt, fear, loneliness, and guilt. It is important that a person learn how to transform doubt into certainty, fear into courage, loneliness into companionship, and guilt into freedom.
- ▶ **Generosity in the face of demands.** By envisioning who others can become in Christ, the preacher will find enjoyment in freely loving, affirming, and praising them. He will see their giftedness and potential. This is generosity, when one chooses to love, encourage, and forgive others their faults.
- ▶ **Openness in relationships.** Transparency in relationships is essential to both loving and being loved, helping others and receiving needed help. A readiness to be open in appropriately expressing feelings, in sharing needs, in confessing failures, and in encouraging others make conflict resolution a hopeful effort.
- ▶ **Sensitivity in relating to others.** Feeling what the other feels and putting oneself where the other is will help one understand, identify, and be willing to respond to others. While not always being able to approve of another's actions, one can more easily understand them and appropriately provide needed assistance.
- ▶ **Unselfishness in decision making.** Objective people are able to dispassionately look at an issue outside of their own feelings, relationships, and needs and make an unselfish decision. They are not a part of the "me too" generation. They honestly do not think of themselves first. They truly have a servant spirit that prefers others higher than themselves. They genuinely can look to the

interests and needs of others without selfishness clouding their view.

- ▶ **Courage in performance.** Courage is based on a strong sense of Bible based, self-worth, a sense of bonded belonging, a sense of personal competency, and a guiding sense of purpose. This virtue causes one to be decisive, to be persuasive, and to confidently step out and lead.
- ▶ **Humility in forgiving others.** Forgiveness, as required and modeled by the Savior, begins with anger management and the ability to heal from hurt. It is promoted by the accomplished ability to verify hurts, put them context, and the decision to forgive.
- ▶ **Self-discipline in commitment.** Impulsiveness and reaction-planning give way to self-control and thoughtful, long term planning. A purpose driven life results. Responsibility and accountability are among the outcomes of self-discipline.

These nine virtues will increasingly enable a person to confront conflict and bring about a peaceful resolution. Reconciliation and meaningful fruits will result.

- **Step Six: Develop a Strategy of Conflict Management.** An effective strategy provides a map for a controlled discussion. No strategy puts emotions in charge. There are four basic steps in developing an effective, conflict management strategy.
- ▶ **Examine controlling assumptions.** When the heat of a discussion permits, it would be helpful to ask the other disputants and share with them the assumptions that control the discussion. Sometimes assumptions can be clarified and the conflict is over. Many, if not most, conflicts arise from misinformation, failed communication, and pre-existent feelings.
- ▶ **Identify desired results.** What some people ultimately want may not have anything to do with the topic in conflict. Many arguments can be bypassed by understanding what the person most desires. It may be just to be heard. It may be a desire for more information. It may be for more recognition. Genuinely searching to

understand desired outcomes confirms one's right intent to others.

- ▶ **State the essential issues.** It is useful to search for an agreement of what are the essential reasons for the conflict. Too many conflicts are fought at different levels as both sides are addressing different issues at the same time. Like two freight trains that pass each other in the dark of night nothing is communicated and nothing is resolved.
- ▶ **Identify creative alternatives.** Some would call this a compromise, but it is more. It is teaming together in finding solutions that meet the needs of the situation, solutions that confirm the values of both, solutions that promote the purposes of the Church, and solutions that honor God.
- **Step Seven: Develop a Liturgy for Conflict Management.** Humanity must have a frequent and regular liturgical access to the heart of God to make conflict management an experience that is creative and fruitful. Using the pathways of prayer, noted earlier in this study, one needs to be regularly approaching God in adoration, praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, commitment and communion (meditation). It is amazing how a preacher can direct these same principles to building a conflict-proof relationship with other members. He needs to be really looking for what is beautiful in everyone. He needs to regularly be commanding each person for valid accomplishments and generously be expressing gratitude for every action. He needs to humbly be acknowledging any hurt or disappointment he may have caused and be praying on behalf of every member. He needs to be making commitments on behalf of the church and be meditating on the grace of God and the joy of fellowship in the church. Then, conflict will come less often and resolution more quickly.

Conclusion

Well managed conflict accelerates the growth of the Church. It brings people together for united, fruit-bearing. It brings out the best in people. It is one of the best weapons against the destructive designs of the Evil One. It promotes

the unity of the Church and contributes mightily to the global mission of the Church, to the growth in holiness, and to the glory of God. It is priceless! It is well worth every effort to master the art and science of managing conflict. Patterns of ingrained and habitual behavior can and must be changed if they continually promote ineffective conflict management.

Choose to Grasp the Vision of God

Seeing a Glorious Church in a Lost World

The vision of God is that His holy people, the Church, be a beacon of light in a dark world leading truth loving people to salvation in His son. Wherever and however a preacher serves he must serve with the global vision of God. To be faithful to that vision he must be an avid student and practitioner of the Great Commission. It is the marching order of the Commander of a global quest for souls.

The Evangelist of Galilee spoke volumes in every sentence of his earthly ministry. Whatever he said was meant to be understood as a message of importance. One of the most far-reaching messages was in his farewell address to the Apostles containing His vision of the Kingdom enterprise. For three years these men had been trained in the missionary school of Jesus. In this last address they had to wrap their minds around some age-lasting, monumental truths. The Apostles were shortly empowered by the Holy Spirit and began to translate Jesus' towering command into history as recorded in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts tells us that they went everywhere preaching the Word, eventually preaching to every person alive (cf. Colossians 1:23). They understood and preached the full content of the Gospel. They went to the full extent of the commission, and they were faithful to the prescribed intent of the mission.

The Great Commission Summarized

- **The Commission Is Validated and Christ Centered.** Jesus is the reason and the overpowering subject of the commission.

- **The Commission Is a Mirror of the Nature of the Church and Declares its Purpose.** When the Commission is obeyed, the Church stays on task and fulfills its reason for existence.
- **The Commission Is Global and Exhaustive.** There should be no place and no person left behind unvisited with the Gospel message.
- **The Commission Is Message Laden and Redemptive.** It generates rich works of generosity and human assistance, but it is fundamentally about a message to redeem a lost humanity.
- **The Commission Is Integrative and Relational.** It embraces all people, gathering them into a relationship with Deity, and hence, with one another.
- **The Commission Is Believer Focused and Content Rich.** Its purpose and completion is about responsible people brought into a saved relationship and matured with the richness of the continuing message of Jesus.
- **The Commission Is Empowering and Age Long.** As it derives its authority from Jesus it is energized by His purpose, power, and presence until He concludes the Commission by His second coming.
- **The Commission Is a Forecast and Motivation in the History of the Church.** Global evangelism, making disciples, ministry training, and church planting have always sprung from an understanding and commitment to fulfilling the Commission.

The inspiration and setting for Gospel preaching are in these charter statements of the Kingdom enterprise. In Matthew 28:18–20 and in companion statements in Mark 16:15–16, Luke 24:46–49, and Acts 1:8, the superlative Evangelist of Galilee, the ultimate Gospel Preacher, and now King of kings, sets the stage for the place and value of soul winning. He placed before the apostolic leaders a commission that inscribed His signature on the Christian

movement in all succeeding centuries being led by dedicated spokesmen (cf. Romans 10:13–15). By a faithful practice of the Commission, the Church grows in numbers. That growth is enhanced in a well informed faith, in soundness of doctrine and morality, in fraternal relations and unity of purpose, and in joyful worship and life. Winning souls is infectious, exciting, healthy, and gives a convincing reason to exist, to dare, and to do what is right.

The Reason of the Great Commission

The Person and Authority of Jesus

The deity of Jesus was confirmed by the fulfillment of ancient prophesies in His life, by His works and teachings and by the life He lived, by the death He suffered and by His powerful and unique resurrection from the dead. By that validation it was right that Jesus would be worthy both of being the undisputed head of His Church, appointed King of God's Kingdom, and given all authority in all realms of heaven and earth. It should be of no surprise that the Great Commission is Christocentric in His person and in His authority (cf. Matthew 28:18).

- In Christ's eternal deity, He has always shared in the sovereign authority of God (cf. John 1:1).
- By Christ's divinely arranged birth into the human lineage of David, He was made the royal heir to the Messianic Throne (cf. Matthew 1; Luke 3).
- By the resurrection, Christ's royal appointment was announced (cf. Psalms 2; Acts 13:29–30, 33; Romans 1:1–4; Ephesians 1:20–21).

By the time of Christ's coronation at God's right hand all creation knew that Jesus had been given the absolute authority over all creation. At the high summit in human history, Jesus, in the Commission, had already set His global agenda before His trained spokesmen. The Lord of the universe commissioned them to set up His throne and exercise His authority in the palaces of the kings, in the city squares across the lands, in every village, in every hut, over every mountain, across every sea, and on every island. This would require a global strategy to train evangelists, to

evangelize, to plant and grow churches which would be taught how to be obedient in following Jesus, their Lord.

The Agenda of the Great Commission

The agenda of the Commission is set in stone with three concerns: it was to be global in its execution (extent), it was to be purposeful in its mission (intent), and it was to be message laden (content). For then and for all time, these three concerns were to give direction, purpose, and impulse to the Commission. Gospel proclaimers in all cultures must be dedicated to the implications of the Commission agenda and equipped in carrying out each aspect.

● The Extent of the Great Commission

The extent of the Commission is defined graphically in the varied accounts of the Commission.

- ▶ Matthew's account: "***all nations***" (Matthew 28:19). It would be a large enough task to reach the limited population of the first century. It is a daunting task to even think of the nearly 200 large and small nations and principalities today on a map that is ever changing. However, "*nations*" is translated from the Greek word ***ethne*** which designates ethnic groups. This multiplies the extent and complexity of our global task. An ethnic group is set apart by its language, its dress, its history, its purposes, its culture, and its place in society. In one nation there may be multiple ethnic groups distinguishing themselves from other distinct groups in the nation. Ethnic groups would include Gypsies in European nations, the refugees collecting in gateway cities of the world, specific professions and trades, movements and deliberate causes, even religious denominations, prison populations, and immoral change agents in society. All have their own distinguishing language, dress, history, purposes, culture, and place in society. Planning and learning how to penetrate each ethnic group, gathering resources to preach the Word among each people, and planting churches in every place among them is an extension of the Commission.

Spokesmen must be trained for each ethnic group or we will scarcely take the King to be enthroned among them.

- ▶ Mark's account: "***into all the world***" (Mark 16:15). Mark remembers the Lord making this a cosmic mission, using the Greek word ***kosmos*** to talk about preaching in every place of organized life. Wherever these ethnic groups live must be placed on the mission map of Christian strategists. To the big cities we go, even as we go to every small city and rural area. Wherever someone lives in the remote jungles and rain forests, wherever men build their family huts and plow their fields, wherever men languish in hospitals and in prisons, or achieve their successes in universities and in businesses, these are places of the ***cosmos*** that Jesus foresaw. While receptivity is a factor in mission planning, un-evangelized places take precedence in decision making. Un-climbed mountains must be scaled by the courageous if people are to be found atop the mountain because every un-evangelized place must be reached with the Gospel.
- ▶ Mark's account: "***every creature***" (Mark 16:15, KJV). Mark presses the global case to its very edges. Every one that breathes is a specific object of the Commission. Many, perhaps even most, will reject the Gospel, but none is to be denied the Gospel. Their living and dying without the Gospel must be by their choice after we have fulfilled the Commission in giving them a fair hearing of the beauty of Jesus, the ugliness of sin, and the joys of salvation. Loving their souls and straining every resource to save them draw their motives from the cross that stands at the summit of the Commission. Our humanity must not get so small and narrow that color of skin, wretchedness of life, nationality, or cost and difficulty in reaching them are prohibitive factors. The "***every creature***" of the Commission is both emphatic and inclusive of all and each living person, in every ethnic group, and in every place.
- ▶ Luke's accounts in the Gospel and in Acts emphasize the progression of the Commission until the job is finished, from its beginning in Jerusalem until the Gospel has been preached to every creature to the ends of the earth. It is a mission that remains unfulfilled until the last place where

people live has been visited by the people of the King and the last of the living hears the Good News.

There must be a compelling reason to dedicate so many resources, at such great sacrifice and to so many nations and peoples. That reason is seen in the clearly stated intent of the Commission.

- **The Intent of the Great Commission**

The clearest intent of the Commission is found in the one imperative found in the Matthew statement: “***make disciples***” (Matthew 28:19). While much good will be done to confront human need by those who work for the King, the main mission is to draw all men unto the Savior and to persuade them to follow the King. Making disciples takes precedence over all other purposes of the local church. It becomes the combined, major thrust of the universal Church. A recognition and honoring of the authority of Jesus constrains every congregational and para-church organization to set its priorities on speeding the Gospel message to every individual around the globe. Understanding the Kingdom intent is to educate the believers in a concern for the lost, assemble the necessary resources, train an adequate number of spokesmen and workers, and send them adequately supported to every open nation of the world. It would demand an ongoing research into the best ways to make disciples in every culture and to study how to enter resistant nations. There are four functions in the Commission Scriptures to carry out that imperative mission intent.

- ▶ **Going:** Jesus said literally, using a Greek, aorist participle, “*having gone*” or “*as you are going*.” Considering the global extent of the Commission, it is self-evident that Christianity was to be a going religion of a coming Savior. The model of Christ’s coming to earth and the teachings of Jesus of “*other sheep*” is the background of the earliest understanding and practice of the Commission. There was no need to command the Apostles to go. That would be in the fabric of their souls. That was already seen in their missionary training. The

world was aflame with the powers of hell and souls were in jeopardy of not knowing soon enough of the Kingdom privileges. Regardless of the financial costs, difficulties to be faced in contrasting cultures, conveniences lost, families left behind, and threats to life, they understood that the Commission would be unfulfilled and disobeyed if they stayed in Jerusalem.

- ▶ **Preaching.** Mark cites “*preach the gospel*” (Mark 16:15, KJV) as a vital function of making disciples. Being informed, being convinced, being convicted, and being persuaded to repent and obey are the dynamics of the preaching that calls people to think like Jesus, feel like Jesus, and live like Jesus. The Great Commission Church in the first century and in every century hence must be a powerfully preaching Church. A focus on any other function to plant and grow a church will inevitably result in something less than a church whose head is Christ.
- ▶ **Baptizing.** “... *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .*” to bring believers into a relationship with Deity. The participle “*baptizing*” puts the function of baptism in focus as a vital part of the intent to make disciples. Discipling is incomplete without gaining a relationship with the Godhead, begun with learning of Jesus and believing in His Lordship but completed in baptism (cf. Mark 16:16). The function of baptism is clearly stated. The form of baptism, except for the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*, is not illustrated in the Commission as it is elsewhere in the Gospels and Acts (cf. Baptism of Jesus, Matthew 3:13–16; Acts 8:35–39; Romans 6:3–4; Colossians 2:12).
- ▶ **Teaching.** “... *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*” so that the full body of the teachings of Jesus to the Apostles can be understood and practiced by every disciple. The resultant churches were to be educated assemblies of ever learning disciples, capable of acting in obedience out of their own, studied convictions. Uneducated or wrongly educated, and even superficially educated groups, fall short of the intent of the Commission. The intent of making disciples must not be confused with or replaced by other good works which

have their own place in being a “light” in the world (cf. Matthew 5:14). Jesus went about doing good (cf. Acts 10:38) and Paul urges believers to “... do good unto all men . . .” (cf. Galatians 6:10). Responding to human need is woven into the fabric of our faith. James describes certain good endeavors to be the essence of the Christian religion (cf. James 1:27). The dominant intent of Kingdom people stands out in the commission: making disciples through an incessant pursuit of the lost in every place, preaching to them the Good News message, bringing them into a relationship with the Godhead by a believer’s baptism, and continually and systematically instructing and equipping them in ministry.

- **The Content of the Great Commission**

The Commission is focused in an objective message. A message about a person. It calls upon the hearer to believe specific things about the person and act in prescribed ways. Both message and response are intended to be reproducible and universal in all times regardless of the person, culture, language, or nation. It is called a message of “*good news*” (Mark 16:15) bringing an offer of great benefit, making it both desirable and compelling. The extraordinary nature of the Good News makes a rejection of the message a serious loss attended by a divine condemnation (cf. Mark 16:16). Those rejoicing in their own salvation and being trained as “Good News spokesmen” must be taught the urgency and importance of the message being faithfully shared with every man, everywhere.

- ▶ The content of the Commission message was anticipated in the preaching of Jesus. He spoke of being the Messiah, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the prophesied Savior, and becoming the anointed King and appointed Judge. He gave evidence from the prophets that He was the awaited one from ancient times. He confirmed those claims by His miracles, His life, and His teachings. God authenticated His claims by the resurrection. He called upon people to believe in Jesus Christ as such and become His followers joining other disciples in making

other disciples around the world. He made “*repentance and remission of sins*” (Luke 24:47) to be focal points in the Good News message that was to be proclaimed throughout the Christian age.

- ▶ The content of the Commission message followed four predictable lines:

- **First**, speakers would confirm the story of Jesus, frequently confirming the prophetic background, explaining His good works, life, and teachings, and relating His sacrificial sacrifice for the sins of the world, His burial and His resurrection.
- **Second**, they often called the hearers to a conclusion concerning the deity of Jesus, His divine authority, and the fact that He is God’s eternal plan to save sinners. There is such gladness and conviction in the Good News of knowing the facts concerning the person, the nature, and works of Jesus.
- **Third**, the core of the Good News proclaimed by all who preached was in the difference that a relationship with Jesus would make. The Good News refrain of the Commission was that forgiveness of sins would be the result of faith and obedience.
- **Fourth**, repeatedly preaching ended with some reference to the sinfulness of the people and the offer of forgiveness of sins or urging a response to result in being made right before God. Sometimes the peril of rejection was added to persuade the listeners to respond. The preaching content of the Gospel called the sinner to acknowledge and trust in Jesus as the only way that his/her sin problem could be transformed into a saved, happy and purposeful solution.

The burden of guilt and accusation, the sense of doubt and uncertainty, the constant fear and threat, and the weight of loneliness and isolation from God were more than any human could thoughtfully bear. Being enabled to be freed from such tyranny by following Jesus was GOOD NEWS that affected every day, every relationship, and gave strength in every circumstance. “I have been forgiven,” shouted every day is the Good News of the Kingdom Message, the core of

the Gospel content, that is to be shared with every person, in every place. It has been validated by the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Book of Acts is the source book on knowing the content of the Commission message. A study of the sermons from Acts illustrates the affirmation of the four stage presentation of the Gospel. Peter in his Jerusalem sermons (cf. Acts 2:14–41, 3:11–26, 5:29–32) and in his preaching to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 10:34–43, 11:1–18) featured these four preaching points, always focusing on the Good News concerning “*the remission of sins*. ” Paul followed a similar scheme of Good News preaching along the Roman roads in gateway cities (for example: Antioch of Pisidia, cf. Acts 13:16–41) and even to some extent in his defenses before Jewish and Roman officials (cf. Acts 22:1–21, 24:10–25, 26:2–29).

- **The Completion of the Great Commission**

The Commission will have been complete only when Gospel spokesmen have gone to every person in every place, have preached the Gospel in its entirety, people have believed and have obeyed in baptism and the Church has nurtured each believer in teaching all that Jesus conveyed to the Apostles. In substance, the Commission has reached its potential in every time and in every place when every saved person this side of heaven will have worked to provide the opportunity to every lost person this side of hell to hear the Gospel and obey and become a mature disciple of Jesus. Each generation of believers will have pursued other prospective disciples until there are no more potential disciples anywhere or there is no more time left in the patience of God. Jesus, the Commander, did not see the Commission as a one generation revolution to make radical but temporal changes. It was a multi-generational, world wide conquest in which every disciple was to be involved to the lengths of his/her giftedness and circumstances. It was an until “*the end of the ages*” Commission (cf. Hebrews 9:26). However long it might have taken to reach “*the end of the ages*” was how long the Church was to be urgently busy in fulfilling the Commission. And with an urgency as if Jesus might

return and close the Kingdom business before tomorrow. The passing of 2000 years does not lessen the urgency and necessity of the Commission. It lasts, with all of its treasured facts, with all of its Good News, with all of its urgent and compelling appeal, and with all of its peril if rejected.

As long as there is a ruling King in the heavens, as long as there is a faithful Church on earth, as long as there are sinners in need of Good News and as long as there is a danger of missing heaven altogether, the Commission has purpose and potential.

- **The Continuing Legacy of the Great Commission**

Two millenniums have passed but the words of Jesus are still compelling to believers and must be taught to a whole, new generation of spokesmen of the Word. Taught and obeyed!

- ▶ The Great Commission still authorizes global, all-inclusive evangelism and disciple making. No nation may be bypassed, despite the difficulties of entry or the time and problems required for sowing and harvesting, or the threats and prohibitions against preaching or the financial costs to complete the Commission. No nation is exempt as nations for which we pray, for which we prepare workmen, for which we plan a strategic advance, or for which we determine to claim it for Christ.

No ethnic group and no individual is excluded by our evangelistic plans because of an outward condition or seeming difficulty in sharing the Gospel. We understand the difficulties of the human condition, but we refuse to make a decision for any lost person by what we see or fear. We envision every group and every person as a potential disciple of Jesus. Because of the Commission we consider every person a compelling reason for intense efforts to save his/her soul so as to follow Jesus faithfully throughout all of life. We train spokesmen of the Word to have the same vision, motives, and commitments to the lost.

- ▶ The Great Commission still authorizes effective ministry training and powerful, persuasive, convincing, and

convicting Gospel proclamation. If the Gospel is to be taken to every ethnic group so that the throne in heaven will be surrounded by people from every nation, language and tribe, men must be trained in every place to reach out to people of their own culture. To be most effective the men must be trained in their own language, in their own culture, to remain and preach in their own national circumstances. Churches of one nation cannot and should not supply all of the preaching for the world when men of every nation and of every ethnic group can be effectively trained to go more quickly, to speak more convincingly, and to stay more focused on the responses of the lost. Beyond an issue of reduced financial costs, there is the urgency of going quickly to the lost, speaking to them even in the local dialects, understanding all of the cultural obstacles, and remaining long enough to complete the intent of the Commission. The most convicting messages calling for repentance and obedience to the Gospel are those best expressed in immediately understandable words and coming from a disciplined heart of understanding.

- ▶ The Great Commission still authorizes church planting and church growth in every culture. Being implicit in the Great Commission and illustrated in the Book of Acts church planting must continue to be at the forefront of the agenda of the Church of the twenty-first century. From the establishment of the first church until now churches are the focal point of God's action and the most visible evidence that Jesus is still on the throne as the Commander of the Kingdom campaigns. Churches worshiping in every language on earth, dressing and living in their own culture, but honoring and changing the content of their secular culture in the name of Jesus, give voice to the reality and vitality of the Commission.
- ▶ The Great Commission still assures faithful believers of the empowering presence of Jesus as they go about the search for lost souls on every continent. Planning and going to mission fields with the limits of our own strength raises quick and insurmountable barriers to planting healthy and fruitful churches. Recruiting workers to go as church planters based on our known resources has limited appeal. Ministry training based on

the poverty of our human resources sends men out to face the extraordinary resources of evil with the certainty of inevitable defeat. Long term commitments and fruitful ministries are not to be expected unless the empowerment of Jesus is believed to be available and tenaciously sought. Through the confirmations of studied obedience to the will of God we can know of the abiding, empowering presence of our Lord and regularly do things beyond ourselves with eternal outcomes (cf. John 10:1–15). He has promised to be with Great Commission people throughout the age of sowing and harvesting. This trust must be ingrained into the hearts of those we train and send into the world.

Conclusion

Constrained by the evidence for the deity of Jesus, consumed by the redemptive nature of the cross, and overwhelmed by the power of the resurrection, every preacher should thrill at the hearing of the global Commission. We take great courage at the diligent and passionate fulfillment in the evangelistic history of the Church made possible by the dedication of able men, faithful to the challenges of the Commission.

Choose to Be a Church Builder Glorifying the Savior of the Body

Important qualities of spiritual formation and ministry fruitfulness are the capturing of passion and the expanding skills for building churches. A passionate Church builder identifies with the following:

- The Church was dear to our Lord, so dear that He died to give it birth.
- The Church was dear to the Spirit, so dear that He was sent to empower it and direct it by apostolic teachings, spoken and written.
- The Church was so dear to generations of faithful believers across the centuries, so dear that they died that it might carry the saving message of Jesus to the nations.
- The Church was so dear to early, nineteenth century reformers that they began a continuing struggle to restore the Church's nature, its purpose, the apostolic practices in godly living, the worship, the message, the evangelistic fervor, and doing good.

That quest must continue so there will be an increased focus on building strong, healthy churches that again will be called the Pillar and Ground of Truth. That endeavor will require increased numbers of spiritual men to take the lead.

Applaud to Gifted Writers

A good day is dawning for those who are hungry in growing spirituality. There is an incoming tide of multiple books that are helping church leaders catch the vision of building healthy churches. The following books can contribute to one's spiritual formation as a Church builder:

- **Build Healthy Churches with Purpose Driven Commitments.** Rick Warren, in his book, The Purpose Driven Church, urges leaders to define and communicate the purpose of the Church, to reach out to the community, to bring in the community and to build up the church.
- **Build Healthy Churches with a God-designed Agenda.** Bob Russell, in his book, When God Builds a Church, states ten principles that should guide Church builders.
- **Build Healthy Churches with Natural Church Growth.** Christian Schwarz, in his book, Natural Church Development, develops eight, growth principles that should measure how churches grow.
- **Build Healthy Churches Through Effective Church Growth Strategies.** Gene Getz and Joe Wall, in their book, Effective Church Strategies, review seven strategies that are designed to build effective churches.
- **Build Healthy Churches Through Reclaiming the Biblical Pattern for the Church in the 21st Century.** Philip Graham Ryken, in his book, City on a Hill, presents nine principles to guide a Church builder.

Each of these books will help the reader understand the great heart of God in planting and building churches. The more committed and fruitful one is in doing what is close to the heart of God the more His favor and needed empowerment are available.

Commitments to Church Growth

God, as in all of creation, designed His Church for growth and fruitfulness. In both the natural world, so in the redemptive world, there are conditions that exist to promote growth. Much in God's world grows without man doing anything. Parts are able to survive better and do well in difficult circumstances with man's careful and skilled attention. Production most often increases when man knows what to do and does it. The Church is no different. Man can make a difference in the survival and fruitfulness of the Church by knowing what to do and being skilled in doing what is needed.

This chapter is largely devoted to suggesting ten principles of Church growth. Each one requires the preacher to be growing taller in his spiritual stature to provide the leadership and motivation.

- **Affirm Biblical Beliefs.** A growing, healthy Church must preserve its distinct identity in a confused religious world. It must give pointed attention to its unity and proficiency in knowing and carrying out its purpose. It must be careful in progressing in spiritual growth, in moral integrity, and in family building. All of this must keep pace with its growing knowledge and fidelity to the biblical beliefs as revealed by divine inspiration in the Word. The affirmation of these biblical beliefs will not just happen. The affirmation must be intentional:
 - ▶ The pulpit must be faithful, alive, and on fire in expositional preaching, with informative, convicting, and persuasive proclamation.
 - ▶ The study habits of the members must be disciplined, systematic, in-depth, comprehensive, with Bible reading at the core.
 - ▶ An emphasis on the centrality of the Bible in the didactical life of the Church must be constantly made and demonstrated in every discussion, decision, and design.
- **Infuse a Hunger for God.** Rising to the stature of Jesus, becoming like Him in His reflection of God (cf. John 14:7–11 Hebrews 1:1–3) is the very essence of the Christian faith and what it most ardently wants to share with the world. The fervor of the martyrs, the longing for home of travelers, the erupting of joy with the thought of a return of a loved one, and the passion of loving someone dear, all are foretastes of one's hunger for God. The psalmist describes the longing for God in Psalms 42:1–2:

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?*

- ▶ A preacher's encouragement to fast and pray in times of deeply felt need will bring worshipers acutely into the presence of God.
 - ▶ A preacher's encouragement to members to make regular visits to the Book of Psalms and some of the great writings on the Psalms (for example: Treasures of David by Charles H. Spurgeon) can stimulate hunger for God.
 - ▶ A preacher presenting deeper studies into the names of God can help the church explode with understanding of the extraordinary nature of **Jehovah** God.
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- **Develop Healthy Members.** Those new converts coming out of the world and into the church are often marked by sin and dysfunction. Families within the church have not always developed fully, functioning people. Christ, who increasingly comes to the center of our lives, brings harmony, direction, and a harvest of values and virtues.
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- ▶ A preacher can lead a church in a continual study of the Bible to confront Christ in the Word. These daily confrontations demand self-examination, devotion to prayer, and mutual confession. These reoccurring disciplines ultimately bring us to good health.
 - ▶ A preacher can help members to identify areas of needed growth through effective Christian counseling and character development.
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- **Make Brotherly Love a Signature Statement.** With Christ's love serving as the standard, we are to affirm our identity as his disciples with our quality of love for one another (cf. John 13:34–35). Without fraternal love, all of our other attributes and exercises of faith are hollow and annoying (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:1–3).
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- ▶ A preacher can instruct members how to find biblical models for developing healthy mind-sets by which they can build good relations in the body (cf. Philippians 4:8).
 - ▶ A preacher can lead in a study of the harvest of qualities we are to lovingly share with our spiritual siblings and so model Christ (cf. Galatians 5:20–21).

- **Develop Inspiring Worship.** God-centered worship is the prerequisite for growing healthy churches. Members come to worship to fill their hearts with God and go out to share Him with every person they meet. Growing churches exalt God in their worship assemblies, they celebrate His works, they renew their commitments, and they draw other worshipers to God.
 - ▶ In most settings the preacher, in heart, knowledge, and skills, needs to be a major catalysis in achieving an inspiring worship service.
 - ▶ The preacher needs to lead the church in each of the eight pathways of worship (adoration, praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition, intercession, commitment, and meditation). He can, thereby, fully develop an inspiring worship that is rich in content, purpose, and desired outcomes.
- **Create a Passion for Lost Souls.** Moving closer to the heart of God inflames one with a passion for lost souls. The preacher who builds healthy churches helps the members to understand how God prepared the Scheme of Redemption through the ages, how He sent His Son to die for their redemption and how He created the Church to seek and nurture souls until Christ comes again.
 - ▶ A preacher must teach the priorities of soul winning from the Word. Church buildings crumble and must be maintained and replaced in time. Souls live forever.
 - ▶ A preacher must teach all members, help train a select number to seek the lost, model in sowing the Seed, and share in gathering the harvest. The preacher needs to be a dedicated model and teacher of soul winning.
- **Grow an Empowering Leadership.** Good leaders see visions of a growing church. They make growth plans and study how to finance and implement the plans. However, just as important, they know that members must be trained, motivated, involved, empowered, and led to fulfilling objectives.

- ▶ The argument continues whether good leaders are born or made. The fact is, good leaders are not born already made. They have to be trained.
 - ▶ The cycle of leadership training must be pursued from convert, to involved member, to core and active member, to a deacon, and on to an elder.
 - ▶ The scriptural agenda for mature development must be held before the congregation at all times (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).
- **Involve Members According to Their Giftedness.** God, in His sovereign will, has bestowed His gifts in ministry. Each gift is a Kingdom assignment. He empowers the gifts through training, develops them through ministry opportunities, and further shapes them through Body life, and through His presence. He, thereby, equips the Church to accomplish His will in the world.
 - ▶ The preacher is in a good position to help people to believe that each is a gifted person (cf. Romans 12:6–8; Ephesians 4:11–13; 1 Peter 4:10–11 and 1 Corinthians 12).
 - ▶ The preacher can help the members understand that in their humanity God has gifted them, but by redemption, their gifts become Kingdom assignments. They, then, become Kingdom bound to identify, develop, and employ their giftedness.
 - ▶ The preacher can help the members identify their ministry giftedness. The identification of their gifts can be accomplished by observation, fulfilling experiences, and fruitful labors. The identification can be accelerated by Ministry Gifts profiling (Free at www.Teamministry.com).
 - **Excel in Conflict Management.** What Satan cannot block, make difficult, or retard with external resources, he stirs up conflict internal to the Church to destroy every good effort. Conflict management is one of the great imperatives for healthy, growing churches. The Church is first and last a community of peace makers (cf. Matthew 5:9). One of the most needed spiritual traits of

every preacher is to learn how to manage conflict in the church.

- ▶ The preacher needs to be a teacher of conflict management for the good health and progress of the Church and to maximize growth resources.
- ▶ The preacher needs to make conflict resolution a theme in preaching, a course in the teaching curriculum, a part of marriage and parent counseling, and a choice, library section at home or church.
- **Unite with a Commitment for the Future.** Beyond taking care of business, a church must unite on an all-consuming vision, identify a singular purpose for the church to exist, and develop specific and challenging goals that are consistent with the purpose statement. The preacher needs to be sure he has acquired the training to unite the church around this triple growth challenge: vision, purpose and goals.
- ▶ A preacher needs to convict the leaders that people do good and lasting things when given a purpose. Aimless ministry and living seldom result in any thing getting done that is consistent with the potential of the church.
- ▶ A preacher needs to keep the vision, purpose, and goals vividly before the church in his sermons, visual materials around the building, the church bulletin masthead, calling cards, telephone advertising, and other things.
- ▶ A preacher, every three-to-five years, needs to lead in renewing or revising and recharging a group agreement on the congregational vision, the purpose to pursue, and the goals to be reached.

A Call to Soul Winning, Church Planting, and Church Building

When every preacher reaches his spiritual mountain top, the churches will be closer to fulfilling the vision of the Commander-in-Chief. Following are some basic characteristics of healthy churches around the world:

- A church must hear evangelistic messages regularly taught from the local pulpit. The preacher, right or wrong, has the eyes and ears of the congregation by virtue of the preaching assignment. The local congregation will be as evangelistic as it is challenged to be by the preaching.
- The Church must spend more time in the Word. Not simply more hours spent in reading the Word, but studying the Scriptures more from the vantage point of evangelism. The Book of Acts is the classic book on evangelism and church planting. Jesus was the Evangelist of Galilee and Paul was ever traveling in search of souls.
- A church must become more driven and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As long as the early Church yielded to the Spirit and took His sword into battle, the faster it grew. The Church today must not be as ignorant of the Holy Spirit as were those disciples at Ephesus in Acts 19.
- The Church must have more teaching on the stewardship of time and money to combat the materialism that has us in its grip and also to infuse the joy of giving and the excitement of seeing what increased giving can do for a body. People get excited and more convicted in giving when more of it is directed to soul winning than to bricks and mortar.
- The Church must focus its attention on the big picture, the most pressing priorities and the most essential matters in life and faith. Every time we let ourselves become engrossed in things that will amount to nothing five minutes after we are dead, we become that much less a soul-searching Church. If negative views become our mantra, the fervor for soul winning dries up to nothing.
- The Church must stretch its sights, enlarge its vision, and lift its horizons to know that it is to be global in its evangelistic outreach. It was “*the whole world*” and “*every creature*” (cf. Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16) to whom Jesus assigned us to take the Gospel. To be sure, being brightest at home enables us to throw the light further, but it is not an “either-or” situation. We must be committed to both a local, evangelistic fervor and a global outreach.

- A church must have leaders who are united in firmly believing in each of the above statements and urge the fellowship of believers to pursue each of these realities.

Jesus left this earth wanting His disciples to share with Him in a world-wide enterprise dedicated to saving every soul possible, in every nation, and in every tribe. He sits in glory with the pointed desire that every convert be brought to fullness in Christ and every local church be a healthy, thriving, and growing people. He yearns to see His world brought to the enjoyment of grace through global preaching and church building.

Conclusion

Men who know that the Church belongs to God and know that they are responsible stewards of its purpose and treasured resources will learn what to do to promote growth and fruitfulness. They understand that they are custodians of its nature and destiny. And they will work with all of their might, with urgency and care.

Conclusion

A Restless Soul at Peace with God

This book is all about being filled with Jesus, His teachings, His purposes and His power. But before being filled and empowered, there must come an emptying. Room must be provided for God's entry and envelopment of our lives.

The great Sermon on the Mount began with that concept. Happiness, fulfillment of life, begins with those who acknowledge and accept their poverty, their emptiness (cf. Matthew 5:3). Only to them can the person and authority of the King overwhelm their lives and bring fulfillment. Faced with our situation, most people want to be transformed, to be changed. However, we are afraid of change, afraid of letting go.

Like Abraham, the Promised Land was far away until he left home, stepping out of his comfort zone, safe haven, and familiar scenes. The ratification of his covenant with God required him to love God more than his treasured son. The abandonment of our old ways, the re-prioritizing of our affections, and the reordering of our values are the beginnings of spiritual formation.

We join Moses in relinquishing our rights to fame and fortune. We join the Apostles in abandoning our earthly boats of gain and security. We join that long trail of Gospel men of every nation and time who count the purposes of the Kingdom and the smile of God as motives enough and treasures enough to let all else be second in value and in urgency.

He is our peace. He is our purpose. He is our joy. He is our hope. He is our all.

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Special Applaud

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Richard Foster, Director of Renovare, is the foremost writer of our times. His works include:

- Spiritual Classics, San Francisco: Harper Collins Pub. 2000.
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Other Books By Foster: Celebrating the Disciplines, Challenges of the Disciplined Life, Devotional Classics, Freedom of Simplicity, Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Prayers From the Heart, Seeking the Kingdom, Spiritual Classics.

Dallas Willard, sought after spokesmen in spiritual renewal. His works include:

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Dr. Truman Scott has served over fifty-five years as an evangelist, a missionary, a congregational minister, ministry trainer and Christian counselor. He received his undergraduate degrees from Freed Hardeman and Harding Universities. His graduate work and doctoral studies are from Harding University and Bethany Theological Seminary. His counseling experience is extensive and ongoing. He has authored study courses on counseling and conducted multiple seminars on leadership and marriage.



Currently he is retired from ministry training administration in which he served as Dean at Sunset International Bible Institute. He is engaged in consulting work, planning and writing. He is on the Graduate Faculty of Sunset International Bible Institute. He is married to Ferne White; they have three children and nine grandchildren.

In my 40 years of ministry, I have not observed a greater need among those who serve in church ministry than the need for personal spiritual development. Authenticity in ministry is vital to real influence and credibility. Most of us in church work have felt the spiritual strain and drain of constantly giving of our lives and resources without a purposeful plan to replenish the spiritual supply. Good news! This book can help. No one is better prepared to supply an answer than our brother, Truman Scott. He has not only lived these principles but has taught them to several generations of ministers in the church. Though based in ancient truth, these insights are fresh and exciting and worthy of reading, study, meditation and imitation by anyone who has chosen a life of service in the Kingdom of our Lord.

— Truitt Adair, President of Sunset International Bible Institute

*With his new book, **Spiritual Living for Ministers**, Dr. Truman Scott has made a major contribution to the continuing growth and education of every minister who will read and study this great work. It has been written out of the crucible of experience. In this book Dr. Scott is sharing truths from God's word, that if applied, will help readers become more like Jesus, which is the goal of every Christian (Philippians 2:4-8). The minister of today faces challenges no other generation has faced. His spiritual life will determine how he responds to them. This new book should be read and studied by both the young and old minister. It is a must read for every Christian. I am so glad it is the text for one of the required courses in the Sunset International Bible Institute's curriculum, at the undergraduate and graduate level.*

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