

My
JOURNEY
Devotionals from a Blessed Man

BOB ANDERSON

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About the Author

Reverend Robert L. Anderson, known as “Bob” by those who knew and loved him, had a unique calling from God. He served in ministry full-time and wrote and preached hundreds of sermons throughout his lifetime. Bob was a dynamic preacher, a strategic planner, a gifted organizer, and an enthusiastic educator. This series of edited devotionals and inspirational readings has been culled from several volumes of his sermons and notes after his passing in April 2022.

As part of his ministry, Bob developed and coordinated outreach, leadership development, and ministry programs in 58 congregations throughout the western part of the United States and Canada, including establishing five new congregations. He developed and taught over 300 workshops about church planting, outreach ministry, leadership development, small group ministry, preaching, and worship planning. In addition, Bob taught both graduate and undergraduate courses through Portland State University and the University of La Verne.

Before his death, Bob published his memoir, *My Journey: Stories from a Blessed Man*, available on Amazon. It recounts a lifetime of his testimony that is alive and vibrant, thought-provoking, insightful, warm-hearted, and good-natured. He also published *Love Letters: I'll Be Loving You Always*, a series of hundreds of love letters he and his wife, Betty, exchanged during their courtship and his deployment in the Korean War. It is also available on Amazon.

Bob Anderson, better known as Dad and Grandpa in some circles, rejoiced in spending time with his family. He was devoted to developing

positive, affirmative, nurturing (PAN) relationships with everyone, every day, in every personal interaction. He invites you to do the same. And now, that friendship extends to you in this latest collection of inspirational readings.

God Wants You to Have Peace!

MARK 4 & 5

What a soap opera the fourth and fifth chapters of Mark would make. Will our hero survive a raging storm? Will a madman do Him in? Will a woman die of her incurable illness? Is our hero too late to save a young girl? But we are not talking about some fictional characters in a television series. We are talking about people today...when we are afraid, hurt, and suffer...and yet, even then, God wants us to have peace.

In the fourth chapter of Mark, we are told of a terrible storm. These were not amateurs but seasoned fishermen who feared for their lives. But Jesus said to the wind, "Peace, be still!" The wind subsided, and there was a great calm. What kinds of storms are raging in your life? Look deep inside of you and have faith! God wants you to have peace.

Jesus left Capernaum to go to the *other side*

Jesus then made His way to the other side of the lake because He wanted to get away. Perhaps going to the "other side" is symbolic of our desire to get a fresh start. To retreat into the past. To seek an alternative for the present. To assume that, somehow, the future will be better. We often long for the other side as we try to escape from life's reality. How we would like

to return to the good ol' days! I remember when gasoline was 35 cents. Our first house was \$11,500 and 21 years later we sold it for \$220,000! If only we could start over again, we tell ourselves regarding our spouse, our job, our location, our school. Then we would have peace.

Remember, Jesus wanted to get away. But when He reached the other side, He immediately dealt with reality when He met a demon-possessed man. Here was a man so deranged and tormented that civil authorities could not deal with him. But Jesus made the man whole and gave him peace.

You can run, but you cannot hide. There is no escape to the other side. What kind of demons must you face up to in your life? We all have them. A demon is anything that has control over us. Have faith! God wants you to have peace.

Our last scripture deals with desperation and giving up

First, a Pharisee. He was a member of a religious order who opposed Jesus. A man of substance, rich and socially powerful. A man who was religiously prominent.

Then, there was an ill woman at the other end of the social and religious spectrum. She had spent all she had on the best and most expensive medical treatment available—and was now worse off than when she started.

It was for his daughter's sake that the Pharisee knelt at the feet of Jesus. For her sake, he begged Him to come to his house and heal her. Meanwhile, as Jesus made His way with the man in the crowd, the ostracized women thought to herself, "If only I could touch His garment..." And as she did so, she was instantly healed. Immediately, Jesus felt the healing power go from His body.

“Who touched me?” He asked. Frightened, she confessed what she had done. “Daughter,” Jesus says, “your faith has made you well; go in peace, healed of your disease.” Brothers and Sisters, what kind of disease are you suffering from? Have faith! God wants to bless you and give you peace.

Word then comes to the Pharisee that Jesus is too late

The Pharisee’s daughter is already dead by now. What does Jesus proclaim? “Don’t be afraid. Just trust me.” But Jesus is laughed at and scorned by the crowd. The implication is that Jesus should make faster house calls! Their lack of faith is blocking the mighty acts of God, so Jesus sends them away. He takes only the parents and disciples into the girl’s room with Him, surrounding Himself with believers.

Then He says, “Get up, little girl!” And she jumps up and walks around the room!

So, what does this say to us today?

God is in control of the universe. Nothing that we may face is beyond God’s control. Not the storms of life. Not demons—real or imagined. Not the most serious illness. Not even death.

We too are surrounded by unbelievers and skeptics at work, school, our neighborhoods, Little League—everywhere. Unbelievers and skeptics tend to block God’s power in our lives. How can we overcome this negative force in our lives? By investing quality time with our Brothers and Sisters. By worshiping together often. By sharing our lives with other Christians.

Like the disciples, we are to call on Jesus when we’re afraid so we can have peace.

Like the man possessed with demons, we too are to go and tell others so that they too may have hope and peace.

Like the Pharisee, we are to kneel at the foot of Jesus and trust that He will give us peace in the most terrifying situations.

Like the woman, we remember that whoever touches Jesus is blessed and is granted peace.

Have faith today! God wants to bless you. He wants all of us to have peace.



The Dimensions of Love

1 CORINTHIANS 13 & 1 JOHN 4:7-21

Today the world has various dimensions of “love” in different shades and degrees. Webster gives 13 definitions for the one word, “love”! We say a man loves a woman, we love roast beef, and we use the same word to describe a score in a tennis match. Contrast what the Bible says about love with the world’s concepts and you’ll make an interesting discovery. They used unique and different words to express each kind of love. For example, “agape” love is pure love. It is the love of God.

Agape symbolizes the love of God

When the New Testament says that God is “agape,” it is not defining God. It is defining love. In other words, it is God’s nature to love. Love like this is always freely given and is voluntary. Therefore, we cannot earn God’s love. We are not loved because of our nature, but because of God’s nature.

Our normal reaction is to reject agape love and rebel. Our “selfish self” wants to be loved for ourselves alone. For our intrinsic worth. Because we’ve earned it. And yet God loves us, not for what we are, or because it gives Him satisfaction, but because it is His very nature to love. That’s what we mean by “God is love.”

The great revelation of the New Testament is agape love among Christians. Christianity differs from all other religions in the dignity and value it places on the individual. The Bible says, “God created man in His own image...” Genesis 1:27. And it says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” John 3:16. Christ gave us His example to help us understand that we too should have agape love for each other. These stories in the New Testament teach us what agape love is:

- *The lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-13)*
- *Laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)*
- *The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35)*
- *The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)*

The love of God

Christ is the fullness of the revelation of the love of God, and His ministry was one of love (John 15:9-12). His teachings set the standard, and He illustrated these truths by His example. Remember, Jesus restored the ear of the injured Roman soldier who was sent to arrest Him. Jesus then asked God to forgive those who crucified Him because “they know not what they do.” That is true love.

Let Christ's Mind Be in You

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-13

Today's scripture lesson finds Paul in prison. He is in communication with the saints at Philippi and discovers troubling news. There is the threat that the church might break up. It's the age-old danger of personal rivalries. It's not the first time this has happened.

For example, Jesus' disciples questioned who would be first in the Kingdom. As I write, I'm thinking of a woman who is so gifted and wants so much to serve the Lord. But she keeps shooting herself in the foot. How often we allow ourselves to get in our own way! This is the context that Paul is writing to the Philippians. He loves these people so much and has so much invested in them. After all, they are the hope of Christianity in Europe.

It's important that we understand that this new mission is not among the Jews but is made up of Gentiles. This city is to become the cornerstone of planting Christianity in Europe. Paul made several trips to Philippi, where he spent much time and developed strong ties and relationships with the people. It is a wealthy congregation that supported Paul's ministry in other areas, including sending relief to the poor in Jerusalem. So what does Paul tell the good people of Philippi to straighten out their problems?

In essence, he says, “Let Christ’s Mind Be In You!”

Let me ask you, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” I suppose some would say:

To have certain beliefs

To go to church and perhaps prayer meeting

To worship in a particular way

To read and believe in the Scriptures

To sing certain kinds of religious songs

To be baptized and celebrate the Sacraments

To do good works

To have good morals

To be obedient to God

All of these are good—but what Paul is saying in his Philippian letter is that Christianity is all about letting Christ’s mind be in you.

What might a person be like who has Christ’s mind in them?

Well, let’s see what the Apostle Paul has to say about this in Philippians 2:5-8, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, and Galatians 5:22-23. Then add to it what the gospels tell us about people with the mind of Christ. The Bible says that such persons will be like a father welcoming home a wayward son. Like a forgiven woman pouring precious perfume on Jesus. Like a shepherd risking the wilds to find one lost sheep.

May I also suggest something else that describes a person with the mind of Christ? Their lives will not only differentiate between good and evil but also between good and better and best.

Let Christ's mind be in you!

In the past, I have done an experiment with our young people to illustrate how the presence of Christ colors our lives. Imagine a large empty fishbowl representing our church community. Into that community bowl, each young person would add a clear liquid representing his or her gifts and talents. The principle is that all talents are important and that each makes a significant contribution to the cause of the Kingdom. Then another “clear liquid” representing the influence of Christ was added to the clear liquid already in the bowl. But as if by magic, the clear liquids turned a beautiful color!

That's how we influence our communities for Christ when we have the mind of Christ. We see and do things more closely as Christ would see and do them. And in turn, your life, and the lives of your family, and the life of our community is filled with hope, love, joy, and peace. So let Christ's mind be in you!



Witness the Living Christ

MATTHEW 8:19-20, 9:9 & LUKE 24:13-24

The disciples followed Jesus without reservation when He called them to follow Him. They left their jobs and family. They could not turn back. Initially, they misunderstood His mission and looked to Jesus to free them from Roman bondage. After all, they had staked everything they had on Him. But in the span of three short days, Jesus had been betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, and crucified.

How did they feel after that? How would you feel? We pick up the story on the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-24. This passage shows us what life would be like without Jesus. The disciples walking this road are overwhelmed with grief and downcast. Their eyes are clouded by doubt. But then Jesus took the initiative and joined the two walking on the Road to Emmaus. The Scriptures say that their eyes were held—meaning, they did not recognize Him at that time. So how do we recognize Jesus today? The same way these disciples did.

By knowing the Scriptures. They give us comfort, understanding. They're like the instruction manual for life. Jesus brought Scripture to mind for these downcast saints.

By sharing in the fellowship of the saints. Matthew 18:20 says, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” By breaking bread together, we have fellowship. Sacraments like these bring us into a closer relationship with Christ. And they reveal Christ. In this passage, when Jesus broke bread with the two believers, their eyes were opened.

By expecting Jesus to reveal Himself. Jesus said, “Ask and ye shall receive” (John 16:24). It was likely their deepest desire to see Jesus alive and well again.

By making time for Him. The two men in this story “urged and insisted that he remain...” with them. The implication is that, had they not made time for Him, He would have gone on. Jesus says in Revelation 3:20, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...”

Share Jesus

Having recognized Jesus, the disciples wanted to share the good news. Likewise, we must share Him with others (Luke 24:30-35). The disciples knew full well what it was like when they believed that Jesus was dead, so they could not wait to share the good news of the risen Christ with others! Quickly, they retraced their steps to Jerusalem where Christ stood in their midst and said, “Peace be unto you...” And so it is that we, like the two on the Road to Emmaus, are sent. We are sent to share the good news that Jesus Christ lives.



Heal the Brokenhearted

LUKE 4:14-21

I was once at a conference where the participants were challenged to invest quite a bit of time talking about how to put our faith in action. The walls of the conference room were covered with newsprint containing our thoughts of what we should be doing as Christians. One of the participants was a farmer in his mid-forties and all this Christian business was new to him. He looked around the room at all the paper sheets hanging on the wall and then he said, “I never knew I was supposed to do all these things. I just done ‘em.” That was a man who knew what he was about!

Jesus is proclaiming his Messiah-ship in this passage. And in doing so, He reads the words from Isaiah 61:1 that include the declaration: “He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.” Jesus also said, “I must be about my Father’s business.” This is also an important question we must answer today: What are you about? In the Scriptures, we find Jesus raising the dead and healing all manner of diseases. We find Him making it possible for the crippled to walk, restoring relationships, and bringing about forgiveness. And then He astounds us by saying that we must go forth in His name and do the same! If this were not enough, He then says, “Greater works than I do, you will do.”

How could this possibly be? How can you and I, together with other disciples, possibly do “greater works” than our Lord? Let me suggest four considerations:

Consider that in His physical form Jesus was one man, limited to a geographical area, and to a time span of three years. Today there are billions of disciples, in all parts of the globe—and we’ve been at it for centuries.

Consider that we sometimes have the tendency to think of God’s work being limited to taking place among God’s people and within the four walls of the church. Our God is much bigger than our simple concept of Him. He is at work everywhere, with everyone and with everything, not just in our world but throughout the universe and beyond.

Consider that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the Lord’s work. Let me remind you of the words of the Apostle Paul: “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”

Consider that in our world today we are:

- Bringing the legally dead back to life
- All manner of diseases are being conquered
- Those who were crippled can walk — made possible through miracle drugs, therapy, and artificial devices
- Through various means, relationships are being restored and forgiveness achieved

The brokenhearted

God is at work with everyone and everything throughout the universe and beyond. So see if the Holy Spirit brings anyone to mind as I tell you about the brokenhearted. Be aware that we’re not just talking about strangers but also about people we know. The brokenhearted are those who are:

Crushed by loss — like the father who accidentally ran over and killed his small son while backing out of the garage.

Trampled by circumstances — like the mother of three who works two jobs but still lives below the poverty line.

Broken because of disappointment — like the long-time employee whose promised retirement has been absconded with.

Beaten down by abuse — like the woman who is regularly beaten by her husband and is terrified what he might do to her children if she left.

Incapacitated by their physical ailments — like a person who is old, sick, and feeble and living alone.

Smothered by loneliness — like the widow whom everyone has forgotten about.

Victimized by aggressors — like the parents of the teenage girl killed by a stray bullet from a drive-by shooter as she studied in her bedroom.

Rejected — like the woman whose husband divorced her after 30 years for a woman who was younger than his oldest daughter.

Paralyzed by bad decisions — like the kids who did not graduate from high school last June and have no place to go.

How to help the hurting

There is another dimension of a broken heart. It's one that exceeds all the others we've considered because it has eternal implications and eternal consequences. We are speaking here of those who are "Left destitute by sin." I'm speaking of those who need forgiveness—those who are lost and desperately need to find Jesus. The best way I know of helping a hurting

and desperate person is to point them in the direction of Jesus. I asked you to let the Holy Spirit bring others to mind who need Jesus. Here's your assignment. In the name of the Lord Jesus, visit someone on your list this week. Don't worry about what to say—just be there for them.

How are we doing?

When it comes to our congregation reaching out to the brokenhearted, how are we doing? You know the answer to this far better than I do—but from where I sit we're doing pretty well. We have raised some from the “dead” — dead, that is, in terms of their relationship with Jesus. And in the name of Jesus, hands have been laid upon the sick, and God has blessed them. We have prayed and comforted one another. Counseling and learning have taken place, resulting in souls being healed, self-esteem being enhanced, and relationships being restored. And we've been sensitive to and have welcomed the disenfranchised, accepting them as they are and demonstrating our love and concern in practical ways. Some of us have even forgiven others—at least sometimes. To those who may still be harboring anger and resentment within your hearts: in the name of Jesus, let it go! If you need help in letting go of this anger, let me invite you to come and talk with me. Or talk with someone else. But get this destructive poison of anger and resentment out of your soul.

As individuals, and as a congregation, we've “been there” when others have needed us. If I were to ask you to make a mental list of those who were “there for you” when you were hurting, whose names would you think of? Here's your next assignment. Today, or sometime this week, share with those on your mental list how their ministry has helped you. And if you've already told them, tell them again.



What Are You About?

LUKE 4:14-21

The Prophet Isaiah looks into the future and foretells the coming of an unnamed prophet. He proclaims that this prophet (the coming Messiah) will have “The Spirit of the Lord” upon Him, and he says that He is to be “anointed.” The “anointing business” is a big deal. At that time, only the likes of kings got to be anointed. Isaiah then describes what this prophet will be about...ministering to others.

So now our scene changes in Luke 4 and we skip ahead 800 years to the city of Nazareth. The grapevine of Nazareth was almost as good as the one we have here at our church. The town is all aflutter because the news has come that Jesus, a local carpenter’s son, has been away some months performing all kinds of mighty works. And now, He’s coming home. Jesus left home a nobody and returns a celebrity.

Jesus is a churchgoer. He never misses a Sabbath. So the first Sabbath after returning home we naturally find Him at the local synagogue. The synagogue president invites Jesus (as the famous teacher He has become) to read and comment on the day’s scripture. It is unclear if the scripture He is to read was pre-selected or if Jesus chose it. Regardless, Jesus stands and reads from the scroll of Isaiah (61:1-2). Everyone—and I mean everyone

who has heard this prophecy—knows what this prophecy is about. For centuries they have yearned and prayed for its fulfillment. Everyone in attendance understands that the scripture being read is about the coming of the hoped-for and long-awaited Messiah. Jesus reads:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
Because He has anointed me
To preach the gospel to the poor
To heal the brokenhearted
To preach deliverance to the captives
And give recovery of sight to the blind
To set at liberty them that are bruised
And to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord
(Luke 4:18-19)

Then Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and sits down to comment on it. Here is this hometown boy with every eye fixed upon Him as He proclaims: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.” Close your eyes. Can you feel the electricity and hear the gasp of astonishment sweeping across this small, unknown congregation? Jesus is saying, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled. Today God’s promise has come to pass. Today the world has changed forever. Today the Messiah has come!” This is what Jesus was about! It’s my experience that when we are “about” our Father’s business, blessings not only flow but also come as torrents of rain giving new life to parched souls.

The poor who are blessed

If you pick up a red-letter edition of the Bible and look at the words of Jesus, you’ll find that He had a lot more to say to those in the cheap seats than to those sitting in the plush stadium boxes. By and large, the words of Jesus were received eagerly by the poor, while the rich and powerful

whose core values were being challenged were threatened and angered by what He was saying.

Now please understand. We're not talking about how many dollars or pennies one has in his or her pocket but about one's willingness to follow the Master. The Good News is about salvation. To receive this priceless gift, one must hear and accept the words of Jesus and then commit to Him unconditionally. And I submit that anything that diverts us from clearly hearing and accepting our Lord slowly devalues us. And we become poorer and poorer. So if our spiritual bank account is zero, we are poor.

But by the same token, if our checking account is empty and we're having trouble putting food on the table...but we're right with the Lord...we are rich. The opposite of poor is "rich," and as a modern scripture proclaims, "He that has eternal life is rich."

Our commission—What are we about?

We are about being more than 5'9" as I am. We stand much taller than that. In fact, we are giants. We are Christ's Ambassadors. And when we stand in the stead of Jesus, at that moment "The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Us." Because He has anointed us to preach the Good News and proclaim that Jesus is the Christ. Not only are we to proclaim Jesus is coming but also that He is here now! He is in our midst. And His Kingdom is real and tangible.

How well are we preaching the Good News to the poor? On Sunday mornings, we're doing pretty well. However, preaching to the choir isn't going to cut it. The words of Jesus must be heard outside of the walls of the church. But if our voices are silent, how will the poor hear? And how can they accept that which has not been heard?



Why Tarries Thou?

JOHN 3

Every one of us, at one time or another, has broken the law. We've gone against a traffic light or ran a stop sign. We've exceeded the speed limit and maybe even walked on forbidden grass! In a much more inclusive way, every one of us has sinned against the law of God in some major or minor way. Sin is the turning away from God. It is a broken relationship. Repentance is turning from sin and turning to God. In the words of Isaiah, it means "to cease to do evil; learn to do well."

In preparation for the coming ministry of Jesus, John the Baptist preached in the wilderness, saying, "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." When Jesus began His ministry, His first teaching was similar. He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:13). All Christians are agreed on one thing—that man is powerless to save himself. That's why Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." He also explains, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9).

The role of baptism

The Bible says to repent and be baptized. Christ taught the principle of baptism by His own example (Matthew 3:41-46). And He also baptized others. “After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them and baptized” (John 3:22). Jesus “tarried” (meaning, He took longer than normal) to take time to baptize. It was that important to Him. What can we learn from this? First, let’s look at what baptism is. Baptism is an act of physical obedience to a spiritual law. It is an outward sign of an inward grace.

Second, baptism is the making of a covenant. One receiving baptism takes upon him the name of Christ. He repents of his sin and promises to serve and obey Christ faithfully and diligently. In return, Christ agrees to forgive his sins and to be with him always.

Baptism is a symbol

It dramatizes and exemplifies the death of the old man, his burial, and his resurrection (a new birth). It is a picture of the cleansing of the whole man and the washing away of his sins. Finally, it symbolizes his obedience and humility as he surrenders himself into the hands of Christ’s ministers.

We are to baptize others

In fact, Christ commanded the Apostles to teach and practice baptism (Matthew 28:18-19). Peter preached to the people of Jerusalem and commanded them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

Baptism requires authority

To be baptized is not enough. It must be performed by one having authority. Christ, by His example, sought out John the Baptist. This is similar to the experience of Paul in Acts 19:1-5.

Baptism by immersion

The Greek word “baptize” means to plunge vigorously beneath the water, to dip, to drench, to immerse. Where do we see examples of this imagery of fullness?

- Romans 6:4 – We are “buried” with Him by baptism
- John 3:24 – John baptized where there was “much water”
- Matthew 3:16 – Jesus “came up” out of the water, signifying He went underneath it

How does this apply to you?

Some have not yet entered into the waters of baptism. I invite you to do so or set up a meeting with your church leaders to talk about doing so. The door is open, and the invitation is always there.

Called to Build up the Kingdom

MATTHEW 6:38

According to the words of Jesus, we are called to build up the Kingdom of God. It begins with man recognizing God as the Creator and the Owner of the universe. From there, it moves to our understanding that we have a responsibility to God and our fellow man as a manager (or steward) over everything we possess.

These are some of the commands God gave regarding building up the Kingdom of God:

Be fruitful and multiply

In the beginning, God spoke to man and said for him to be fruitful and multiply. This command implies that we have a responsibility to our families.

Replenish the earth and subdue it

“Subdue” means cultivation and to use something productively. Therefore, man is to replenish the earth. With this comes the realization that we are

accountable not only to God but also to our fellow man. Anything we have today has been used in the past and will be used by others in the future long after we are gone.

Have dominion over the earth

A king has dominion over his kingdom. But he does not own it. See the difference? Man has dominion over the earth, not as an owner but rather as a manager. And just as the manager of a business firm is accountable to the stockholders, we are accountable to God. That which we have dominion over consists of our time, our talents, and our resources—and we are responsible for our use of each of these.

Tithe

Early on, God proclaimed that we were to tithe a tenth of our increase. This was in a day when people lived off the land, so they tithed their crops. For us today, if there is to be an increase, we must be productive. We are to produce in accordance with our abilities. However, if there is to be an increase, we must also conserve that which we have. If we use all that we produce, there will be nothing left for God. An accounting must be made in order to determine the increase. In the time of the Old Testament, the shepherds needed to gather and count the sheep. A manager today must likewise make his accounting to his stockholders through a Profit and Loss statement. Therefore, we make a similar accounting to God through the use of a tithing statement.

What is stewardship?

It is the response of God's people to the ministry of His Son. An "acting religion" considers how it will benefit me. What will I get out of it? A

“reacting religion” is the response to the love of Christ in our lives. But what keeps us from responding? Other gods like selfishness, fear, conformity, material wealth, a lack of understanding, and even procrastination can keep us from responding well to Christ. Stewardship, however, is required of all those who seek to build the Kingdom. This cannot be evaded. The temptation is to allow our “unnecessary wants” to have dominion over us. The goal instead is to have control over our unnecessary wants. Let’s look at some categories we can steward for the sake of the Kingdom.

The stewardship of our time

If we sleep 8 hours a day, work 8 hours a day, and care for ourselves and our meals 3 hours a day, that adds up to 19 hours. We therefore have an increase of 5 hours during the workweek. If you work six days a week, this gives you 30 hours of increase per week.

Therefore, you would tithe 3 hours per week. Sunday is the Lord’s Day when you don’t work. Just take 8 hours of sleep, add 3 hours of personal care, and you have a total of 11 hours. This leaves 13 hours at your disposal for tithing to the Lord.

Therefore, there are 16 hours a week that belong to the Lord. This amounts to 64 hours per month, and it is the minimum the Lord requires. In some cases, however, we are so busy in other pursuits that we say we “do not have time” to serve. This is bondage. This type of bondage is easy to slip into, and we do so unknowingly.

The stewardship of our talents

Each of us has one or more special gifts. It might be music, athletics, faith, administration, clerical, carpentry, home making, prophecy, etc. Each one of us is charged with the development of these gifts and “increase”

them. We are charged with using these gifts to the glory of God. We have to think about how we can best serve Christ—in our profession, in our marriage, in our community.

The stewardship of our resources

It is dishonest to use something for yourself that does not belong to you. In Malachi God asks if it is right to steal from God (Malachi 3:8). There are times that we justify ourselves and say whatever we have to offer is not important. We say that the small amount of our time and money could not make any difference. But in doing so, we lose sight of the fact that God does not need us. He does not need money. We lose sight of the fact that the law of stewardship has been given to us in order that we might have a part in the building up of the Kingdom. God is not interested in how much we have to offer. But He is interested that we offer all that we have. In the gospels, there is a story of a small boy who gave all he had to Jesus so the Messiah could feed 5,000 people. It is true, therefore, that what we have to offer is meager. But when we offer all that we have, then God multiplies it.

Is the Kingdom of God worth the price? Is it worth it to budget our time? Is it worth giving up the new car or a new electric oven? Is it worth keeping family financial records? Is it worth the price we must pay to excel in the way we use our talents for God? Christ said, “The Kingdom is like the merchantman who, having found a pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought the field.” The Kingdom is of eternal worth. The Kingdom offers us new life and hope. So, therefore, let us be good stewards and offer our time, talents, and resources in the building of God’s Kingdom.



Proclaim Jesus Christ

1 CORINTHIANS 4

What is the most important thing in life? I would say that it is our relationship with God. The reason our relationship with God is number one is because it's out of that relationship that we learn how to live properly. It gives us a proper perspective on who we are, and it's out of that relationship and the teachings of our faith that we come to understand the most important values in life. Through that relationship, God gives us strength—the strength to do good, to live properly, to love others, to forgive one another.

But if we're not careful, we may begin to believe what is said in so many ways in our world—that it's our strength, our ability, and our goodness that matter most. A person might even feel so good about themselves that they think they don't need help. Not from other people, not even from God.

But the Scriptures, the Christian faith, and the evidence of history say it's just not true.

A person might be tall, strong, good-looking, educated, sophisticated, wealthy (all those things our culture and society says are so important) and their life can still come apart. A person can be very strong emotionally and still reach a breaking point.

All around us we find such people. We are surrounded by people who hunger for food and for the Gospel. We are surrounded, both inside and outside the church, by people who are wounded. So we are sent into the world to proclaim Jesus Christ and to share a message of Joy, Hope, Love, and Peace.

Paul preached Jesus

In our Scripture lesson, the Apostle Paul is encouraged. Why? Because God had called him to share his ministry. Another reason he is encouraged is the message that he was given to share. It is a message centered in a person, not a message about a book, or a ritual, or an institution, or a set of teachings. Paul preached Jesus Christ.

Another reason for encouragement was that his ministry was empowered by the Holy Ghost.

But most important, Paul understood that he was the messenger and not the message. It was the Lord Jesus that he preached. And when Paul was criticized and assailed, he shook it off and continued to proclaim Jesus Christ. He understood that the “treasure in the earthen vessel” was the Christ and not him.

Share your message

Like the Apostle Paul, you are called to share your witness by word and deed that Jesus is the Christ. Tell others that the Master offers Joy, Hope, Love, and Peace to both the strong and the wounded. And remember that you go in power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

– BOB ANDERSON –

You're stronger than you think. Brothers and Sisters, like Paul your strength comes from the power of the Lord Jesus within you. And if Christ is for you, who can stand against you? Give some thought to the power and joy that is within you. Consider ways that you can proclaim Jesus Christ to your friends and family this week.

Stop the World. I Want to Get Off.

MATTHEW 5:1-18; 6:10-15, 19-20, 38

There is a great deal said today about freedom. There is freedom of speech. There is freedom to dissent. There is “free love.” And there is “free living,” believing that the world somehow owes us something. But there is only one real freedom in the world—the freedom a person has to determine his God. After that, God then determines the person.

Think about the kind of person you are. More importantly, what kind of person do you want to become? Let’s analyze some song lyrics you may be familiar with to see what kind of person you are most like.

Are you a George Powell? He wrote a song “Pack up Your Troubles” about gathering up your troubles in a bag and trying to smile instead. He wrote these short lyrics while sitting at a piano in a bar. Leaving the lyrics there on the piano, Mr. Powell then went upstairs and killed himself.

Are you a Mr. Lytte, who wrote “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”? This song reminds us that it’s *your* boat in life—and *you* are the only one who counts as you drift through life downstream. After all, life is but a dream and the chief goal is pleasure.

Are you a modernist, singing songs like “Hell No, We Won’t Go” and “Burn Baby Burn”? There are those who would destroy our imperfect society but offer no solutions to our dilemmas.

Or are you more like the false prophets today who claim they have found “the way”? “Come follow me,” they cry. They say our problems can be solved by fighting poverty and giving men jobs.

Finally, are you most like those who cry, “Stop the World, I Want to Get Off”? They find their solution at the bottom of their jump from Golden Gate Bridge or at the bottom of a bottle.

Trouble in the world

The troubles of this world are with us today because too many of us have chosen the wrong god. We have chosen the god of selfishness, the god of greed, and the god of the “arm of the flesh.” The only salvation for this world, however, is the establishment of the Kingdom of God. In this sermon, Jesus told us to place our trust in things of eternal worth. It’s true that the world we live in has its troubles. But the important thing for us to remember is that Christ will ultimately be victorious. He was victorious at Golgotha. He is victorious in the day-to-day struggle. And He shall be victorious again when He reigns at the Second Coming.

So, what kind of person are you in today’s world? Are you a Mr. Powell or Mr. Lyte or one of the others? Or are you a Kingdom builder? Stop and think for a moment. What a privilege we have to share Christ in the building up of the Kingdom! What a privilege to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What a glorious thing it is to be in the light of God!

Forward with Increasing Power

EXODUS 14:8, 10, 15

God spoke to Moses and gave him the job of leading the Children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, the mightiest military power on the face of the earth. This was quite the task for a fellow who didn't speak too well. He hadn't asked for the job, but he moved forward in faith and in God's power. His rod turned into a serpent. The river turned into blood. The frogs came, the dust turned to lice, there were swarms of flies, swaths of dead cattle, and the people were covered in boils. Hail fell, locusts ate their crops, darkness fell on the land for three days, and the firstborn was taken.

Finally, Pharaoh relented and let them go. When the Hebrews arrived at the Red Sea, they faced a problem.

Three groups at the Red Sea

At the Red Sea, there were three groups of people. One group wanted to go back to the comfort of what they knew and relative safety. Another group was satisfied to stay right where they were, gathering manna from heaven as it came. The third group wanted to go forward to the Promised Land.

In some respects, people are still like this today. There are those who want to go back to “the good ol’ days” and fight theological battles from 100 years ago. Then there are those who are content where they are. They are comfortable in their air-conditioned pews, waiting for the Lord to feed them with inspiration from above. But they are starving spiritually. Then there are those who want to go forward, building up the Kingdom of God and going forth in power.

Visualize the Hebrews encamped at the Red Sea. They look up to see Pharaoh’s army barreling toward them and they begin to chatter. “I told you this wouldn’t work,” says one. “That Moses,” says another. “He is always getting us in over our heads.” And then comes the command: “The Lord spoke to Moses and said, ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they may GO FORWARD.’” And when the Hebrews responded to that command, they were blessed!

It’s not enough to be on the go. Sometimes we mistake activity for direction. We must be purposeful. When I was a sergeant in the Army, every time I gave the command, “Forward!” I knew where we were going. We had a purpose. I had my orders, and I carried them out. Today we have our orders from the Supreme Commander and we are to go forward, not in circles. As we participate in Zionism, we will come to a greater understanding of where our orders will take us. And as we respond to our orders, we will also be blessed.

Be ready to move with increasing power

You can sit and wait for manna to come from heaven if you want to. But you’re not going to be fed spiritually. God’s power is reserved for those who are on the job. It’s like exercising—use it or lose it. This is what Jesus says in Matthew 28. “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching

them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, unto the end of the world. Amen.”

At home, we used to have a small night light. It wasn't much, but you could use it to find your way in the dark. When I took my two boys to a night baseball game recently, the lights at the field were much greater than our small night light at the house. But the remarkable truth about these two lights is that they both utilize the same source. The difference is in the ability of each bulb to reflect that power.

In a dark house, even the smallest light helps you find your way. Likewise, in this dark world, even a small light is a big help to illuminate the face of the Master. As we exercise the power we have, we increase our ability to receive more power and give more light. We bring our lights together in the fellowship of the church, and our lights blend so that all in the house might see.

We are sent

Moses had a big job to do, leading men and women out of physical bondage. Like him, we lead men and women out of spiritual bondage. We are sent to lead them to a new land and a new way of life. It's a land where all will be of one heart and mind, and we will all dwell in righteousness. So, let's heed our call and move forward with increasing power!



First, Remove the Log

LUKE 6:36-38, 41-42

There is an old adage that says, “Don’t judge your neighbor until you have walked in his shoes.” Likewise, Jesus said to love others and don’t judge them. He told the story of a man who owed a king a vast sum of money and was forgiven the incredible debt. But after he was forgiven, he tried to extract about \$5000 from a person who owed *him* money! When the king heard of this, he demanded repayment.

Judging is usually an ego trip

We judge others to make ourselves feel better. My wife, Betty, once overheard a group of older women criticizing everyone and everything in church, all the while experiencing the Lord’s Supper! Instead of receiving the bread of Life, they poisoned each other. A judgmental attitude always estranges us from one another. It hinders the spirit of fellowship. It discourages, rather than promoting love, hope, joy, and peace. It forces us to spend time and effort to deal with this bitterness, rather than allowing us to invest our time in Kingdom-building enterprises.

When we feel judged by others, we react by being judgmental also. A woman felt judged by church members because of the lifestyle of her daughter. And

this same woman judged her church members by saying they were a bunch of hypocrites (which we are!). She protects herself by ceasing to be part of the fellowship even now. I wish I could say this story is an isolated incident. But I have heard this kind of example over and over again. Judgment always creates a ramification of judgment in return. Score one for the devil!

The danger in judging others

This passage shows how ridiculous it is for us to judge others and to fail to judge ourselves honestly. We must understand that in any given situation we can never fully understand all the issues involved. And just as we cannot understand all the issues that are involved, we cannot understand the motives of others. Nor can we be completely impartial. Only Jesus is competent to judge another person.

In reading the gospels, I find that Jesus' most striking condemnation was not against sins of the flesh, but the sins of a hard mind and arrogant spirit. He repeatedly criticized the Pharisees. Why? Because their focus was on the Law. They had lost sight of the qualities of life that really matter, like love, joy, forgiveness, and peace.

What did Jesus say when they brought to Him a woman who had committed adultery? "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." This is not to say that we are to be unaware of other people's behavior. We are not to endorse their unacceptable actions. Rather, our task is to be discerning without being judgmental. Matthew 7:2 reminds us, "Judge not unrighteously." When you read the last sentence in Luke 6:42, you see Jesus encouraging us to understand our own flaws first. Then through God's grace, we are to overcome and turn away from these sins. Having removed the log from our own eye, we are now in a better position to help others. And we help them, not from our perspective, but at their point of need. In the spirit of humility and love.



Encourage One Another

I THESSALONIANS 5:9-18

A pastor in San Jose invited me in 1954 to teach a class of junior boys. He warned me that they were difficult and hard to handle. But since I was fresh from combat in Korea, I figured I should be able to handle a couple of kids. Boys like competition, so I instituted a point system in the class to keep up with their attendance, scripture memorization, and bringing their Bible to class. I also had a five-question quiz after each lesson. At the end of the month, the boy with the most points could come to our place for Betty's famous hamburgers and a movie. More than one parent complained about having to turn around to retrieve forgotten Bibles that year! We started with three boys and grew to an average of 10 or 12 each week.

Years later, I was walking down the street in San Francisco when a young man in a business suit approached me and asked if I was Bob Anderson. When I told him "yes," he said that he had been in my Sunday school class in San Jose! He was in town on a business trip and was now serving as a pastor in the Midwest. I was feeling pretty good about my influence on him until he said he "didn't remember anything" I taught him. But he did recall my jokes! Even so, it's obvious that he learned something along the way, or he wouldn't have been a pastor.

What he was saying is that the lessons I taught were not important—it was our relationship that mattered. This young man took the risk of embarrassment by stopping a man on the street to ask if he was his former Sunday school teacher. Not because of what he was taught, but because of our relationship.

Strength in relationships

Paul also emphasizes the importance of relationships in the last chapter of 1 Thessalonians. He says to honor, value, and respect each other—especially our leaders. People often comment, “Oh, I’m only a church member...” Brothers and Sisters, libraries could be filled with books of the testimonies of such members who exemplified the Christ through their faithfulness, devotion, and actions. We are to honor everyone.

Be at peace with yourself and with others

There are those who feel estranged from the church. They feel wronged. Paul says to encourage one another. We are to comfort one another, writes the Apostle. When was a time you were comforted by someone actively listening to you by paying you a visit, writing a note, or calling? By someone touching or holding you? By having the hands of the Elders laid upon you to pray for you? Paul reminds us in this letter to truly care for one another.

In my full-time ministry, I traveled about 80% of the time. I would be gone for weeks, even months, at a time. Betty was left at home taking on all the responsibility of caring for our three (and later four) children. At times, she felt almost overwhelmed. One time when Betty was really feeling down, the doorbell unexpectedly rang. On our porch stood one of the most refined, best-dressed women in our congregation. Her hair was up in a bandana, a mop and bucket in her hand. “I’ve come to clean your

house,” she announced and made her way inside our home. Paul says to encourage one another this way!

Be patient with everyone

You recall the prayer, “Lord grant me patience—and do it right now!” How patient the Lord is with all of us. We are called to do the same. Let us always remember to be patient with one another; we’re all a work in progress.

Do good to all

Look around you. How many people you know and love have done something good for you? How much good have you done for them? What good things have you done for others this week? Paul says to encourage each other.

Pray unceasingly

Now “unceasingly” does not mean to constantly move our lips. Rather it is to pray from the heart and to always think and live with the presence of God. Betty’s Aunt Marge is a woman in her late 80s. Every morning, she climbs on her stationary bike and starts pedaling. She prays for one-quarter mile for each member of her family. And she has a large family! With a smile on her face, she says that her grandchildren are going to be the death of her if they don’t stop blessing her with great-grandchildren!

Being scientifically minded, I wanted to know how long it would take the average person to cover one-quarter mile. I learned it was about one to three minutes or so. This brings me to issue the 90-Day Challenge. This challenge calls for you to pray for ninety seconds every day for the rest of the year. Specifically, in increments of 15 seconds, you will:

– MY JOURNEY –

- Praise and glorify God and offer thanks for His bountiful blessings
- Pray for your pastor
- Pray for the leaders of your congregation
- Pray for the members of your congregation
- Pray for someone who needs Christ
- Pray for yourself

Don't Be Afraid. Trust Jesus.

MATTHEW 25:14-18, 24-25

You remember the story. The Master was leaving town. He called his servants together. According to their ability, he gave them varying talents (a form of currency back then). When the Master returned, the first two had doubled the amount he had left with them. They were commended and made rulers over many things. The third servant returned what the Master had given him, but he had not trusted his Master. He was afraid. So, he'd buried his talent and no increase was produced. He was condemned as an unprofitable servant, and that which he had was taken from him.

We are not created equal

The amount of talents given to the men was in proportion to their ability to use them. Due to our gene pool, environment, education, and experience we all have differing abilities. For example, if something needs to be organized, I can probably do a pretty fair job with it. But if something needs to be repaired, I'm in deep trouble. If my car breaks down, I'm highly trained and know exactly what to do. I will call AAA.

What we achieve matters most

It's not the *amount* of increase that matters as much as what we achieve with the gifts and talents we have. In the parable, one man returned 10 talents and another returned four, but both were equally commended.

Playing it safe is condemned

The man who played it safe and buried his talent was the one condemned. Not because of having produced no increase. But because he did not trust his Master and was so afraid that he did not even try. Fear is a terrible thing. It keeps us from becoming what we're meant to be.

Our talents are to be used to glorify the Master and to bring about an increase. If not used, our talents will be lost. In accordance with our abilities, we are accountable for what we achieve in this life.

Never So Glad to See a Cop in My Life!

ACTS 2:1-4

When I was speeding down the highway one time, I looked in my rearview mirror and saw a police officer with his lights on right behind me. I knew I'd been caught! But then to my amazement, he passed me by for another car ahead of me. Whew! I was not glad to see that officer that day. But a friend of mine has a different story. When my friend rolled his car and was trapped with his daughter in a ditch, he prayed hard to see an officer driving by. When help finally arrived, my friend remarked to me, "I was never so glad to see a cop in my life!"

He was glad to see that officer because he had the authority to help them.

There are three kinds of authority:

- Authority from a higher power
- Authority due to expertise
- Authority granted by the people

All three of these elements must be present, or there is no authority. Could I go out on my own and issue speeding tickets? No. If I came on the scene of an accident, would I have the expertise needed to deal with it? No. Would people treat me like an officer if I had no power and no expertise? No.

Ministry requires authority

The same holds true for ministry. Leaders must be called of God and be approved by the people. They must know how to offer effective ministry. And their leadership must be supported by the people. When ministry is not supported by the people, it is ineffective. That's why Jesus said a prophet has no honor in his hometown (Mark 6:6-8).

The devil mixes up our view of our authority so he can distract from ministry. He does not want real ministry to take place. A magician distracts us from reality by getting us to focus on one thing while he does another. The devil is the great magician. He tries to distract us as Christians by:

- Giving us false gods
- Focusing our attention on areas of unimportance
- Causing us to use time and energy dealing with dissension
- Getting us to settle for second best
- Telling us to mistrust one another

The devil will have us believe that what we really need in life is a good cigar. But our greatest need today is for a contemporary Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit was sent by God and connected all the disciples in unity). We need:

Unity between you and God

Unity within yourself

Unity within your family

Unity within the church

Unity of purpose

This was the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21. When we are unified, real ministry can take place with the proper power and authority to change people's lives.



Love Your Enemies

MATTHEW 5:43-48

Jesus said to love your enemies. Consider the opposite of that command. Where does hating your enemies lead? What does that accomplish? To love your enemies does not mean to like them or to put up with unacceptable behavior. We cannot blind ourselves to the faults of others.

To love is easy when it's someone we want to love. I love my wife, Betty, and frequently tell her so. It's rather easy because she is lovable. I can't help myself. But Jesus is not talking about the kind of natural, emotional love a man has for his wife when He says to "love" your enemies. He's talking about consciously adopting an attitude of good will toward an enemy. The operative word is "consciously" because it doesn't come easily. You have to work at it all the time. When Jesus says it's not enough to be friendly only to your friends, He's talking about the greeting of "Shalom" in the time of Jesus that was more like a prayer asking for a friend's peace, prosperity, and spiritual well-being. Jesus is saying we should have this same concern for all persons, not just our friends.

I can think of at least three reasons to love your enemies:

We love our enemies for the sake of Christ

He set the example. We have taken His name upon us. Now our task is to emulate His character.

We love our enemies for their sake

People are important. We are to treat them like a lost brother or sister. Love is the greatest change agent in the universe. And we are to share in Christ's reconciling work.

We love our enemies for our sake

Indifference and hate are like a rattlesnake's venom. If we allow this poison in our lives, it will kill us. Think about the last time you felt hatred for someone. Get in touch with that feeling. How did it affect you spiritually, mentally, physically? How did your hatred affect others around you?

Take some time to reflect on your relationship with Christ and your relationships with people. Reflect on your feelings toward those around you. Can you pray for others, instead of nursing hateful feelings? Can you love for the sake of Christ, for others' sake, and for your own sake?



Give Me This Water

JOHN 4:15-17

The Samaritans were hated by the Jews. They avoided the Samaritans like the plague. In fact, because they preferred never to step foot in Samaria, Jews would cross the Jordan River and take the longer route just to avoid having to go into Samaria on the way to Galilee. So imagine what the disciples felt when Jesus said He wanted to go through Samaria. He was not in a hurry. He did not have to save the three extra days it would take to cross over the Jordan River and go the long route. He just wanted to go through Samaria.

When Jesus arrived at Jacob's well, He was exhausted from a rough week. His disciples were concerned about Him—so they left Jesus to rest while they went in search of food. Usually, the Samaritan women came to the well at the end of the day to draw water and socialize. But this woman in our story comes alone at noon, hoping to avoid embarrassment and ridicule. According to Jewish law, you were allowed to have up to three husbands. But she has had five and is currently living with a man who is not her husband. In the eyes of the town, she is a sinner and outcast.

Jesus speaks to the woman

Jewish men did not speak with women in public. Even husbands did not speak to their wives in public. But Jesus asks this woman for a drink, and they end up talking about sin, repentance, forgiveness, and acceptance...the same topics I usually talk about with a congregation during Communion. Ironically, Jesus also talks about living water—another Communion image of sharing the sacramental bread and wine. In response to the testimony of Jesus, this woman says, “Sir, give me this water.”

When we take Communion, we are asking the same thing. We ask of Jesus, “Sir, give me this living water so that my sins may be forgiven.” So that our thirst for righteousness will be quenched. So that we’ll never thirst again.

Nicodemus and Jesus

There are two scenes in this passage. Scene one involves this woman. But the other scene is Nicodemus, who came to Jesus later under the cloak of night. The assumption is that he did not want to be seen with Jesus because he was a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was the big man on campus—a rich, educated ruler of the Jews. He was part of the privileged religious crowd, but on this night he’s just a man looking for answers. Jesus gives a similar message to Nicodemus involving water, saying that you must be born of the Spirit and of water. Likewise, when Jesus gives us the living water, we are like Nicodemus in that our questions are answered and the door to eternal life is opened.

Two testimonies

Jesus shared His testimony in the span of two days with two very different people. He shared eyeball-to-eyeball, one-on-one, with a ruler of the Jews

and with a nameless outcast of outcasts. Can there be any doubt that Jesus is concerned about all people?

...the rich and the poor

...the educated and the un-learned

...the sinners and the forgiven

...the accepted and the outcasts

...the privileged and the disenfranchised

...the leaders and the followers

...the teachers and the seekers

...and you and me and all the peoples of the world

He shared His testimony, just as He expects us to do with others.

Sharing our faith

Jesus broke tradition by responding to His Father's call to go to Samaria and speak with a woman. Then that woman ran town to town to tell others about Christ. The Bible says she left her water jug behind, "not wanting to be encumbered" by it. When this outcast told her neighbors about Jesus, they believed! They responded. And they drank of the living water.

What encumbrances should we leave behind so that we can share Christ more freely? Are there times when we choose not to share Christ with others because of a bias, like the Jews and the Samaritans? When do we prefer not to go into Samaria and avoid proclaiming Him to people we don't like? Are there times when, like Nicodemus, we prefer not to be seen with Jesus at all? Are there times when we hesitate to stand as a disciple of the Lord Jesus? Are there those who may die of thirst because our voice is silent about the living water?

Brothers and Sisters, what are your priorities in sharing with your friends and neighbors about Christ's living water? Consider the priorities of Jesus and make them yours.



Bind Us Together

MATTHEW 18:15-17

Have you ever had difficulty balancing your checkbook? I keep our bank records on my computer and a few weeks ago I just couldn't get the figures between the bank and my register to agree. Boy, what a stupid computer I've got! I struggled and struggled and struggled. Finally, a message popped up on my computer screen. The message was kinder than this, but in essence it said: "Look, dummy. Go back and fix so and so." So I did, and voila—the two figures balanced.

Sometimes life gets out of whack with God

The theological word for this condition is sin. From experience, we all know that sin separates us from God, and from one another, and even from ourselves. Now I can't speak for you, but when this happens to me, God's message pops up on my inner screen and reads: "Look, dummy. Go back and fix it—and don't do it again."

So here's the fix-it formula:

Awareness+Repentance+Forgiveness=Reconciliation

What is reconciliation?

It means to bring into harmony and balance. If we are to live the kind of life that God created for us, we need reconciliation with God, others, and ourselves. How do we go about this reconciliation thing? Well, a good place to start is to partake of the Lord's Supper. There, we gather in the name of the Lord Jesus in remembrance of His broken body and His spilt blood. We gather to renew our covenant of baptism and to acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior. We gather to lay our sins at His feet and to receive forgiveness. We gather to forgive, as we are forgiven.

Resolving conflict

In this passage, Jesus is very specific as to how we are to resolve conflicts with those who offend us. So let me suggest that if you are offended by someone, your first option is to just forgive and forget. This is always a viable option. But let me hasten to say that if you haven't forgotten it, then you really haven't forgiven it. The emphasis in today's scripture is one of forgiveness rather than one of retaliation. The goal is to heal and strengthen the relationship.

Jesus clearly puts the responsibility for initiating this healing process with the person who has been offended. He tells us to go to that person privately. Privately so that person's honor and ego is respected. Privately so that confidentiality is preserved. The goal is not to be right, but to solve the problem and to preserve the relationship.

My experience is that this usually works. There are other times when, rather than deal with the problem, we allow it to fester like a sliver underneath the skin. Then there are times when we allow negative thoughts to poison our minds and relationships. I knew a woman who thought her

husband was having an affair, despite the lack of evidence. She couldn't let it go and ended up destroying her marriage.

If you are the offender

What should you do if you are approached by someone you offended? An apology works wonders. Just say to the person, "Our relationship means everything to me, and I feel terrible that I've offended you. What can I do to make it right?" But what if you feel you didn't do anything wrong? It doesn't matter. Why not? Because the person you offended thinks he or she is right. They have strong feelings about it. And they're hurting. They are your friend, and you want to promote healing. You want to preserve the relationship. Do what you can to help them out.

What if you can't solve it?

What happens if the two of you can't solve the problem? This passage says the offended party is still responsible for initiating action to resolve the issue. You try again. And you take it to the church. These are strong measures in Matthew 18. But taking such measures says that a congregation cares enough about both parties to help them. It says that forgiveness and reconciliation are important tenets of the Body. It also preserves the integrity of the church and its witness to the community.

Always remember that Jesus is not about punishment or retribution. He is about love and caring. Growth and development. Forgiveness and reconciliation. Salvation and eternal life.

May we turn from those things that divide us. Seek understanding and acceptance. Forgive those who hurt us. And especially may we be bound together in love by cords that cannot be broken.

Christ, the Hope of the World

MARK 6:31-37 & JOHN 6:7-13

In today's world, what are people hoping for? Money, belonging, happiness, a sense of well-being, love, and strong families. Maybe also acceptance, health, friends, peace, and some sort of meaning to life. Can Christ respond to all these hopes? I believe the answer is yes because Jesus is the Son of God and the greatest teacher who ever lived.

Jesus taught as one having authority

The Pharisees regularly quoted the Law and tradition, resulting in narrow, restrictive, and stale teaching. Jesus respected the Law and tradition, but He went beyond them. His message came from within, and He spoke about not only who He was but also what He was. His witness was fresh and alive, like living waters from a new stream. People were thirsty for this, and they marveled at His gracious words. They asked themselves, "What manner of man is this?" He knew what He was talking about; He fully participated in life; and He cared for others deeply.

Christ taught about life—and participated in it

No ivory tower for Him—Jesus chose to be with the people. He walked with them, ate, slept, laughed, and worshiped with them. He lived and taught by example. Jesus also went to where the people were—where they worked, in the synagogue, on a boat, on the road. He went everywhere, from the celebration of a wedding to a funeral for a dear friend. He witnessed at every opportunity. He ministered in terms the people could understand. He had no pretense, choosing to ride a donkey for a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus was also a wonderful storyteller who made the Gospel come alive, which is why Mark says the “common people heard him gladly.”

The people listened because they knew Jesus cared for them

Jesus was motivated by love. He was busy blessing the children. He was concerned with real-life issues, like the woman caught in adultery. He helped at the point of need, choosing to feed the multitude who were hungry.

In human form, Christ was limited

So, He commissioned us to “Go and make disciples.” What does this mean? Through you, Jesus works to address the hopes and needs of people. We must act as if we are the only ones who can help them and be mission-minded. Jesus said, in fact, “Greater works than I you shall do.” Think about it. Together, you and I can help people realize their hopes. Together, you and I can work miracles.



Choose You This Day Whom Ye Shall Serve

JOSHUA 24:14-15

In our modern world, we are faced with making a multitude of decisions. Some are easy—should we steal? No, that’s obvious. Others are relatively unimportant, such as, should we have peas or carrots for dinner? But there are other decisions, important decisions, that must be faced. They regard how we can best use our time and our talents in building up the Kingdom of God. All around us, we face the temptation to make second-best decisions. Perhaps the decision is not wrong in and of itself. But choosing second best takes us away from something that we should give priority to.

Christ was faced with a temptation like this early in His ministry. He was in the wilderness fasting. The Adversary tempted Him, “If thou be the Son of Man, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). How many times these words must have echoed in His ears as He faced the temptation to feed the hungry and starving! But to do so would have destroyed His ministry. His main work was more important. He came that we might have a full life, not a full stomach.

When and Where Should We Choose?

The emphasis is in the present tense: “Choose this day...” The implication is that the choice must be made now, immediately. This is not something we can put off, for we choose by not choosing.

It is not a choice we can make once and for all. It’s something we face continually throughout our life. We choose over and over again—and the choice must be right. In our family life. In our places of labor. In our relationships. We make choices in the streets, in our schools, and in our backyards about the way we love, work, and serve. How can we be sure we make all the right choices? Not all of them will be. Many mistakes will be made. Because we act without thinking. Because we allow selfishness to jam up the network between God and ourselves.

To make the right decisions, we must be in tune with God. This is a life-long process. Our receivers get more in tune the more time we spend in prayer and the more time we study and learn about Him. As we reflect and fast. As we sacrifice and commune. As we seek the will of God, we grow and mature. This is what life is all about.

We have two choices. We either serve God, or we serve the Adversary. Some of us attempt to straddle the fence. We confess Christ, attend church, tithe, and lull ourselves into the delusion that we have done our duty. This is the paramount danger of society. We fool ourselves into thinking we are righteous. Somehow, we allow ourselves to believe that on the day of judgment, God is going to wink at our evil and we’ll squeak through the gates.

Jesus said that no man can serve two masters. “He who is not with me is against me.” Choosing Jesus calls for full commitment. No ifs, ands, or buts—and no halfway measures. Christ calls for unconditional surrender. Someone has said, “It doesn’t take much of a man to be a Christian, but it

does take all of him.” Jesus described being lukewarm as “spew” from His mouth (Revelation 3:16).

Why should we choose?

To answer this question, we need only to pick up the daily paper or listen to the news. We live in a sin-sick world that is threatening to blow itself out of orbit. Its only salvation is through the love of Jesus. Through Him, we will have a fuller life and a better world: the Kingdom of God. The choice is yours.



Choose the Cross

MARK 8:34-35

We are to take up our cross and lose our life, according to Jesus. But what does this mean? And how do we go about it? As always, the central issue is: Who is Jesus? As Jesus was teaching His disciples, He posed this same penetrating question. Can you join with Peter in proclaiming the Christ? To do so implies a response. No longer can you be the same person. You are now in the process of losing your old life and obtaining eternal life. That's what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "In Christ, you are a new creature." And in response to this truth, we join the prophet Isaiah in proclaiming, "Here am I. Send me."

This new life also implies the acceptance of at least four primary gifts that are freely given but must be received.

God's love

God's love is perfect, complete, and unconditional. It is given with no strings attached. To receive this love is a motivating force that propels us to respond to His love by loving others, even as Christ loves us.

The grace of Jesus

This second gift cleanses our souls. We are not perfect, but we are forgiven. Grace is the gift of forgiveness that offers us salvation. Grace offers us eternal life.

A meaningful life

In this world, many have their priorities mixed up. They seek material possessions and personal power. They pursue self-glorifying success, excess, and indulgence. A bumper sticker I once saw read: “At the end of life, the person with the most toys wins.” But deep inside we know that in the end, in the blink of an eye, all the toys are gone. The only thing that will last is the cross we have chosen.

The opportunity to serve

This fourth gift affords us a life of purpose and the chance to make a difference. We find meaning in this world that is bigger than ourselves.

Pick up your cross

What does picking up your cross mean? Ask Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, or David Livingstone. Perhaps it means choosing to do some things in this world because we are His people. Things like feeding the poor and caring for the sick. But it also means teaching kids, visiting homes, planning worship services, cleaning the church, serving in a food line, hugging a crying child (or adult), or serving as a pastor. It means taking a meal to a sick friend, forgiving a slap in the face, calling on neighbors, mowing their lawn, sending a card, calling a troubled person, or preparing yourself for some future service. It can even mean sharing

your joy and laughter with others. It's important to be in tune with the Master. Remember the 80-20 rule. Eighty percent of your service comes from twenty percent of your effort. You must have a clear understanding of what's of primary importance, or else you'll run around doing busy work or "feel good" ministry. It's not what others or the world will have you do. It's what the Master calls you to accomplish.

I'm recalling the story of the man who on Judgment Day stood before the Christ, extolling all the things that he had done in His name. And when he was finished, Jesus said: "But I told you to feed my sheep." So, listen carefully to the Master. Be about your Father's business. And gladly choose the cross.

Are You Listening?

1 SAMUEL 3

Young Samuel thought he heard God calling to him, but no one else heard it. Fortunately, a priest named Eli helped him to know how to listen. If we are not listening, we can't hear God's call. You will hear His call to you everywhere, once you start to listen. It's in the curse of a co-worker, the cry of a teen addicted to drugs, and a crumbling marriage. His call is to help the people who are destitute, homeless, hungry, and ill.

But there will also be angry and violent voices of despair as to what is taking place in our neighborhoods, nation, world, and society, as well as within our church. Let me challenge you to also listen for God's voice in the laughter of children, in a miraculous healing, in a reclaimed soul, in a quiet walk while singing a hymn, and in the whisper of God's Holy Spirit.

God said to Moses in Exodus 3 that He called him. Like Moses, we are also called by God. We may not have asked for this job, but with certainty we are called. And in keeping with this calling, God is saying to you:

I am the Great I Am.

I am in control.

I will sustain you.

This has always been and will always be true. If you've heard God's call and responded to the voice of the Good Shepherd, that is not the end. We all need to be aware that God has a greater call for us. And if we will listen carefully, God will reveal that call to us. However, sometimes, we don't want to listen. "I'm comfortable in my church pew," we say. "I've put my time in. Let someone else do it." Or maybe we're afraid of just not being up to the task.

There are times when we try to muffle God's call by controlling Him. We limit Him to our understanding. We place God in a box and tie it with a ribbon. Then, all of a sudden, we're shocked and troubled when we find God working outside the box. This kind of thinking is not new; it was also a big problem in the Early Church.

A focus on the Law

Take circumcision, for example. Jewish law called for males to be circumcised at birth and since Gentiles were not, they were considered unclean. So, when Gentiles wished to be baptized it was argued that they first had to be circumcised. Boy, as a front-line missionary, I'm sure glad I didn't have to deal with that problem! But in that time, circumcision was a big issue and became so heated that it nearly destroyed the Christian Church. Get ready. Here comes the voice of God again in Peter's rooftop experience where God gave him a vision. "Would I give you anything unclean to eat?" God asked. (Now I want you to remember these words because I'm going to refer to them later.) But before I continue, I'm wondering if anyone reading this today is troubled by this issue of circumcision. Isn't it interesting how something that is perceived to be of such great importance one day can be of such little interest later on? The length of boys' hair comes to mind. What is important today may not be important tomorrow. Take this into consideration the next time some "issue" raises its ugly head.

A focus on heresy

Another big problem in the Early Church involved learned men who kept insisting that the earth was the center of the universe. Anything else was heresy. The immediate solution to this problem was that these heretics who would not recant were burned at the stake. The reason they were burned to death was because it was common understanding back then that a person could not be resurrected without a body. I'm wondering about the common practice of cremation today!

Today's issues

We have the Bible today. It contains everything we need to know. If the theories of science seem to clash with the Bible, the Bible wins out every time. There are those who cherry-pick Scripture to “prove” preconceived notions, while ignoring other verses that conflict with their ideology. Other contemporary controversial issues include changing the name of a church, women in the priesthood, or a new understanding of the Sacraments in the church.

Then there's that business about welcoming “those other kinds of people” into our fellowship. And nevermind Peter's unclean food experience on the rooftop. The church of today is not the same church I was baptized into 76 years ago. I recall a conversation I had with an angry woman who said, “If Jesus knew about the changes taking place in this church, He'd turn over in His grave.” She was right about the changes, but I'm thinking that her theology could use a little work.

I'm not being critical of this woman, and I'm deeply aware that she was hurting, even as others might be struggling with similar issues today. Fortunately, she came to me—a man in all humility of great theological

training, perception, and depth. (The trumpets will now sound!) After all, I've been reading *Peanuts* cartoons for years.

What I shared with this dear sister is the same that I wrote earlier:

Like Samuel, listen for God's voice.

Know that He is the Great I Am.

He's in control.

He will sustain you.

Happily, this good sister prayed about her concerns, the Holy Spirit blessed her, and she was able to reconcile the issues with her belief system. I have dozens of other stories with similar outcomes. Listen up. The Holy Spirit will do the same for you. Knock and it shall be opened. Ask and you will receive.

Risk and hearing God speak

Sometimes we listen and God tells us to take a risk. The more risky the task is perceived, the less likely we are inclined to respond because risk often mutes the voice of God in our ears. Yet the Scriptures tell us about walking into a lion's den and doing battle with a giant while armed with nothing more than a sling shot. And how about Gideon? When the Israelite army is vastly outnumbered by the Midianites, God insists that Gideon has too many men and he is to send most of his army home!

Has God ever asked you to do anything you were incapable of doing? Has He ever deserted you? In response to God's command, I have walked into the den of lions and twisted some tails. I have taken on giants and wished they were smaller. And God knows that there were times when I desperately wished that I had more troops to command. Yet God was always with me. Sometimes I emerged wounded and bleeding, but always victorious. The victory being His and not mine. God promises to be with

you as well. “Lo, I am with you always, unto the end of the world.” That’s my faith and my experience. God is always with me — even when I don’t particularly want Him around.

Brothers and Sisters, hear the one and only true God clearly, for He is saying:

I am the Great I Am.

I am in control.

I will sustain you.

And make no mistake about it. He is saying that you are called. What is your special gift? What gift might you use to glorify your Lord? Reflect on these questions this week. Tell God, “Speak to me, for I am listening...”



Love Casts Out Fear

1 JOHN 4:7-21 & ROMANS 8:35-39

Fear is a terrible thing. It keeps us from “becoming.” It kept Peter from continuing to walk on the water. It kept many of the Hebrews from entering the Promised Land. It also focuses on the negative. Most fear is self-centered. We fear pain, failure, ridicule, and a bruised ego. We’ve all known people who are afraid to act because of what others might think.

Then there are people who are afraid to try because they might fail. If we are not failing, we are not stretching. Edison failed 1073 times before he succeeded in inventing the light bulb. Edison even remarked, “The more we fail, the closer we are to success.” Research indicates that others don’t fault us nearly as much or as often as we think they do. According to Psychologist Karen Horney, when we attempt to do something new, we succeed about 95 percent of the time. All things are possible with Christ.

Just as Jesus stretched forth His hand to help poor Peter, so He offers His hand to us when we’re afraid. That’s the Good News. There will be hard times, however. The Scriptures even tell us that there will be calamities. We may be hunted down or destroyed. We may be hungry or penniless. But the overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loves us so much that He died for us.

Nothing in the world can separate us from that love. God first loved us. He sent His Son to pay for our sin. His Holy Spirit sustains us in the here and now. Christ pleads for us in heaven. And we have the promise of eternal life. Such love propels us into righteous living and opportunities to share the Gospel with others. Cast aside your fear and with renewed confidence go forth in the name of the Lord Jesus to love your families, friends, and neighbors.

The Greatest Commandment

MATTHEW 23:34-39

This passage is about love. Many of us give lip service to the idea that God loves us. We know it in our heads, but it doesn't make its way to our hearts. If someone asks, we agree intellectually that God loves us. But we don't *feel* lovable. We wonder how God could possibly really love us.

We do all kinds of things—serving on committees at church, giving generously, keeping God's Law—to make Him love us more. We even stay awake during the pastor's sermon! But there is nothing we can do to earn God's love. Because He already loves us. He loves us, not for our nature but because of His nature. When Scripture says that "God is love," it's not defining God. It's defining love. God is love; that's His nature. There is nothing else He can do, because to do otherwise, would be to reject His very nature. Then He would cease to be God. This brings us to the age-old question as to why some seem to be blessed, while others seem not to be. The key word is "seem," for I believe God blesses us every time we ask Him. The Bible says to ask and we will receive. Still, at times, we don't understand why things happen the way they do.

The Law

One of my favorite movie scenes is from the film, *The History of the World Part 1*. It's a spoof with Mel Brooks playing the role of Moses. Moses comes down from Mount Sinai and in his arms he holds three tablets, each inscribed with five commandments. The crowd is fixated on him, and he begins to speak. "The Lord God has given unto you these 15..." It's at this point that Mel Brooks stumbles and as he does so, one of the tablets falls to the ground and shatters to pieces. Without missing a beat, Brooks says, "...these 10 commandments for you to obey"!

The Law (the Torah) was a very big deal with the Jews during the time of Jesus and continues to be very important to them today. It contains 613 laws, with 248 being affirmative and 365 being negative, along with a great deal of commentary or interpretation of these laws. Some argued that over time the "letter of the law" took precedent over the "spirit of the law." Learned men would discuss each item for hours on end.

In Matthew 23, we find Jesus talking with some of these learned men who have been plotting to discredit and perhaps indict Him for blasphemy by asking Him a question that could not be answered correctly. A lawyer asks, "What is the greatest commandment?" The game was rigged. It's like the story of the devil challenging God to a baseball game. God is thinking that all of the great players are in heaven, while the devil is saying to himself, "Yes, but the umpires are on my side." It's a gotcha question the lawyer asks Jesus. He believes that no matter how Jesus answers it, it will be wrong. But Jesus turns the tables and draws together two passages, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, and in doing so introduces a new concept of Love over Law. He says to love God supremely—and love your neighbor as yourself. That's strike one for the lawyer.

But the lawyer steps up to the plate again and in an attempt to justify himself asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" He is attempting to add new

“commentary” to the question. After all, you certainly don’t want to love anyone who is not your neighbor. Most of us have neighbors who are like us, but if someone “different” should move in...are they your neighbor also?

Who is my neighbor?

A few years ago, a house across the street from us sold. The previous owner—who was a good neighbor—went around the neighborhood apologizing because they had sold to a gay couple. It was just “too good of a deal to pass up.” Well, the gay couple are good neighbors as well—in fact when I’ve fallen, they are the ones who rush over and get me back on my feet. Then there is the black family on the corner and the Baptist folks across the street, and the guy with all the political signs in his front yard, and the Mormon kids and Jehovah Witnesses who keep knocking on my door. They are all my neighbor.

You see, if you had told me 35 years ago that Betty and I would have two foreign-born daughters-in-law—and one would be black—I would have said you were crazy. Today I would tell you what a blessing they have been to our family. And, by the way, should you want to do a little more thinking about this issue, let me recommend the book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

Who is my neighbor? Jesus answers the question with a parable. A Jew is beaten and robbed and left half-dead by the side of the road. A priest and then a Levite see and recognize him as one of their own, but choose to move on. Then a Samaritan—hated by this wounded man—interrupts his journey, risks harm, renders aid, and places himself in debt to an innkeeper for this Jew’s continued care.

Jesus asks a question

Now it's Jesus' turn to ask a question. Which one was the man's neighbor? The answer is obvious—the one who showed mercy. Then Jesus says, "Go and do thou likewise." Strike two for the lawyer. Strike three comes when Jesus turns the lawyer's question upside down by teaching in this parable what the real question is: Are you willing to be a neighbor?

If your answer is yes. Then go thou and do likewise.



Trouble in Today's World

MATTHEW 28:18

In today's world, we don't have to look far to see the trouble we're in. We pick up the paper and read of a war. We switch on the television and see the social unrest of this great nation. And we can go on and on. Where will it stop?

Trouble at the start

It would seem that we have had trouble from the beginning. Adam and Eve are given the dubious distinction of being credited with committing the first sin. We have a tendency to think of sin in terms of specific wrongdoing, like stealing or adultery. But these acts are not sin. Sin is the rejection of God's will. The *specific acts* we commit are rightly called sins (plural). But the real sin, or root of the problem, is the rejection of what we know God wants us to do.

In Adam and Eve's case, it was not partaking of the forbidden fruit that was the issue. It was disobeying the will of God. In this sense, sin is idolatry. It is idolatry in that we place ourselves, instead of God, at the center of the universe. We worship ourselves. We do not feel the need for God.

Atonement

Early in the history of humanity, this was the condition of the world. Man had turned away from God. There was a need for atonement—AT ONE MENT. Christ came to minister to us, that we might be AT ONE with our Father. In some respects, sin is like a boulder on the road, blocking our way. We try to move it, but can't. We measure the weight of the boulder by the effort and power required to move it. And so it is with sin. It is not until we see how much it cost God to remove the stone between us and Him that we understand how great was the weight of our sin.

Humanity was given a choice of two gardens: The Garden of Eden or the Garden of Gethsemane. We chose the Garden of Eden, so Christ came. And with His coming came the call to enlistment, to work to build up the Kingdom (Matthew 28:18). This battle cry has echoed down the pages of history. It was this cry that was heard and answered by Moses, Paul, Peter, James, and John. Who calls? Christ calls. “Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

The Call to Enlistment

1 JOHN 2:17

A famous preacher was once asked the secret to his success. His answer was that he had one sermon outline. It went like this:

Point 1 – the world is upside down

Point 2 – it needs to be turned right side up

Point 3 – We are just the people to do it

Are we called to live a boring life? To go to meetings at church? To sing hymns and quote scriptures? Was the Church created to give us a feeling of self-righteousness? To satisfy our ego? To give us a sense of belonging? Is the purpose of the church to become ingrown? No, no, no.

The purpose of the church is to let our light shine so others may find their way in a world of darkness. When my daughter, Mary, was young she liked to blow out candles. One time she came across a yard torch and was so frustrated that she could not blow that sucker out! As followers of Christ, we are to let our light shine brightly so that the Adversary is frustrated because he cannot “blow it out.” We are to stand before the tomb of the living dead and call them forth. To do otherwise would be to fall short of our calling.

Frontline action

It has always fascinated me that the Church has shown its greatest growth in times of persecution. During the hardest moments it kept opening up new frontiers and moving forward in faith. I opened my concordance the other night and found over 1000 references to “go”—just as Christ commanded us in the Great Commission. Christ’s ministry was focused on action and movement. It should be the same today. As is said, “Even Christ can’t steer a bicycle that’s not in motion.” Therefore, our enlistment must be for frontline action. We must understand that there are no sleeping soldiers in the Army of God. We must continue to live on the frontier with Christ.

We are all wanted and called. Called for what?

To obey all the commands of Christ? Certainly.

To study and improve ourselves? Absolutely.

To teach our children the way of the Kingdom? Definitely.

To grow in Christ-like stature? Hopefully.

To witness to the world? Positively.

To build the Kingdom? Most assuredly.

The list can be summarized in five words: Father, thy will be done. As the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:17, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” Our primary calling, therefore, is to bring about the purpose of God. For this purpose, we were created, we are called, and we are enlisted.



I Have Chosen You

JOHN 15:9-16

God needs us as His instruments when people are hurting, sharpened and honed and ready for His use. Christ laid down His life for you. And He calls for you to lay down—or to give—your life also. Not in death, but in service. The essence of your calling is to serve where and how He would have you serve. We must bloom wherever we are planted.

Walk with God

To see clearly His vision (purpose) for you, you must be on the mountaintop with Him. Down in the valley, it's hard to see. We get separated, depressed, and discouraged. But when we are walking with the Master, we are supported, alive, and encouraged. The idea is to stay close to the source of the fire that is within you. A coal taken away from the fire goes out. Let the power of the Holy Spirit burn within you and you'll discover your purpose.

Some people's purpose is to be a shepherd to others. Think about the relationship a shepherd has with his sheep. They love him, know him, lie down with him and respond to his voice. Like the Good Shepherd, ministers are called to love and know their people.

Someone has said that the characteristics of good church leadership are wet eyes, bent knees, and broken hearts. Let me suggest three other characteristics:

- Prayerfulness that leads to hearing God’s direction
- Eyes of vision
- Hearts filled with love and joy

You are called to love the lost

The Bible says, “Behold the field is white, already to harvest.” If the field is white, it’s almost too late. Each of us has a portion of the harvest for which we are responsible. In our church, after someone agrees to serve as a minister, we have the congregation voice their support. I ask the congregation and they answer:

Will you as the people of God support them in the ministry to which God has called them?

Answer: We Will!

Will you do all that is in your power to encourage them in their ministry?

Answer: We Will!

Will you encourage them in their study and learning?

We Will!

Will you encourage them with your love and affirming words?

We Will!

Will you pray for them and for their family often?

We Will!

There are four things to remember about ministry:

- **You have the love and support of your family and of this congregation and district**

And wherever you go, you will find that same love and support.

- **The mark of successful ministry is to bring forth fruit**

Ask God to help you understand how you are to be a “family minister” to a campus congregation. A few examples might be:

To help students to become a part of the family

To strengthen the faith of those who are searching for life’s meaning

To be aware of opportunities to assist those who will be choosing their life partners

To witness to those who have not yet come to know the Christ

Remember that we are to “bloom where we are planted.” Develop a life-long and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Remember also that a large portion of our priesthood authority comes from our knowledge and expertise. That’s why we are God’s instruments, sharpened and honed, ready for use.

- **Have confidence in yourself and in the Lord**

It is He who has called you.

It is He who will sustain you.

It is He who will give you the power to bring forth much fruit.

- **Above all, claim the promise of Jesus**

He said, “Ask in my name and it will be given you!” (John 15:7)



How Will They Know We Are Christians?

JAMES 2:14-17

We take life for granted. But when we're facing death, or someone we love is facing death, life takes on a whole different meaning. Not only life in the here and now but also life in the hereafter as well. There's a big lie being proclaimed on bumper stickers that goes like this: "Whoever has the most toys when they die wins." I'm here to proclaim that whoever has Jesus Christ in their life wins! They win all the marbles, the whole enchilada. Not only for today but for all eternity. Jesus wants you to choose life. Both for now and forever. That's the reason why He came. "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly," Jesus said. He calls us first to choose Him and then to help others find the way also.

Jesus shows us who God is

Jesus took everyone by surprise with His claim to be God. "He who has seen me, has seen the Father," Jesus said. I once preached a sermon with a window frame beside me as an illustration. Each of us views the people around us through a window—just as others see us through their windows. And we also view Jesus through this same sort of window. It is through

the window of Jesus' life and ministry that God is revealed to us and we better understand His grace, love, and forgiveness.

How could we possibly have this view of God except by catching a glimpse of His nature through the window that Jesus displays for us? Jesus shows us who God is. Our task then is to see the revelation of God through the Lord Jesus and to become faithful disciples.

Paul says we are Christ's ambassadors

We have a wonderful message to tell others about who God is, as revealed through Jesus. But to be an Ambassador one must have credibility. Now here's a scary thought. You and I earn that credibility through the kind of lives that we lead. You see, people are looking at us through their windows. And just as we see God through Jesus...so people see Jesus through our lives (James 2:14-17). Ask people how they initially came into contact with the church. They will often say someone loved them into the church. So, how will people know we are Christians? By what they see us doing through our windows.

Break Down the Walls

EPHESIANS 2:14-15

The temple in Jerusalem was more than bricks and stones. The Jews believed that it was here that God dwelt. It was here that people went to receive salvation. But the very layout of the building complex demonstrated the estrangement of the Gentiles (non-Jews). Inside was a series of courts. The innermost court was the “holy of holies” into which only the High Priest could go—and then only once a year. Then came the court of priests—just outside the Holy Place. Then the court of the Israelites. Then the court of women. And finally, far back and away from the priests, away from the men of Israel, and away from the “lowly” women came the court of the Gentiles. In this lowest of courts was posted signs in both Latin and Greek warning that death would come to any Gentile who sought to advance further toward the Holy of Holies.

So what did the layout of the temple say in terms of the value of the Gentiles and the possibility of their salvation? When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple...” He was talking about His body and by way of the crucifixion, all that this temple had improperly stood for had been destroyed. The signs denying entry had been smashed. The barriers between the outer and inner courts had been torn down. Hostility between the Jews and Gentiles had been abolished. He is saying that on crucifixion day,

even the curtain isolating the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom. In Ephesians, Paul is saying that the way is now open to all. That reconciliation had taken place. That through the cross we have been brought into one Body. That no one is excluded. And all of us have direct access to the Father.

Walls that separate

We don't have to look very hard to see that we continue to build walls that separate us from one another today. So what are we going to do about this? Let me define three words. The first word, discrimination, may be defined as the denial of equity based on personal characteristics. The second word, stereotyping, refers to forming an instant or fixed picture of a group of people that is usually based on false or incomplete information. And the third word, prejudice, literally means to "prejudge" based on preconceived ideas about others.

All kinds of people are discriminated against: women, the poorly educated, the physically and mentally challenged, people who cannot speak English, obese people, sick people, old people. People who are different or who have different religions or beliefs. The homeless. Those of lower social positions. So what can we do to break down the walls that separate us? I have a few suggestions.

Prayer and awareness

We can break down the walls through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the way of love, peace, and justice. All things are possible through Him. We can break down the walls by also building awareness. Awareness is always the first step toward change. So examine your feelings and examine your actions.

Seek to understand

We can break down the walls by seeking opportunities to understand. Visit with people of color in your neighborhood. Attend a different ethnic or cultural church service. Work and serve with those who are different from you. Take a cultural awareness course. Read some good books on the subject of discrimination, stereotypes, and prejudice. Ask your pastor to invite ministers of ethnic or other cultural churches to preach in your congregation.

Promote equality

We can break down walls by promoting equality. Support organizations promoting justice. Object to racist jokes and insults. As soon as it appears, paint over racial graffiti. Write letters to the editor that promote justice. Support equal hiring practices. Demonstrate concern and respect for all people. Support equal rights legislation. Boycott television shows, movies, and services that promote prejudice and stereotypes. Let your voice be heard. Enlist others to join you. Protest to theater and station managers and complain, especially to their headquarters and to their sponsors. Serve as a mentor to a minority child. Send a needy kid to church camp.

The list goes on and on. You can break down the walls that separate people from each other.

The Body of Christ

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-18

Everything requires organization to function properly. In Matthew 16, Christ said, “I will build my church.” “Build” implies a plan and a purpose. The Church was intended to have organization and parts arrayed in a specific design so that it could function properly. The Church’s ultimate function is to bring souls into the Kingdom of God. This is clearly seen in Christ’s design of His Church. This is the way God organizes His people to do His work in the world today.

Designed for ministry

One of His designs involves calling individuals to the ministry. The calling consists of four principles:

A call to serve

A call from God Himself

A call to specific functions like a priest, teacher, or deacon

A call for a reason (purpose)

Designed for Sacraments

Another design involves the role of the Sacraments that strengthen the Body, including the Lord's Supper and baptism. These practices are designed to bring us into a closer relationship with God and with others.

Designed to build up the Kingdom

We are designed to make a difference in the world. To be the leaven or yeast in the communities where we live, we need to be mixed in the dough! We must offer loving, vital ministry to a world in need and provide a free climate where people can grow and mature. Some words that come to mind to describe our work include being caring, ethical, always learning, and always practicing reconciliation. What doesn't come to mind when I think of God's Church are words like chaos, distortion, and mistrust. These are not words I associate with God because He is a God of order.

The whole Body is called to serve

It is through that calling—and our response—that the Body is given life. This makes the Body more than an organization. It lives, and it is more like an organism. Each part is important. I once met a woman at a conference who had terrible burns on her hands. She shared how she had rescued her child from a house fire. As I thought about her story, I realized that every part of her body had responded to the child's desperate need. Her ears heard his cry. Her brain sent the message to her legs that carried her into the burning room where the child was. Guided by her eyes, she found the child. Her arms beat out the flames, and her hands now carry the scars. Her entire body worked together to save this child.

We are called to extinguish the flames of anguish in the souls of people in a hurting world. This work is accomplished through the work of the

priesthood, through worship, through celebrating the Sacraments, through caring programs of ministry, and through the collective efforts of the Body. And let us always remember that our efforts will be multiplied many times over through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are never alone.

Our Lord works miracles. It was He who fed 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes. This miracle was made possible through the willingness of a small boy to share all he had. Like the mother who ran toward the fire, we are called to help those in need—it may be painful to answer. It may be scary. But then again, we are here today because 2,000 years ago a man endured fear and pain for our sake and was scarred for our sins. And it is He who calls us today to function as a healthy and vital, living Body of Christ.



The Holy Spirit

MARK 1:1-6

During Advent, we celebrate the coming of the Messiah. Traditionally, there is a wreath made of evergreens, along with four candles symbolizing hope, preparation, joy, and love. Advent is a time to lead us into the Christmas season and prepare us for the celebration of the birth of Christ. The operative word is “preparation”—just as John the Baptist was the forerunner to Christ to prepare the way of the Lord. John preached faith, repentance, and baptism by water for the remission of sin. But he proclaimed there was One coming after him whose shoes he was not fit to tie. That One would baptize not only with water but also fire and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of this prophecy.

In John 14, Jesus promised to leave us with a comforter, the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the Holy Spirit would be to bear witness of Christ, to guide us into truth, and to reveal things to come. The fulfillment of Jesus’ promised Holy Spirit is told in Acts 2.

Baptism by the Holy Spirit

When we are baptized by the Holy Spirit, we are new persons in Christ. But we are not completely grown. Our new life in Him is to be a growing

experience. It's like when a child is born. It's small and weak and in need of nourishment and care.

When we are “born again” in Christ, we are not completely grown. We are just beginning our journey, and the task of the family of God is to nourish and care for us. As we grow, our capacity to receive additional light from the power Source will be enlarged. Additional light will be given as we use the light we have.

Let me suggest ways that all of us can use the light we have. And perhaps by following these suggestions, we can help to “Prepare the way of the Lord” during the Christmas season and all year long. We can:

Seek the will of the Father

Be humble and exhibit hope, love, joy, and peace

Practice acceptance

Be faithful to the teaching of Christ

Live lives of integrity and moral courage

Exercise faith and repentance

Forgive one another

Forgive ourselves

Study and reflect on the glory of God

Be valiant in prayer and testimony

Seek strength in the company of the saints

Strengthen our marriage, family, and relationships

Minister to our community and share our faith

Assume our rightful responsibilities as a member of the congregation

Be a faithful steward of our time, health, and resources

When someone is “Confirmed”

We can see that Confirmation does not signal “The End” but “The Beginning.” When someone is confirmed as a member of our church, they take upon them the name of Jesus Christ, promising to follow Him always. They receive the fullness and the power of the Spirit in their lives. From that point on, they are never alone. Jesus walks by their side. The Holy Spirit guides them into truth and will strengthen and comfort them.



Attitude: The Key to Worship

PSALM 95:1-7

How important would you rate one's attitude in worship? In many cases, we treat worship as an athletic event. As a congregation, we sit back and watch the game. Then afterward we rate the experience as an A, B, C, D, or fail! We determine the kind of experience we have with God by our attitude. If we come prepared to worship, we worship. If we expect to have an experience with God, we have an experience with Him. If we plan on participating, we participate instead of being spectators.

So how you can prepare and plan for worship?

Prepare yourself through prayer and fasting during the week

We can pray for God's Spirit to touch a specific person in our church in a special way, from the preacher to the musicians. Ask for all those in charge of the service to feel God's power.

Prepare yourself through repentance

Come before the Lord with clean hands and a pure heart (1 Corinthians 11). This is especially important in receiving Communion.

Consider Communion as an experience with Christ

What would you do to prepare if you were invited to have dinner with the President at the White House? How excited are you to have a meal with the Lord at His house? When you take Communion expect to meet God by faith at this special time. In Matthew 7, Jesus reminds us that if we ask, we receive. When we see this promise fulfilled, it reinforces and expands our faith. Ask God to help you worship, and then ask yourself afterward how a sense of anticipation aided your worship experience.

Have a plan for going to church

Before you leave the house, tell each family member how much you love them. When you arrive at church, smile and greet each person you see. Do the same thing when you select a new place to sit in church. Change sides, sit toward the front, change it up and meet someone new! Before the service starts, silently pray for those in church with you. Say softly to yourself, “This is going to be a wonderful service.” Look over the responsive reading sections in the program and/or read the scriptures listed. Underline important words. Ask yourself, “What meaning does this have for me?” Look over the hymns in the program. Ask yourself, “What do these words mean to me?” Sing with your heart. Make your singing alive. When you make your offering, realize you are placing a gift at the foot of the Master. Offer a private prayer that this gift might be acceptable in His sight.

When worship changes you

I heard a man speak these words at a worship conference: “Some of you have come here to experience speaking in tongues and the singing of angels. If this were to happen, some would scoff. But, if through the power of the Spirit, your lives are transformed, then no man can deny it.”

Let us pray and expect to experience the Lord every time we are at church. Let our motto be, “We have come to worship. We leave to serve.”

Does My Belief Matter?

PROVERBS 4:14-18

There is a popular belief today that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere. But you can be sincerely wrong. There are some beliefs that do not matter, such as a couple arguing about what's for dinner. You may believe beef would be good, and your spouse may hold a different belief. There are also times when compromise and abandonment of individual belief is wise and necessary in the interest of unity. For example, we Americans believe driving on the right side of the road is correct, but we suspend that belief when driving in England.

But there are times when belief matters very much, especially when it is more important to be right than to be popular. There are times when correctness is more to be desired than unity. The pathways of history are littered with the wreckage of men and nations and civilizations who thought it unimportant to believe in the laws of God. To them, the important thing was to be powerful and popular.

Beliefs Jesus taught

Jesus and the Apostles taught certain truthful, saving doctrines based on the unchanging laws of God (John 7:16-17; John 12:46-50). Jesus attached

no small importance to those doctrines. If sincerity of belief was all that mattered, He would have no occasion to disagree with the Pharisees and Sadducees on matters of doctrine. In fact, the religious leaders' doctrine was popular; it was sanctioned. But Jesus said to beware of it (Matthew 16:6-13). Sincerity of belief could not make these teachings correct.

Falling away from the truth

The Apostles continued to teach the doctrines of Jesus, but men began to change them to suit themselves. Paul warned about this in Hebrews 13:9. John further warned the people in verses 9-10 of 2 John. It is evident that these men were not among those who felt that beliefs did not matter.

Not long after Jesus ascended into heaven, the time came when Paul's prophecy was fulfilled and the falling away was complete. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine," Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, "...but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned into fables."

Our beliefs matter. Be sure yours are based on the Word of God.



Join Christ's Parade

JOHN 12:12-19 & MATTHEW 28:1-6

Let me transport you 2,000 years ago to a wonderful parade in Jerusalem when the people welcomed Jesus as He entered the city riding a donkey. In the excitement, many people watching the parade had the wrong idea. That's understandable, for Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead shortly before and had performed all kinds of miracles. The people reasoned that if He could do that, Jesus could also free them from Roman bondage and give power to the Jewish people.

Today, I'm wondering what kind of wrong ideas we have about this same Jesus. Let's look at this parade in Jerusalem more closely.

Jesus organized the parade

It was His parade, this triumphal entry into the city. Jesus was the Grand Marshall, and He knew what was in store for Him in just a few days when the crowd would turn on Him and He would be crucified. And yet the Bible says that Jesus "set his face steadfast" toward Jerusalem. He asked the disciples to secure a donkey that had never been ridden before, in fulfillment of prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. Livestock was a commodity in Jesus' time and people often pooled their resources to buy donkeys and cattle. Whoever gave

up this donkey for Jesus' sake made a great sacrifice. When asked why they were untying the donkey, the disciples simply replied, "The Lord needs him." There was no promise of its return. I wonder if we could give up something so precious in our lives simply because Jesus asks—money, a job, etc.

The scene changes

Within a week, the scene quickly shifted from a joyful parade to the cross where Jesus suffered and gave His life. From there, the scene shifts again to an empty tomb where women are searching for Jesus' body but He is not there. Sometimes we look for Christ in all the wrong places. If you want to find Him, look for Him in Scripture. Look for Him in the fellowship of the saints. Look for Him in the lives of the hurting.

After Jesus appears to the women, He appeared to the disciples who were meeting in a locked room, hiding from authorities. Think how they must have felt. They had staked everything on Jesus, and in the span of three days their whole world had come crashing in on them.

Four important things happened in the Upper Room

- When Jesus appeared to the disciples, He granted them peace.
- Their faith was renewed.
- They knew with certainty Jesus was alive.
- They were given the Great Commission.

Thomas, however, doubted Jesus was alive. The world is like that today. Many doubt. Overwhelmed with grief and sorrow, they need comfort and understanding. They need hope and peace that only Jesus can bring. It is for their sake that Jesus gave us the order to "Go and make disciples." Now He invites us to join in another wonderful parade—a parade to praise and honor our Lord and proclaim Christ as Savior.

Jesus Keeps His Promises

JOHN 3:16-17

This passage tells us that God loves us deeply and unconditionally. He kept His promise to the early prophets to send His Son. Jesus came full of promises—and He keeps every promise. But there are things He does *not* promise. For example, Jesus does not promise us a rose garden. Christians face the same trials and tribulations as everyone else—unexpected deaths, kids on drugs, the list goes on and on. Jesus tells us that the rain falls on the just and the unjust—but He does promise to help us carry our problems.

Christ challenges us to build our lives on solid bedrock

In Matthew 7, Jesus tells the story of a fool who built his house on the sand. When the storms came (and they will come), it came down like a house of cards. But a wise person builds on a solid foundation—Christ Himself. His promises are a foundation that can withstand the storms of life. What promises? There are many, but let me focus on seven promises.

1. Jesus promises us forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7) – Do you know you're forgiven?
2. Jesus promises to light up our lives (John 12:46) – Have you ever felt enlightened by the power of the Holy Spirit?

3. Jesus promises that through faith, all things are possible (Mark 11:24) – Have you received a blessing?
4. Jesus promises that we will receive spiritual food and drink (John 6:35) – Do you know He is the bread of life? If you believe in Him, He says you shall never thirst. Are you spiritually hungry? Just say, “Feed me, Lord.”
5. Jesus promises power to become the sons and daughters of God (John 1:12) – Have you received Christ?
6. Jesus promises us the Kingdom of God (Luke 12:34-35) – Luke assures us it is God’s “good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Do you see the Kingdom demonstrated among Christians?
7. Jesus promises us the gift of eternal life (John 3:16) – Do you believe in Him for eternal life?

Jesus’ promises are guaranteed

You might say they are backed by the Good Faith of God Almighty! So how do we claim all these promises? There is a well-known painting of Christ standing outside the door of a small cottage, knocking on the door. If you look closely, you’ll see that there is no latch on the outside of the door. The only way Christ can enter our lives is for us to invite Him inside.

Ask Jesus to experience more of the joy of His promises being fulfilled in your life. Open the door—ever wider and wider—to Jesus Christ, who keeps His promises. Your job is just to keep the door open.



Jesus Is There!

JOHN 6:16-21

The context of this passage includes all the things Jesus had already accomplished—healing the sick and feeding 5,000 people. Having performed so much ministry, He then went high into the mountains to escape the crowds and be alone. The disciples gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and awaited His return. When darkness fell, and Jesus hasn't returned, they got in a boat and sailed for Capernaum. When they were far from the safety of the shore, a treacherous storm arose without warning. There is darkness. Violent winds. A heavy sea. The disciples are afraid and almost overwhelmed. They were not a bunch of Sea Scouts out for a pleasure cruise—they were seasoned fisherman who were terrified!

Have there been times in your life when you felt the same? You are without Jesus. You're tossed about. It's dark, rough, and you feel as if you are sinking.

Suddenly, the disciples see someone walking toward them on the water. Perhaps images of sea monsters fill their minds! Then Jesus calls out to them and tells them not to be afraid. Jesus is there! This passage conveys four simple truths:

1. We must recognize Jesus as the Christ
2. We are to invite Jesus into our boat
3. As we travel with Jesus, we experience comfort, strength, and peace
4. As we travel with Jesus, our destinations are redefined and we reach them more readily

My wife's dad used to say, "God can easily part the Red Sea, but He also expects us to build bridges." That's true! I would just add, "Make sure Jesus is there as your architect." Winston Churchill said, "If you're going through hell, keep walking." Sound advice, but do make sure Jesus is there with you. When I was in combat in the Korean War, we proudly proclaimed, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." That's a great slogan, but let Jesus be your strength and shield. Take it from one who has claimed the promise—when you need Him, Jesus is there.

In fact, I keep finding Him there, even when I don't think I need Him. Twenty years ago, I had cancer. I had two major surgeries and underwent six months of chemotherapy. Many prayed for me, including a group that met weekly on my behalf and prayed for me every day. Because of my illness, I was home a lot and spent much time holding my newborn grandson. I vividly remember praying, "God, let me live to see my grandson Robert graduate from high school." He's now at Princeton University. And I'll see his sister, Carmen, graduate from high school this June. Now, I am praying to see my other granddaughter graduate from high school!

Jesus is there for us in many different ways. But one of the major ways that He reaches us is through people. People like you and me. That's how He reminds us that He is there.



Others See Jesus Through Us

JOHN 14:8-9

One thing I really enjoy about my job is how many new Christians I meet. Whenever I ask them what drew them to our church, few reply that it was our theology that got them there! No one has said it was my good looks either. What they say is that they came to church because of a person. Or some ministry they received from others. Or because of the spirit of fellowship we enjoy in church. In this passage, we learn that as Christians, we see God through the life and ministry of Jesus. The closer our relationship is with Christ—the clearer we see God. That’s why Christ’s presence in our life is so important. But just as we see God through Jesus, the truth is that others see Jesus through us. Boy, that’s a scary thought!

Jesus showed us who God is

Jesus started His ministry with baptism in Matthew 3. He was without sin, but he chose to be baptized to fulfill the Law. That pleased God, who said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” In like manner, we are to obey God’s laws—not just baptism, but all of His commands. Why? Because others see Jesus through us. Jesus also taught and demonstrated that the spirit of the law is what’s important. He said, “If someone

slaps you, turn the other cheek. If someone robs you, give him your coat also. If someone uses you, forgive and pray for them.” Jesus walked the talk because He suffered and died on the cross, surrendering His cloak to His tormentors, forgiving and praying for them. In doing so, He showed them who God is.

Don't look now, but others see Jesus through us

Jesus taught and demonstrated that we are to reach out to the hurting (Luke 4:18-19). He took the Gospel to the poor. He healed the brokenhearted. He preached deliverance to the captives. He restored sight to the blind. We follow His example when we support others through addiction. When we help release people from financial bondage. When we listen to those who are hurting. When we share with others that God loves them. That's how others see Jesus through us.



Ministry of the Body

1 PETER 1:13

Throughout Scripture, we see Jesus ministering in various places: on the side of a mountain, by a water well, at the seashore, in a boat, around the dinner table, at a trial, at a wedding feast, and among the crowds. We find Jesus where the people are. He's there because He loves them. He reached out to all kinds of people...poor, rich, righteous, sinners. Jesus sent His disciples to all kinds of people to help them, and He cried when people failed to respond to His love for them.

It seems to me that we have our priorities twisted around because we direct most of our ministry today toward our members, not those outside the church. Look at your congregation's efforts and budget. Look at your own personal ministry. We build expensive buildings—not as outposts but as retreat centers. Not for the glory and work of God, but for pleasure and comfort. We resist establishing new congregations out of fear of what they may do to our existing congregations. Worship takes on the aspects of a major sporting event, where the emphasis is on filling the stands with dues-paying members. We file in, take our seats, and sit back to watch the God Team perform. We are spectators, not participants. Then we second-guess the coach and staff! Resentful that we are not winning the conference, we are fast to criticize the price of admission.

I'm poking fun at us for the sake of emphasis. I firmly believe in strong congregations that are warring holes, not fortresses. I'm not asking the church to do more. I'm confronting us with the fact that much of what we do is not working. Changes need to be made in the way we offer and deliver ministry. We resist change as humans. When something is not working, we often work harder to try and make it more successful. Such a strategy is self-defeating.

God has called you at this time in history to be an important, functional part of the Body of Christ. You are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Salt is of no use if kept in a cupboard. Light is no help if it's covered. So, we'll have to do things differently. Change always brings about fear and resistance. But I challenge you to be leaders of powerful influence who are also filled with love, hope, and faith. To be leaders of clear vision and resolute courage. To be under the direction of the Holy Spirit and faithfully lead.



Love Your Neighbor

1 JOHN 4:7-21

Over 2,000 years ago, in the city of David, Christ the Lord was born in the simplest of surroundings. God sent His Son to us in the full knowledge of the pain that He would have to bear for our sins. He did this for one reason, because He loves us. Jesus, because of His love for us, asked the Father to send Him. Christ laid down His life for His friends and for sinners as well. Many years later after His birth, someone asked Jesus one day, “What is the greatest commandment?” His answer was to love God—and love our neighbor as ourselves.

A world that’s changed

The world has come a long way since Jesus’ time on earth. Today’s world is complicated and confusing. For some reason, a simple word like love seems to get lost in today’s vast industries, in our race for outer space, and in our struggle to make the next payment on the television set. Even when we take time to think about “love,” it seems confusing. The dictionary has over a dozen definitions for it. There is the love a man has for a woman. The love a child has for ice cream. And the score of a tennis game. But it boils down to just two types of love.

On the one hand, we find the common type of love we've all experienced, the kind that demands a reward for its efforts. It's the child who offers his parents a hug and kiss, but then asks if he can stay up just a little later to watch television. It's also the puppy love of teenagers. It seems real, but it's revealed to be selfish in that it exists to bring them belonging and security. We even find selfish love in the church, where seemingly dedicated men and women work hard, but their true motives may be self-serving.

True love

This is the kind of love God has for us, and it's the kind of love He wants us to have for our fellow man. The Good Samaritan in Luke 10 is a beautiful, well-known parable concerning the true love a man can have for his neighbor. It's even more outstanding because this Samaritan was despised by the man he took compassion on. He endangered his own life in giving aid to this stranger, and he went away without so much as a thank you.

This is the same love Jesus had for us on the day He was crucified. When after He had been betrayed and rejected...when after He had been spat upon and they'd nailed His flesh to the cross...He then looked at His tormentors and said: "Forgive them. They know not what they do." Here was a man of flesh and blood. A man who dedicated His life to others and whose earthly reward was betrayal by Judas and rejection by many of the same ones He attempted to minister to. Even Peter, one of His chosen disciples, denied Him not once but three times. But Jesus Christ came to earth in full knowledge of what was to happen to Him. He came because He loves us.

A new commandment

As Christ's modern-day disciples, we need to develop our love for God and our fellow man. True love is a motivating power and is expressed in practical terms. True love moves us closer to God and our fellow man. True love places the work of the Kingdom first, the benefits of others second, and our personal considerations last. True love is expressed through giving of one's whole self to the work of the Master.

This is the kind of love people have when they catch a true vision of Jesus. It's the kind of love that people demonstrate when they place the work of Jesus as number one in their lives. It produces dedicated workers. It produces dedicated workers. It builds churches. It provides funds to support missionary outreach. It makes our communities better places to live. It wins souls to Christ. Do you love Jesus? Really and truly love Him? Jesus asked this same question of Simon Peter, and He poses the same response to you. If you love Him, feed His sheep. And do so with concern, tender care, and a great deal of true love.

Love One Another Deeply

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-8

A study on “rudeness” came out that showed we are not as polite as we used to be. We have a growing lack of respect and consideration for others in our world today. But Jesus said to love God deeply and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Scripture proclaims that we are to love God with all of our heart (emotion), all of our soul (spiritual), all of our mind (cognition), and all of our strength (physical). This is not to be a passive love, but one that is strong, dynamic, powerful, and all-encompassing.

Love ourselves

We are also told to love ourselves. People often have difficulty identifying things they like about themselves. It’s okay to love yourself deeply. It’s not only okay—it’s a commandment to do so!

Love our neighbor

We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. For most of us, it’s easy to say that we love someone. An old saying proclaims that “actions speak louder than words.” I love the way the Apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13

when he emphasizes the value of loving actions versus just words. There is a big difference between saying that you love someone and expressing that love in positive and nurturing ways. So how do we become the kind of lovers Jesus calls us to be?

We must get our attitudes right through lots of prayer and a study of the Scriptures. We must also take time for reflection, as the Bible says in Psalm 46:10. “Be still and know that I am God.” Hear what Jesus has to say to you. We must participate in quality workshops, share in support groups, read other good books, and give ourselves away. When children were asked in a survey what they want most for Christmas, the overwhelming choice was more time with their mom and dad.

Carefully control your exposure to negative, unloving people. And surround yourself with those who demonstrate love in their daily lives. Their influence is catching! When Jesus puts new attitudes in your heart, put them to work in your daily living. Reinforce them and remember that practice makes perfect. We learn by doing. And we learn from our mistakes. So when you slip up, and all of us will, just choose to do it differently next time. Keep reinforcing your positive behaviors until they are ingrained into habits. Every day, in every way, find yourself loving others more deeply.

Joint Heirs with Christ

ROMANS 8:14-17

What does it mean to be led by the Spirit? To be led by the Spirit is to do our Father's will. Stewardship is the response of God's people to the ministry of God's Son.

God has adopted us as full-fledged sons and daughters

As such, we have the rights and privileges of God's family, as well as the responsibilities. We have a new Father who loves and accepts us and wants us to call Him "Abba" (Daddy). We have a new family of brothers and sisters who care for us. We have a new future, where our old debts are cancelled and we have a new, fresh life.

We respond to His leading

To be led by the Spirit is to respond to God's direction. We participate in praise and prayers. We respond by faithful giving. We respond by faithful living. Jesus set the example of what it means to be led by the Spirit. He overcame temptation in the wilderness. He sought God's direction in prayer. He responded throughout His entire life, "Not my

will, but thine.” When we are led by the Spirit, we take orders from God and gladly serve Him and others. We serve in Christ-directed ways, responding as God directs us as a loving son or daughter. Will you respond to God’s leading?

You are Called to Know God

ISAIAH 29:25

We try to put God in a box and tie it with a bright red ribbon! We match Him to our own understanding, and when God operates outside of this box, we are troubled. Today's world has a tendency to take God for granted. We practice indifference to sin, which separates us from God. Young people think of God as a back-slapping god they can chat with. Through the ages, mankind has tried to reduce God to their level. Someone has said, "God created man in His own image and man returned the compliment." But the God I am talking about is the holy God of Israel.

He is a God of power – all things are possible.

He is a God of majesty – we are awed at His creation.

He is a God who spoke to Moses and said, "I Am that I Am" (Exodus 3:1-6)

A creative God

He created all that exists everywhere—out of nothing, out of Himself. He is a God who created the world in six days—but He did not sit down to perpetual rest afterward. Rather, He continues to create throughout all eternity. Those who read Genesis as a blueprint of Creation miss the

point. It is not so much a blueprint of what was created as it is a testimony of WHO created it.

God is a God of order who created the rules and we obey them. He is a stable God and we can count on Him like we can count on the sun tomorrow. He is eternal—meaning, endless existence. He is a just God. He is unchangeable—the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Above all, He is a God of love

When John wrote in his first epistle, “God is love...” he was not defining God. He was defining love! It is God’s nature to love.

- Love is always freely given and voluntary.
- We cannot earn God’s love.
- We are not loved because of our nature, but because of God’s nature.

God is our Father. He loves us, not for what we are or because it gives Him satisfaction but because it is His very nature to love. Therefore, He has a very personal relationship with us. He is our Father, and His purpose is to make us His sons and daughters. May each of us, through faith, accept the Father’s reaching out to us. May we bear witness of His love to all the world. And may we, like His only Son, respond from the bottom of our hearts: “Father, thy will be done.”



You are Called to Receive the Holy Spirit

JOHN 14

As Jesus approached the end of His ministry, He sought to prepare His disciples for receiving the Holy Spirit. He instructed them to tarry in Jerusalem and await the Spirit. Great power was present when the Holy Spirit arrived on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Three thousand souls were baptized (Acts 2:37-39). Up to this time, Christ had been limited to a geographical area on earth. Through the Spirit, He was able to be everywhere, all the time. Through the Spirit, He could not only be with men but also *within* men as well. Hearts could be changed!

Scripture discloses numerous functions the Spirit performs

He guides us to truth. He teaches us all things and brings truth to our remembrance. He inspires us and creates new life within us. In the final analysis, we realize that the Holy Spirit is the manifestation of the mind, strength, force, and will of God. It was by this power that God moved upon the face of the water in the story of Creation. It was by this power that Jesus was conceived of a virgin. Today, modern science suggests that

matter is composed of pure light, force, energy, etc. But this raises a big question—what is the source of this power? God is the source.

The same power that created the universe is available to us

It becomes available to us, in its fullness, as we surrender to Christ. He promises us His Spirit, providing that we are keeping His commands and serving Him (Matthew 28:18-19). Our calling is two-fold. Through the power of the Holy Spirit:

- We become the sons and daughters of God
- Through this same power, we lead the world to Christ

It's my prayer that each of us, through the grace of God, may do both.

You are Called to Know Jesus Christ

JOHN 3:16

The great revelation of the New Testament is Christian love. Christianity is characterized by the dignity it places on the individual. Genesis 1:27 says we are created in God's image. And John 3:16 reminds us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Through Jesus, God's love was revealed in a way that we could understand. Through Christ, we have caught a glimpse of an active, personal, loving God who is concerned and interested in each of us personally. Christ is the fullness of the revelation of the love of God.

Christ came into the world as Redeemer

We chose to turn our backs on God. There was, therefore, a need for atonement—which is AT-ONE-MENT with God. God was not taken by surprise when Adam fell. Jesus was not an afterthought. Rather, according to John the Baptist in John 1:29, Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

But Christ was more than Redeemer

- He is the only begotten Son of God. He is co-creator, as testified in Genesis, the Gospel of John, and Hebrews. The Son of God came to us because of His love for us.
- His coming was foretold by the prophets. He was born of a virgin. This truth used to be commonly accepted. Today, it is challenged and even some religious leaders doubt its veracity.
- His followers called Him, “Emmanuel”—God with us. Paul said that Christ was God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). Christ also said that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father! He was describing the Incarnation, where Christ took upon Himself a mortal body.

His ministry was short but to the point

He taught His disciples. He organized His church. He established His sacraments and ordinances. He told of His Kingdom. He charged His disciples to “Go and Teach.” And having completed this ministry, He offered Himself on the cross. And the cross was Christ’s greatest victory! Christ was the perfect man; He had no sin. Having no sin, Satan had no claim on Jesus. So Christ broke the bonds of death and on the third day, He rose again. Up until that point, humanity had speculated on life and death. But now all doubt was removed! We have hope today through Christ—hope over death and hope of life eternal (John 11:2).



From Whence Cometh My Help

PSALM 121:1-2

There are times we tend to depend on ourselves. Society demands, after all, that we be self-sufficient. A man is to provide for and protect his home. To depend on God, or to recognize this dependency, may be considered by some as weakness.

In the story of Gideon, a multitude of Midianites came upon the Israelites. Gideon is chosen by God to lead the charge, and he moved out in faith. Gideon rounded up a small army of men, but still they were vastly outnumbered. God told Gideon he had too many men! What must have gone through Gideon's mind? After he follows God's instructions and whittles his army down to 10,000 men, again God says this is too many. Think of Gideon's doubts! Was he understanding God correctly? He whittles down the men again until he has only 300 left. They surround the camp of their enemy by night and, in confusion, the Midianites flee, fight among themselves, and are ultimately defeated. The reason why God whittled down Gideon's army was so that all of Israel would know that this was God's victory. Our society judges by size—the bigger, the better! But size is not important to God. He is concerned with quality. Our ways are not God's ways.

Growing people

Like Gideon, we are in need of people to serve God. The church is in the business of growing people, and one of the major concepts of Christianity is the worth of the individual. We are made in God's image. Each individual is important and has a role to play in God's service. Not only that but we are also in the business of building the Kingdom of God. It matters not how, or when, or where we serve. The important thing is that we, like Gideon, place our faith in God and move forth in His strength.

These are the last days. As the time draws near for the final curtain to fall on God's great play, much more shall be demanded and there will be hardships and disappointments. But, like Gideon, we must have faith. We have faith that God is in control of His universe and that His purposes will be fulfilled. True, we are small, but as someone has said, "God and I—we two make a majority!" In the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln expressed this when he said, "I am not so concerned if God is on our side, as I am that we are on His side."

Our calling

Our calling, or if you prefer, our stewardship, is to be valiant soldiers in the army of God. Let us affirm our allegiance to the King. Let us put our faith in God. Let us pray for His direction so that the Kingdom of God might be established and that the Gospel of Jesus might be taken to all the world. Our help comes from Him!



Differences in the Church

JOHN 1:11-14

The church is not a group of buildings or a set of laws and regulations. You and I are the church because it is a living organism. The church is real and alive so that people can better experience Christ through it. The role of the church, therefore, is not to merely have a knowledge of the truth but to participate in that truth. Much of the difficulty in the church today stems from the fact that each of us experiences God in a different way. When we have invested our lives in the church, and we see our concepts threatened, it is a shattering experience. This is why the Jews found it hard to accept Christ. Their life was built on the Law. But their premise about the coming of the Messiah was wrong. Their minds were closed. To protect their concept of truth, they sought to destroy the threat!

Today we also seek to destroy what we believe threatens us. We criticize youth with long hair. We exclude certain races from our neighborhoods. We reject different forms of worship. In doing so, we destroy the faith of a young person, the dignity of a man, and the opportunity for more insight.

Differences are to be expected

The highest value in the universe is personal. We are created in God's image. His Son was sent to us. The church exists to save individuals, not condemn them. Undoubtedly, however, we will have different opinions of which direction the church should take. That will happen because of our differing experiences and understanding of God. We will have differences because of the different premises we hold dear. And we will have differences because we struggle to communicate with each other.

But we need to work at understanding our differences. More important, we need to be accepting of one another. Not because of who we are or what we have accomplished. But because each of us is of such great worth in God's eyes.

Rejoice in the Lord Always

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

In this passage, Paul writes the saints at Philippi from his prison cell. Scholars place the writing around 60-61 AD, which means that Paul is not a young man. He has concerns about whether he will die in prison. In this letter he is writing to thank his “dear friends” in Philippi for sending money to him in order to meet his needs. Paul has a soft spot for these people, as they were one of his most successful missionary efforts. It was here that he achieved his first European convert. And it’s where he cast a demon from a woman’s body. It’s where a massive earthquake destroyed the jail and resulted in the jailer and his entire family accepting Jesus as their Savior. Paul had a very effective ministry here, sharing the Gospel, teaching, and encouraging believers.

In some ways, I can relate to the feelings Paul expressed in his letter. When the church transferred Betty and me from California, it was a loss. We were raised in California and had family and so many good friends here. For 16 years we were gone, so you can imagine the joy we had when the church sent us back to California in Sacramento. Of course, it was a little disconcerting to learn that one of the kids I used to have in my youth group was now the District President!

Paul mentions two women quarreling, whose argument was tearing the congregation apart. In a larger sense, the world needs to be a gentler place. We should be gentle to all, not just those we love or care about—but everyone. I was once in a drug store for a flu shot and a near riot broke out when the line had to be changed for one reason or another. One man volunteered his place as next in line, willingly moving to the back of the line. It was interesting the calming effect that this act of unselfishness and gentleness had on the agitated crowd. Not to be outdone, I later made my contribution to the situation by telling the nurse to be very gentle on me, as she filled the syringe for my shot!

Choose to rejoice!

In an earlier letter, Paul pointed out to the Galatians in 5:22 that gentleness is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It becomes available to us as we let Him fully control our lives. Paul says to “always be full of joy in the Lord,” in Philippians 4. “Again I say, rejoice!” So much of what we hear today is bad news on the TV, in newspapers, gossip, etc. Bad news sells, and it is the devil at work. We must choose to focus on what is good. He walks the talk because he writes these words from prison!

His advice is to let everyone see that you are unselfish and considerate in all you do. And remember, the Lord is coming soon. So, invest in that which is eternal. We all keep buying into the worry pill....it does not work; it does not help you with tomorrow's problems; it robs you of today's strength; it does not reduce pain, but exaggerates it. It doesn't make you better, but worse. Research tells us that most of what we worry about never happens, or it is in the past and cannot be changed. Less than 8% is legitimate concern. So Paul writes, “Don't worry about anything. Pray about everything. And don't forget to thank Him for His answers.”

If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus. How much energy do we invest in churning over and over old hurts, disappointments, and anger? Fix your thoughts on what is true, good, and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, the Bible says. And dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about—take three minutes every day to reflect on this. And, like Paul says, keep putting into practice all that you are learning. Put these principles into action, and the God of peace will be with you.

Tell Others about Christ

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-6

The first four words of our church's mission statement are: "Proclaim Jesus Christ!" Any Christian can accomplish that goal in at least three ways:

- We proclaim Him through our living
- We proclaim Him through our telling
- We proclaim Him through our inviting

The way we live

Sometimes I get the strangest compliments. I remember when an aid at the assisted living facility where I reside sought me out to say goodbye, as she was moving on to bigger and better things. She said, "I want to thank you for all that you taught me." I never set about to teach her anything, so I had a hard time knowing what she meant by that. It makes you wonder just who is watching and paying attention to the way we live our ordinary lives. What kind of example are we setting?

When I was growing up, there was a well-accepted saying among Christians: "The best way to witness is to live a good life!" I'm certainly in favor of living a righteous life, but there's much more to it than that. We need to

remember that our task is not to point people to our lives but to the life of Jesus Christ. That’s what the Apostle Paul was proclaiming when he wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:5 about not “preaching ourselves” but Christ.

What we tell

All husbands know that from the beginning of time, only two men have lived a perfect life. Jesus Christ and the Mac our wives could have married if they hadn’t married us! Jesus, having lived the perfect life, also found it necessary to tell the Good News to everyone. And He told it at every opportunity. He told it to the rich, the poor, the sick, the sinners, and the righteous. He told it in the temple, from a boat, on a mountain, on a dusty road, and while sharing a meal. And then He told the disciples to go and do likewise.

Matthew 28:20 commands us to teach all things to all nations (that includes going next door). Then Jesus said, “If you will do this—go, teach, baptize, and keep my commandments—I’ll be with you always.” Notice that this promise is for those “on the go”! This Great Commission applies to all disciples, and it includes you and me. And it is founded on the Great Commandment: to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength—and your neighbor as yourself. One of my earliest church assignments was to focus on building a congregation in Merced, CA. At the time it was a city with a population of about 40,000. My instructions were to live in the area, even though my own bed was but a short commute away. So I spent a lot of time there. Otto Farmer was a member there. He worked for the water department and was not ordained, but Otto was a witness in word and deed. More often than not, whenever I met people in the community and mentioned our church, they would inevitably say, “Oh, that’s Otto’s church.” Otto told the story. He was a true disciple.

Who we invite

For a moment, consider where we'd be today if Jesus had chosen just to live the perfect life and not tell the story. Where would we be if the Apostles had gone fishing and not told the story? Where would we be if the early Christian leaders hid in safety behind closed and locked doors? Surveys always tell us that the number one reason why people join a church is because someone invited them. Someone told the story. I can count on three fingers the number of people who told me they came to church because they just wandered inside.

I remember a woman who lived a few houses down the street from our church. She had a small child who liked to play outside. One Sunday morning he saw children his age going into the church, so he went down there to see what was going on. Another kid invited him to join them, taking him by the hand and walking him inside. She introduced him as her “friend down the street.” The congregation embraced him, and in all honesty, it didn't hurt that it was potluck Sunday. The mom later told me how much her son enjoyed the dessert table!

The boy began attending church regularly, and one day he told his mom he wanted to be baptized. The mom was surprised and inquired what the church believed. The boy said, “Well, they like Jesus a lot.” She asked a few more probing questions, including why he wanted to be baptized. He replied, “Because those people love me.” How do you know that, she wanted to know. “They just do. Come and see for yourself.” At this point in relaying the story, the mom smiled at me and said, “So I went. And they loved me too.”



Prepare the Way


MARK 1:1-6

John the Baptist had a problem. He was too successful and attracting such huge crowds that the local Roman authorities were fearful of him and the religious establishment was furious with him. Some scholars claim John baptized over 300,000 souls. Some even said he was the Christ—a statement he strongly denied. In fact, he said, he preached repentance and baptism with water but there was One coming after him whose sandals he was unfit to touch. This person, meaning Jesus, would baptize with fire and water and with the Holy Spirit. Over and over, John proclaimed that he had come to Prepare the Way.

Like John, we need to understand that we too are called to prepare the way and do our part to create an environment where the Holy Spirit can operate effectively. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals the truth about Jesus Christ to people, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3. His major task is to reveal to men, women, and children that Jesus is the Christ. I've served as a missionary for over 50 years, teaching thousands of meetings and equipping hundreds of other folks to be missionaries. But the truth is that these successful efforts were possible because other disciples were preparing the way. Just ask a new believer sometime for the names of those people who influenced their journey. It will be eye-opening, I assure you.

So we must stand ready to do our part in “preparing the way” always. Jesus speaks to this truth in Matthew 25:1-13 in the parable of the Ten Virgins. The women were awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. The tradition was that upon his arrival, they would go with their oil lamps to greet him. Symbolically, the bridegroom is Jesus, and the oil in their lamps represents the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In the parable, the bridegroom arrives later than expected. Five of the virgins were prepared and had brought extra oil — the others had not. Upon the arrival of the bridegroom the latter’s oil was exhausted, their flames extinguished. They were excluded from the wedding feast. Jesus is calling each of us to be ready and prepare the way. His call comes with a promise, that if we answer, the oil in our lamp will overflow. Our flame will shine as brightly as the first Christmas star. And many will find their way!

Marriage Made in Heaven



One of the blessings of my role in the church is to help engaged couples prepare for marriage. My goal is to walk them through a series of questions to help them think through the essentials for a happy lifetime of togetherness. I'm listing the questions below. I use these questions for premarital counseling, but many of the questions can be adapted as helpful discussion prompts at any stage of marriage.

How will we keep the romance alive in our marriage?

How will we make time for one another? How will we use our spare time?

How will we spend our vacations? Where will we go? What will we do?

How do we relate to each other's families? How much time will we spend with them? Will this be equal time with each family?

How will we relate to current and future friends? How much time will we invest in these relationships and what kinds of activities will we do with them?

Will we engage in separate interests from one another? What would your time and activity expectations be?

What are our expectations about keeping promises, being on time, remembering important dates such as birthdays, forms of dress, hygiene, modesty, neatness, clutter, use of vulgar language, substance abuse, continuing education, promoting and developing acceptance and self-esteem, caring emotionally and physically for yourself and for one another?

Couples should be able to fully discuss the sexual aspect of marriage. Consider questions like:

What is our basic understanding of sex? What type of sexual experiences do we enjoy? What sexual acts will be off limits? How about foreplay? What are our sexual expectations? How often will we engage in sex? Who will initiate it? Will it be all right for one party to say “No, not tonight”? Discuss how sex can be destructively used as a weapon. What are the emotional and spiritual aspects of sex?

Do either of you have health or emotional problems? Consider having health physicals with complete blood tests.

Discuss your expectations for personal and professional growth. Discuss expectations for the growth of your marriage. What would you like to be doing five years from now? Ten years from now? Where would you like to live?

What financial assets do we bring to the marriage? Will these be merged or remain separate? What about future inheritances? How will your income be handled? Ours/his/hers? Who will have the primary responsibility for paying the bills, managing savings and retirement funds, etc.? How will the other party be kept informed about these financial matters?

Prepare a family budget. Include amounts for personal spending not subject to accountability and for savings and retirement funding. Discuss the need for health, life, auto, liability and home/renter’s insurance. Discuss having an attorney prepare your wills.

How will household tasks be divided? Will each of you work outside the home? Will you have children? If so, how many? What roles will you take in caring for your children? How will the children be disciplined? How will the children be educated? What roles will grandparents play? Other family members?

How will we effectively communicate with one another? How will we resolve conflict? What ground rules will we have for fighting and settling arguments? What about physical and/or emotional abuse of one another or the children?

Discuss the spiritual significance of your marriage. What does your marriage covenant mean to you? How active will you be in church?



Jesus as our Model

1 PETER 2:21

Our parents taught us well because of their love. But the greatest teacher and model of all time is our Lord. Not even our mothers love us as He loves us! It is through His modeling that we catch a glimpse of our Heavenly Father. It is through His example that we have a better appreciation for the worth of all people. It is through His modeling that we see the possibilities of a better world.

As He came to us, so He sends us to be model for others. The goal is that through our modeling, others might be led to the Master. Through our example, we hope others might experience His love and caring. And through our modeling, we hope others might experience more abundant life. That's why Peter wrote about Christ leaving us an example so that we might "follow in His steps."

Each of us must rise to the challenge of the Master to be model parents, grandparents, and saints.



Trust in the Lord

JEREMIAH 1:4-8

What is your level of trust? It's a question each of us should confront often. About 2,600 years ago, Jeremiah had an experience with the Lord. Our passage tells us that Jeremiah was chosen and sent, but he was so afraid! But God promised to see him through, so Jeremiah went forward. And because Jeremiah trusted in the Lord, people were blessed. Can you relate? When was a time that you really had to trust God—and He came through for you?

With my limited “smarts,” I've had to trust Him! It's now a natural thing for me to do. With few exceptions, I've never been afraid. I'm getting better with my fear of bees, for example. I even went on a roller coaster—once! There have been times when I've said, “Lord, you got me into this...now, how are you going to get me out?” The Lord has always been with me, and even more so during those times when I wasn't “with Him.” Both my faith and experience tell me that when we trust in the Lord, He always sees us through.

Like Jeremiah, in 1952 the Lord came to me in an unexpected manner when I was 19 years old sitting on a hill in Korea praying. I was struggling with fear, frustration, and an immature understanding of trust. That

experience anchored me to what is really important in life. Since then, I've trusted in the Lord because I had no other choice. I've sought His direction and have endeavored to respond to His call. And when I have done so, people have been blessed. But not as greatly as I have been.

God has been with me in remarkable ways through four major cancer surgeries. I'm wobbly, but I'm still on my feet. When there was no way for me to survive, God calmed my fears. He gave me strength and the words to speak so that I emerged victorious against impossible odds.

A man fell off a cliff walking in the dark one night. He barely managed to grab hold of an old piece of rope before he tumbled into the sea below. He held on for dear life and cried out to God, "Help me!" God replied, "Let go of the rope." It was quiet a few moments before the man replied, "Is there anyone else up there?" All of us fall off the cliff occasionally. And when we do, fear often sets in. Rather than trusting Jesus, we grab for security in any form and hold on for dear life. Eventually, after dangling there for a time, we realize that the rope is binding us instead of saving us. Some ropes are good, but Jesus is always better. Let loose of any rope or fears that bind you. Don't be afraid—trust Jesus! Then both you and others will be richly blessed.



Five Ways to Teach

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

Teaching is a high calling, especially when we're teaching God's Word—as Timothy was doing. How do we go about this task of teaching others? There are at least five steps.

Know what you're teaching

On a practical note, get a good education. Take some night courses if need be. Get involved in workshops and seminars to learn more of God's Word. Read all good books. Prepare yourself as a specialist in what you teach. Take time to meditate and pray about the lessons. Take time to adequately prepare. Remember, an expert is someone who doesn't know any more than you do, but he has his facts better organized and shows slides!

Be fully involved in life

There is a danger in limiting your experience and influence to just a few areas of life. If we are to be the “yeast” that brings the bread to life, we must be part of the whole loaf! Slice the loaf into parts: community, school, neighborhood, family, church, work. See teaching and witnessing

opportunities in these “slices” every day. Joyfully share with others what God is doing in your life. Let your joy shine through!

Expand your caring and loving

Before you can care and love others, start by accepting yourself. Research indicates that it is hard for people to accept others, if they cannot accept themselves. Forgive yourself—God did, a long time ago. Accept people as they are—not the unacceptable behaviors—and love them. Be sensitive to the needs of others as you teach them.

Let the Holy Spirit work in and through you

Study and work it out in your own mind what you want to teach, then trust the Holy Spirit to enhance your skills and understanding. Be secure in the knowledge that the Holy Spirit will bear witness to the truth. I like to think of the Holy Spirit as the magnet that pulls things together, and the glue that adheres the truth to the souls of men and women.

Remember, actions speak louder than words

It's hard to wear a mask of who we think we ought to be—eventually our real face shines through. Be yourself. Accept yourself, as Christ has accepted you. Continue working on the inside so that you can become the kind of person you want to be.

What Are We to Teach?

MATTHEW 5:14,19

Many people are in darkness today. Like driving in a thick fog, people do not see clearly. Their values and understanding are cloudy. Many have lost their way and many have given up hope of ever finding their way out of the maze of life. You are called to let your light shine so that others may see. The source of our light, of course, is from Jesus Christ.

We are to shine our light and live and work in places where our influence can be seen and felt. Success is promised to those who teach and obey God's Law. What and how are we to teach?

Consider the acronym TEACH:

(T) Truth

Our task is not to teach the latest theory, but the eternal principles of God's Word.

(E) Evangelism

People can't choose that which they do not know. We are to teach them about God. We are to teach them about God's Kingdom. We are to especially teach the children.

(A) Affirming

Our teaching is to be affirming, not blaming. We are to affirm all people—including ourselves.

(C) Christ

Christ is central to all our teaching.

(H) Heaven

We are to teach others that life is more than the number of years we live on earth. We are to show them what it means to have eternal life.

Remember, we are to not only teach God’s Law, but also we are to obey it. Through our obedience, we demonstrate what has value in our life. Our actions always “teach” louder than our words. Commit yourself to TEACH others. Teach by actions and words. Teach the truth. Be evangelistic in your teaching. Be affirmative in the way you teach—and with all people. Keep your teaching firmly centered on Christ. Help people understand that heaven is for real—and that life is eternal!



What Will You Do with God's Resources?

MATTHEW 25:13-30

As Jesus neared the end of His ministry on earth, He knew the disciples would need to carry on the work of the Kingdom and give away the Gospel to others. There's a tendency to hold on to things that are special. The Scribes and Pharisees wanted to protect and preserve God's Law. They wanted things exactly as they were and sought to build a fence around traditions. In a sense, they paralyzed God's truth by holding it so tightly. There are those of us today who will not take new action to reach people for Christ. We don't dare to venture out or explore new possibilities. Like the Pharisees, we play it safe.

Jesus came to make all things new

Jesus came to expand and enlarge our concept of God. Jesus wanted the disciples to do something that most religious people wouldn't do. He wanted them to risk everything by giving away that which is precious. In the well-known "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25, Jesus is teaching us that spiritual advancement cannot take place without risk. The one servant who hid his talent because he was afraid was unwilling to risk. He

was, therefore, condemned for his actions and even called wicked and lazy in the parable—not because he failed but because he would not try! His gift was taken away from him.

Those who risk are commended

In this parable, the servants who multiplied what was given to them were commended as having done a good job. In fact, they were given additional gifts! We learn from this story that God gives the gifts. Everyone receives something, but different gifts are given to different people. Some are more talented than others. Those who are capable and called upon to manage more do so. The reward for a job well done—is more work! The call of God, therefore, is always to risk for the sake of the Kingdom. It's a use it or lose it situation.

One day we will stand before God and He will ask us: “What did you do with all of the wonderful gifts I gave you?” How will you answer?



Sit at the Feet of Jesus

LUKE 10:38-42

“Shalom” is a Hebrew word meaning “peace” and it was a typical form of greeting. It comes from the root word, “complete.” It signifies a state of total prosperity and harmony in all aspects of our lives. It’s the description of someone “who has it all together,” we might say today.

The question is how we get more Shalom in our lives. The answer? We need to spend more time at the feet of Jesus. The problem is that we live in a hurry-scurry world. How often do we say, “I’m so busy!?” We carry around calendars and cellphones to remind us of appointments and events. No wonder we are a sleep-deprived society, trying to cram 28 hours into a 24-hour day. And then there are the lines, congested traffic, and meetings, meetings, and more meetings.

How can we have this spirit of Shalom, this sense of total harmony in our lives, when we have so much going on?

We need to get our priorities straight. And spend more time at the feet of Jesus. That’s the picture of Mary in this passage, sitting at the feet of Jesus while her sister Martha worked herself to death in the kitchen preparing a meal for Him. There is too much “Martha” in all of us. It’s difficult for

many of us to accept that salvation is by grace alone. Our attitude seems to be, “If I’m going to be saved, I want to earn it!” After all, there is no free lunch so there is no free salvation, right? So we busy ourselves, which frequently brings distraction and leaves us with no time.

No time for Jesus.

No time for prayer.

No time for reading Scripture.

No time for reflection.

No time for our families or for others.

No time for ourselves.

The lesson here is about balance. It’s about choosing the better path and recognizing that a lifestyle of over-commitment can rob us of spiritual freshness. It can rob us of our Shalom.

From Martha, we learn that God never wants our lives to be so filled with busyness that we are distracted from giving Him our attention. When Jesus was baptized, God’s voice thundered, “This is my beloved Son. Hear ye Him!” How can we hear Him if we are too busy to listen? Martha was so consumed with being a good hostess and providing a seven-course meal that she became distracted, frustrated, irritated, isolated, worried, and disturbed. Her underlying attitude was that everything depended on her activity or effort.

Boy, I know that feeling. How about you? Have you ever felt that way? Do we really believe, however, that the success of God’s Kingdom depends on our efforts? If so, we are in deep trouble!

Our highest priority

From Mary, we learn that God wants us to give our highest priority to sitting at the feet of Jesus. Mary’s work was to worship. Her work was

to learn. And Jesus commended her for it. Martha's concern was to be a proper hostess. Mary's concern was to be a proper disciple. There are those who say that Mary and Martha were just two different temperaments—each equally good. “Different strokes for different folks,” they say. But don't let the main point be blurred. Jesus loved Martha deeply, just as He loves you and me. And yet Mary was commended and Martha was corrected. Jesus made it clear—the most important thing we can do is to spend time with Him.

Take a deep breath. Close your eyes. Invite the Holy Spirit to warm and touch you. See yourself sitting at the feet of Jesus. And know that you are loved. “Be still and know that I am God,” Psalm 46:10 reminds us. “Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength,” Isaiah reminds. And “there is a season for everything, a time for everything under the sun,” Ecclesiastes says. Take time to sit at the feet of Jesus this week and experience Shalom!



Share the Riches of the Kingdom

MATTHEW 13:32-33, 44-46 & LUKE 17:20-21

I knew a family that divided the personal assets of a relative who had died and gave what no one wanted to a non-profit organization. They took some sentimental pieces of jewelry, and assumed the rest was costume jewelry. But they did not understand the worth of what they gave away—tens of thousands of dollars in fine jewels.

We've all heard of garage sale finds of masterpieces worth many thousands of dollars. We've heard of valuable stock certificates found in a stack of papers in an attic. Every year, millions of dollars go unclaimed, according to the annual lists published in the paper. We lose sight of the true value of what we have. Betty and I used to have a dog named Trapper. For a sermon illustration I once brought our dog to church and held out a string of my wife's pearls and a hot dog wiener. You can guess which one Trapper valued more than the other!

The Kingdom of God

The Bible teaches us that the Kingdom of God has great value for us—and it's available to us now. The Kingdom was of great importance to Jesus. Over and over, Jesus said how valuable the Kingdom is. The Kingdom is

mentioned over 100 times in the Bible. Do you think God is trying to tell us something?

Search for the Kingdom

Jesus says in Matthew 13 that the Kingdom is the pearl of great price. Have you ever desperately searched for something of value like your keys, your glasses, or your car in a crowded parking lot? In this parable, the merchant was on a conscious quest—he knew what he was looking for and had the ability to recognize its value.

Discover the Kingdom

Jesus compares it to treasure hidden in a field. When a man working in the field discovers the treasure hidden underneath the soil, he was extremely pleased.

Pay the price for the Kingdom

The worker did not steal the treasure, although that may have been a fleeting thought. Instead, he sold everything he owned to obtain the field, and the treasure. Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom is not free. There is a price to be paid. It will cost us everything. It will cost our old way of life.

Share the Kingdom

Although you can't "see" yeast in bread, it permeates the whole loaf. When we share the Kingdom, we share our Christian influence in our community, family, workplace, etc. and become a conduit of transforming power. I had a relative who used to say, "Money isn't everything, but it's way ahead

of whatever is in second place!” He was wrong. He had wealth, but he died a drunkard and full of despair. Compare that philosophy with someone you admire and respect.

Enjoy and benefit from the Kingdom

Deep down, we know that true joy and happiness comes from investing ourselves in meaningful pursuits and sharing ourselves with others. It comes from being at peace with ourselves. And true joy and happiness comes from being “at/one/ment” with God. Jesus reminds us that sometimes good things come in small packages. A grain of mustard seed (Matthew 13:32) has an insignificant beginning. The tiniest seed, however, can become a tree giving shade and comfort to the birds.

Jesus tells us in Luke 17 that this amazing Kingdom is within us—it’s here and now! Like the mustard seed, it begins small. But it blossoms into greatness. Like yeast, it sometimes goes unnoticed but is infectious. The Kingdom is something we discover, pay a price for, then give it away—that gives us great joy, and it’s worth everything!



Three Crosses

MATTHEW 27

Many of you may attend a church where a cross is a prominent feature on the wall behind the pulpit. But the cross in our churches is empty! It's empty because Christ no longer hangs on a cross. Jesus is alive and well. He is our Savior.

Let's go back in time and look at the three crosses that were at Calvary that day.

The cross of rebellion

Many in the crowd called for Jesus' crucifixion and had turned away from Jesus. "Give us Barabbas!" they shouted. And they mocked, beat, and spat upon Jesus. Even one of the thieves being crucified next to Jesus mocked Him.

The cross of repentance

On the other side of Jesus was another thief who recognized Jesus as the Christ. In response to the other criminal's attack on Jesus, this man

pointed out that they deserved what they were getting—but Jesus was innocent. This repentant thief surrendered to Jesus and cried out to the Lord to save him. And Jesus did so.

The cross of redemption

Jesus is in the people-saving business. When Jesus freely went to the cross, He was not a victim. He was going about His Father’s business for the sake of all of us, and indeed, the whole wide world. That day on the cross, Jesus’ office was open for business and has been so ever since, 24/7 every day of the year.

Looking at the repentant thief, Jesus assured him, “This day you will be with me in Paradise.” He then looked down on those mocking Him and exclaimed, “Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.” No matter how much you’ve screwed up in life, or how close you are to cashing in your earthly chips, there is always time to turn to Jesus and accept His salvation.

Jesus means business

There are times when I turn away and deny the Christ. In fact, there are days when I don’t even want Him around. Then there are better times when I stand with and proclaim my Lord. But Christ is always there for me, regardless. My testimony is that Christ’s business is the best business in the world to work for. It’s a business where your call is picked up on the first ring. It’s not answered by a machine telling you to push this or that button. Your call is answered by the Man Himself—His response time is instantaneous. Just ask the thief on the cross!

God’s business is known for knocking on the door before you even know you have a problem! The thing that saddens me is that there are so many

doubters in the world who refuse to open the door. Self-absorbed, they don't even hear His knock. Would you like to get more involved in God's business? I have good news for you. There's a Help Wanted sign out front. You don't have to fill out an application. Just say, "Here am I, Lord. Send me." Then go out and proclaim Him!

Five Keys to Effective Leadership

JOHN 6:1-12

Effective leadership begins with investing time with God that brings eternal dividends. We must take time for prayer and reflection as leaders. That's where it all begins.

1. We must know what we are doing

We will know what God wants us to do as a leader when we receive God's vision after investing time with Him in prayer. As leaders, we must know where God wants to take His people. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." We must also invest in study and training so that we can carry out what we know God wants us to do.

2. We must know and manage our resources wisely

Resources in most contexts include people, time, and dollars. In this passage, Jesus knew what He had to work with to feed the crowd of 5,000. He had twelve disciples. A grassy slope. Little money. Five barley loaves. A couple of fish. A small boy who was willing to give all he had. Philip did not have vision. He was not a possibility thinker. He said, "It's going to

take a fortune to feed all these people.” Sounds like a few budget meetings I’ve been a part of! Scripture says that Jesus was testing Philip. He already knew what He was going to do, but He made this a teaching moment for Philip. The plan Jesus followed began by setting the people in groups. This action reduced the problem to a manageable size. He gave thanks for the resources He had, and then He put the disciples to work feeding the people. The people ate until they were full. There was even food left over! The problem is never lack of resources, but a lack of vision.

3. We must set goals and objectives

An effective leader sets goals and objectives in accomplishing God’s work. Just as Jesus asked Philip and Andrew, we must involve others in the goal-setting. Bad goals are “your” goals. Good goals are “our” goals. Plan the work, then work the plan. Make assignments and deadlines and then put others to work. Jesus did this. He invested in His disciples—living with them, sharing His vision, teaching them, encouraging them, and holding them accountable.

4. We must prioritize our leaders

Convey the vision to your leaders—and the plan. Make sure they see the big picture and understand how they can contribute. Invest time in them, getting to know them and their families. Spend time in their homes. Nurture them, because everyone appreciates love and attention. A dry well cannot give living water. As they get to work, support and encourage your leaders. Help them see progress, and be there for them when they need you. Finally, hold them accountable and help them succeed. In the feeding of the crowd, Jesus multiplied Himself by organizing His disciples and commissioning them to carry on His work.

5. We must offer ministry that meets people needs

Churches should offer a fellowship where people can:

Have a sense of belonging

Be themselves

Feel at home

Feel accepted and loved

Be supported and encouraged

Enhance their self-esteem

Offer a fellowship where your church:

Welcomes children

Offers classes and sermons that address people's needs

Inspires and uplifts people

Helps people invest in the work of God

Helps people make a difference

Helps people meet God and feel His Spirit.

Remember this about effective leadership: people who are led will follow.



Responding in Thanksgiving

PSALM 100

What do you have to be thankful for? The other day, I was feeling down, so I went for a walk and thought about all I have to be thankful for. When I finished my walk, I felt alive, refreshed, uplifted, affirmed, and positive. In short, I felt good!

I call this exercise practicing my ABC's. Psalm 100:4 reminds us to enter God's courts with praise and thanksgiving. What all can we thank God for? Let's start with the ABC's.

A - I'm thankful for the Anderson family. And I am determined to be the best husband, father, and grandfather I can possibly be. Starting with the letter A, silently affirm what you are thankful for.

B - I'm especially thankful for Betty. She is the best thing that ever happened to me. I will love, honor, and cherish her always. Starting with the letter B, silently affirm what you are thankful for.

C - I am thankful for the Care I've received in this world. And I am determined to care for all people. Starting with the letter C, you know what to do now.

D – I am thankful for Dollars and my resources and will share my wealth in appropriate ways.

E – I'm thankful for Energy and will use it for the betterment of all people.

F – I'm thankful for Fun and will spread joy wherever I go.

G – I'm thankful for Growth and will promote an environment where growth can take place.

H – I'm thankful for the promise of Heaven and will seek to help bring people into the Kingdom of God.

I – I'm thankful for Inspiration and will act on God's prompting.

J – I'm thankful for Justice and will be just with all people.

K – I'm thankful for Kindness and will practice it throughout my life.

L – I'm thankful for Love and will love God, others, and myself.

M – I'm thankful for God's Mercy and I will be merciful.

Are you still silently responding?

N – I'm thankful for Nature's beauty and will seek to preserve it.

O – I'm thankful for Opportunity and will champion it for everyone.

P – I'm thankful for Peace and will promote it.

Q – I'm thankful for Quality of life and will seek to enhance it.

R – I'm thankful for the Restoration and I will share it.

How about it? Are you still silently responding?

S – I'm thankful for Service and I will give my reasonable service.

T – I'm thankful for Trust and I will be trustworthy.

U – I'm thankful for Unity and I will seek to bring unity among people.

V – I'm thankful for Victory and I will champion Victory for everyone.

W – I'm thankful for the Wonders of God's creation and I praise God for it.

X – I'm thankful for Christ Jesus and will serve Him always. (Chi (or X) is the first letter in the Greek word for "Christ.")

Y – I'm thankful for the Youth and Young Adults of the church and will support them in every way that I can.

Z – I'm thankful for Zion and will promote Zion living.

In thanksgiving and having been led by the Spirit, we gladly respond to God's direction. At the same time, we gladly respond with faithful living. Then we gladly respond by being "Good for Something." What are you good for? The Bible tells us that we are to be engaged in a good cause and make our life count. How will you gladly respond to Jesus in thanksgiving today? Get started by practicing your ABC's—today and the rest of your life.

