

# Gifts from God

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**A 365 Day Devotional/Journal**

ALISON VEAZEY    KERRY L. SKINNER

## **GIFTS FROM GOD**

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*Gifts from God: A 365 Day Devotional/Journal*  
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**This Journal Belongs To:**

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**Name**

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**Date**

**Gifts  
from  
God**

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**A 365 Day Devotional/Journal**

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## About the Authors

**Alison Veazey**, serves as a partner of *Think LifeChange Institute of Biblical Counseling* and Dean of Students and Instructor. She is also the President and Co-Founder of *Victory Reins*. She has co-authored *My Word is Like a Fire*.

**Kerry L. Skinner**, is the President and Founder of *Think LifeChange Institute of Biblical Counseling*. He has authored *The Joy of Repentance* and *The Christian Life: A Human Impossibility* and has co-authored *My Word is Like a Fire*, *The Heart of the Problem*, *The Word for the Wise*, *Breaking Free from the Bondage of Sin*, *Marriage God's Way*, and *I Want to Enjoy My Children*.

## Dedication

**G**lory be to God for all He has done in redeeming our lives for His Glory! The leadership of the Holy Spirit guided us from the Scriptures to learn these amazing *Gifts from God*. He led us each day to learn that His Ways are not our ways. Praise to the Heavenly Father for how He has graciously shared His Gifts with us—one day at a time.

## Other Books Available at [www.thinklifechange.com](http://www.thinklifechange.com)

### **My Spirit is Life and Peace!**

*Alison Veazey and Kerry L. Skinner*



What truth do you base your life upon? What if you found out that what you have based your life upon is not truth? Do you believe that the Bible is absolute truth? Until you invite the Holy Spirit into your heart by accepting Jesus Christ into your life and believe that God's Word is absolute truth, you will not live in the peace that God has for you. The Holy Spirit is the only One Who can teach you the truth found in God's Word. Christ died to leave us with His Spirit. His Spirit is Life and Peace.

### **My Word is Like a Fire!**

*Alison Veazey and Kerry L. Skinner*



Is there a difference between simply reading the Bible as a book and reading it because you have a relationship with Christ? After sharing and talking with thousands of people and after years of learning to walk with God, the authors have come to understand that many people do not know the difference. This book is written from the truth of the Word and from many life experiences to help believers move beyond simple Bible reading to an intimate relationship with Jesus. We pray God will use this book to bring you face to face with the Word of God—Jesus!

### **The Joy of Repentance**

*Kerry L. Skinner*

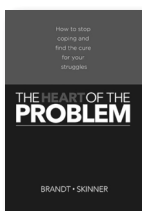


In many ways, the Body of Christ has forsaken the biblical mandate to repent, defining the process as negative and burdensome. But in reality, sin produces a yoke of bondage and consequence, while repentance provides a roadway of reconciliation. The suffering Christian, soiled with the residue of this world, is only a repentant prayer away from resolution and healing. *The Joy of Repentance* reveals that:

- Confession of sin is common. Repentance of sin is rare.
- Though sin truly is negative, repentance is positive

### **The Heart of the Problem Workbook**

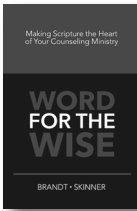
*Henry Brandt, Kerry L. Skinner*



An interactive, Scripture-based workbook that shows readers how to fight sin effectively and live a more problem-free life. This helpful workbook gives encouragement to everyone who has ever faced an insurmountable situation. Pride, anger, and denial separate people from the solutions and comfort they long for. By seeking God's answer, even the most complex problems can be solved once and for all.

## The Word for the Wise

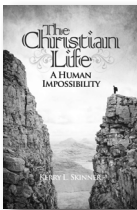
Henry Brandt, Kerry L. Skinner



Worldly solutions offer people only temporary relief from their problems, but biblical counseling offers a trustworthy and lasting cure. This book shows ministers and other counselors how to help angry, broken, confused people look at their lives from a biblical perspective, and move beyond the situation of the moment to the real underlying cause of pain and disappointment. *The Word for the Wise* contains a wealth of real-life examples, along with guidelines for the qualifications, attitude, methods, and standards of professionalism for biblical counselors.

## The Christian Life: A Human Impossibility

Kerry L. Skinner



Learning the basics of Christianity is relatively simple—if knowledge of the how-to's are all that interest you. Simply listing the commands of Christ does not require a massive amount of time nor an in-depth study. Putting into practice the commands of Christ is quite different! This book helps you understand in a practical way what it means to walk in the Spirit.

## Breaking Free From the Bondage of Sin

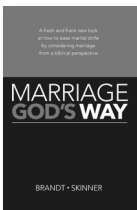
Henry Brandt, Kerry L. Skinner



A human approach to dealing with sin does indeed relieve symptoms. But there is no human remedy for the problem of sin. The cure is out of this world. Only God can help. This book will help to illuminate the barriers [sins] that come between a person and the resources available from God through Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save us from our sins. If there is no human remedy for sin, should we not pause and take a careful look at the biblical definition of sin and its cure?

## Marriage God's Way

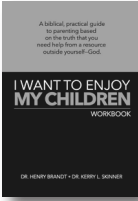
Henry Brandt, Kerry L. Skinner



Tragic but true, couples who follow the world's models of marriage end up in divorce. This problem is growing more and more prevalent even in the church. But *Marriage God's Way* takes a fresh and frank new look at how to ease marital strife by considering marriage from a biblical perspective. With personal illustrations and applications, this book reveals God's plan for marriage and how we must approach this sacred relationship with a higher Christian standard of love. Only God can join two people in wedlock, and only God can keep their love for each other alive.

# I Want to Enjoy My Children

*Henry Brandt, Kerry L. Skinner*



If you didn't plan for them—or even if you did—having kids may threaten to spoil the fun of marriage. This book shows how to make parenting a fascinating, pleasant journey, wherever it may lead. This biblical, practical guide is based on the truth that parents need help from a resource outside themselves—God.



# Introduction

Do you ever wake up in the morning and thank God for His Word? What about thanking Him for His Spirit? There are two gifts that God left His people to have everything that they need to walk in His Ways: His Word and His Spirit.

The sad truth is that Christians tend to resist and battle with the Word of God rather than recognizing that His Word is a gift. When you resist God's Word, you are also resisting His Spirit. Jesus shared with the disciples that God would send a Helper in His name: "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). God has provided all that you need to build a relationship with His Son, Jesus. Do you understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian? Do you understand the role of the Word of God? Until you do, these gifts will mean little to you. As you embark on this devotional journey, recognize that the Holy Spirit is the gift that will reveal truth from God to you through His Word. Invite the Holy Spirit into your time with God and allow Him to teach you all things that are of God. Take a moment and thank God for these incredible gifts: His Word and His Spirit!

## Why This Devotional?

In 2019, God led Kerry Skinner and Alison Veazey to write the book *My Word is Like a Fire*. During that process, Alison recognized Kerry's ability to read a passage of Scripture and receive much wisdom and application for life in one small verse. Kerry has journal entries dating back all the way to 1981. This led to what they have called "burning thoughts." In *My Word is Like a Fire*, you will find a "burning thought" at the end of each chapter using the Scripture reference that is found at the start of the chapter. After Kerry completed these nine verses for the book, he did not want to stop the process. He wanted to continue to hear from God but also decided to include Alison in the process. This devotional is a compilation of Kerry and Alison's personal time with God.

The first nine devotional entries come from *My Word is Like a Fire*, and the last nine come from an upcoming book *My Spirit is Life and Peace*. As you begin this devotional, you will notice that the Scripture references for the first nine are from the book of Jeremiah. Kerry and Alison discussed whether or not to have these back to back and concluded that this is the way in which God revealed His Wisdom. Therefore, they decided to keep them in the order in which God directed. As you begin this devotional, recognize that what was happening in Jeremiah's day is happening in our day. Many who claim to walk with God are providing the world's counsel to God's people. God gave Jeremiah a message that did not make him popular with those around him. In fact, Jeremiah wanted to stop sharing the message; but, because it was a fire that burned within him, he could not stop.

Jesus left a message to God's people: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This message is not popular in our day. Kerry has spent the last forty-five years sharing the healing power of Jesus' message. This sharing has come with much battle from church leaders. The exact battles that Jesus faced. Alison met Kerry in 2015 and received the same message within her heart. The desire of Kerry and Alison is to share Jesus' message with every person that God brings to their paths.

## **The Purpose and Message of Christ**

In Matthew 1:21, the Scripture reveals the purpose of Jesus: “Jesus would be born, His name would be called Jesus for He would save His people from their sins.” Do you know the first message that Jesus preached when starting His public ministry? “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). Here is the most important message of the New Testament that many churches in our nation have refused to deal with because they see it as negative. Repentance is the most positive word in the New Testament. Every time we see the word, we see the result brings life not death. In our day, repentance is seen as negative because many church members have heard strong messages against sin from the mouths of angry speakers. This angry spirit confuses the messenger with the message. When you speak a message that is true to the Word but is not true to your spirit, you are being deceptive. The Scripture tells us that we need to speak a message of Truth out of a heart of love. What would a true message from Christ do to an entire world? It would change everything. Repentance is a positive message. Don’t lay down the message of repentance because you are associating it with an angry spirit.

Do you know the last message that Jesus left with His disciples? “That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). It is past time that Christians today build solid foundations through lives of repentance. This requires a willingness to admit to sin and recognize that this is the only way to a life in Christ. This is the message that believers should not be able to hold back (see Jeremiah 20:9). As you read this devotional, allow this message to penetrate your heart to see that “if sin is the problem, there is no human remedy.” This message will not make you popular, but it will set you free.

This devotional depicts the authors’ personal walks with God, one day at a time, for 365 days. The goal is to help God’s people learn how to sit in His counsel and allow His Word to change the spirit of the reader to be more like Christ. This alone will reveal God’s power to our fallen world.

### **Perspective: Where is Your Focus?**

While there may be many different perspectives of any given situation, there is only one God-given perspective. If two people look at a situation through their own perspectives, their responses may be different. But if these same two people looked at a situation through God’s perspective, their responses would be the same. This is how likemindedness is achieved. Did you know that when two people read a verse of Scripture through their own eyes, they can each come up with two different meanings? This is really alarming. Scripture is not to be looked at through the eyes of man’s perspective but through the eyes of Christ’s perspective. After all, He is the Word!

When you read these daily devotionals, you will see two sections for each entry. You will see “Focus on Christ” and “Focus on Self.” This format came to the authors when they realized how incredibly wrong someone’s understanding of a verse of Scripture can be. Many times it is because people are reading it through their own understanding and not the Holy Spirit’s understanding. When you look at Scripture through the eyes of Jesus, you will see God’s perspective. When you look at it through your perspec-

tive, you risk misunderstanding Scripture because of sin. The more you grow in Christ, the clearer your lens will be when reading Scripture. Your desires for your life need to change to line up with God's desire for your life. When you read Scripture while you are focused on your own desires, there is a high chance that your prayer life will be selfish. However, when you surrender your way to God, you will begin to desire His heart in every area of your life. This is where freedom in Christ begins.

## **Reverence to God**

*Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name...*

### **Matthew 6:9**

In the *New King James Version* (which is the version used in this devotional), the Lord's name is found in capital letters along with the pronouns linked to Him (ex: He, Him, etc.). The truths found in this devotional are God's, and He needs to be glorified. With this in mind, the authors decided to expand reverence to not only the pronouns of God but also to His Nature. You will find throughout the writing capital letters reflecting all the attributes of the Nature of God. These attributes come only from the Spirit of the Lord and cannot be made by man. Therefore, these are special to mankind and need to be put on display. This was a large undertaking because God's Nature is vast. While it is possible some may have been missed, the text was reviewed several times with the hope to catch all of them. The authors hope this gesture will help Christians recognize the majesty and beauty of God's Gifts.



**January 1**

**My Word Is Like A Fire**

*But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not.*

**Jeremiah 20:9**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever had information that you just had to share? You knew that this information could potentially save someone's life but also may cause discord. When you have this type of message, it is difficult to keep it from the one who needs it—no matter the cost!

When you focus on Christ, The Word, you will receive Truth that penetrates your mind, heart, and soul. You cannot contain it! You must use it and share it. When you spend time with Christ, His Word will burn out the junk and purify the soul, so that you can receive more Truth. This fire is a good fire, one that warms the heart, cleanses the sin, and restores one to a perfect union with Christ.

God told Jeremiah that His Word was like a fire. Fire was used to heat up a rock in order to release its precious ore. God's Word does not destroy a person, it just destroys the sin of a person. When God's Word is placed in a person's mind and heart, it begins to warm from the inside out. It is like a burning fire that cannot be held back. In Jeremiah 20:9, the prophet did not want to keep sharing the message that God had given him, but he could not help it, he could not hold it back. Why? Because in his heart the Word was like a burning fire that could not be contained. He had to share it.

**Focus on Self**

The other option is to focus on self. Fill your mind and heart with the desires of self and you will come close to getting what you want from this world. You may attain wealth, position, prestige, and success with enough hard work. But if you do, Christ will not increase in your life. You will miss out on His wisdom, guidance, relationship, comfort, and security.

I pray you will seek the best thing in life—Truth through the Word!

**January 2**

**Stood in My Counsel**

*But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings.*

**Jeremiah 23:22**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Where do you turn for counsel? Can you imagine standing in God's counseling room and having God as your personal counselor? He knows everything about you and your future. He has perfect recollection of your medical, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual past. This is the absolute best source for all your counseling needs. Wouldn't you want this Person to be your Counselor?

Yet, in Jeremiah's day, even the local pastors would not take the time needed to spend with God. They were not interested in having their minds enlightened by God. Instead they spoke from what others said or what they thought up on their own, "They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:16).

What does it mean to stand in God's counsel? That means to compare what *you are saying* with what *God's Word says*. God's Word is the standard, not your best thinking. Too many today want their thinking to be the standard. They do not even know enough about the Word to understand the direction the Word gives for daily life. Many people do not see their life or family change because they did not take God's Word for it.

But just imagine, if you focus on life with Christ, He enlightens your understanding with His Word! When you do not know what to do, He is not confused, He knows what you need! Turn to Christ every day. Stand in his counseling room—His Word—and He will enlighten you!

## Focus on Self

The alternative to standing in Christ's counseling room is to depend on yourself. Think about it. Self is limited in knowledge, wisdom and memories of the past, and has no idea of the future. Is this where you turn for counsel? If so, you probably worry all the time. Worry comes when you do not have all the information, and you know you do not. Self is where many turn for help, but it does not mean it is the best counsel.

January 3

## God's Power

*"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?...They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.*

Jeremiah 32:27, 38-39

## Focus on Christ

It is amazing that God sometimes has to remind us of His character. He asked the question to Jeremiah to make a statement: "Is there anything too hard for Me?" God certainly does not remind us of His character so that we can know how great He is. God reminds us so that

we will remember, be assured, and have confidence that nothing is too difficult for Him.

Maybe you are going through a struggle right now. Possibly, there is an obstacle, a problem, or a crisis that seems insurmountable. Most likely, it is impossible to see a solution without God's help. But do you suppose that the God who simply spoke the universe into creation could deal with the issues of your life?

God gave a strong but comforting Word to His people. He revealed judgment was coming because of their straying from Him. God told His people that one day all things would be corrected and they would again be His people and He would be their God. He would bring them back to their land and they would have a singleness of heart toward Him. No longer would they stray and follow others gods and their own thinking. With one heart focused on Him, they would have a healthy fear of God. He would do good things for them and their families forever.

Do you want this kind of walk with God? Stay focused on Christ by keeping your thoughts on His Word and a heartbeat only for God.

### Focus on Self

It is so easy to act like the people of God in Jeremiah's day. Just simply move away from God by not listening to His Word! When you do not stand in the counsel of God, you do not have the wisdom available to you from the God who created the universe. It seems that so many have lost the fear of God. People in our day are more afraid of what their friends think if they do not join in with the things of the world than what God thinks if they do! Remember God's awesome power to dethrone you from your self is a simple act from God. This memory can be a healthy fear of God that keeps you from going astray.

## January 4

### Shaping the Soul

*And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.*

**Jeremiah 18:4**

### Focus on Christ

Can you be still long enough for God to shape you? Do you believe God has a better plan in mind for your life than you do? How would you know what God wants to shape you to become? These are questions everyone needs to ponder.

Have you ever tried to dress a squirming preschooler? It seems like an impossible task. The parent is interested in making the child presentable to match the occasion. There is just one problem. Children have much more on their minds than getting dressed! Staying still and

## Gifts From God

cooperating is not a child's focus. Thinking of playing with a toy, going outside, or getting something to eat drives the child to activity.

Many times believers are like preschoolers. They want to have fun but ignore what it takes to get prepared for life. Staying still is not on their agenda. They are looking for activity that increases their possessions, positions, and even their influence. Activity can be masked to look like activity for God when many times it is simply trying to find out what we can do to make God proud of our success.

God is the Potter and we are the clay. To be molded and shaped by the Master, we must be still and abide in His Hands. Jesus said that without Him we could do nothing. Yet, many times we think we must do something! Shaping requires being still in the Hands of God and letting Him speak to us through His Word. There is no substitute for spending time with God. Having a good attitude, a positive thought life, or an encouraging word is not the same as sitting in the counsel of God and hearing what He wants to do with your life. When God gives you direction, it is like a fire in your soul that will not let you go. You cannot get your mind off of what God shapes in your soul. You want to go further in your relationship with Him when He gives you wisdom.

### Focus on Self

To avoid letting God shape you into the vessel He wants brings discouragement, worry, and tension to your life. It is impossible to feel good about yourself when you hinder the very thing God is wanting to do in your life. You might say that you are not resisting God when you avoid His Word, but that is not true. When you avoid spending time in His Word and miss out on His Purpose, that is rebellion.

January 5

### Corrects and Teaches

*And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one follows the dictates of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me.*

Jeremiah 16:12

### Focus on Christ

Did you know that just because you desire something does not mean God desires the same thing? Do you listen to God? Do you know how to hear from Him?

Though we can do what we want, our ways are not hidden from the Lord! What does it mean to follow the dictates of your own heart? In this passage, the emphasis is on a people who are following their wrong, evil hearts. That means that they follow a twisted imagination, way, or lust instead of following after the Words of God.

God was placing His Hand on His people because they had gone after their own thinking, desires, lusts, and imaginations. Their heart had turned from God! His response was strong discipline. Does that



seem harsh to you? It shouldn't. God brings discipline to correct, teach, and bring His children back to a deep relationship with Him.

Many people say, "As long as I am not hurting anyone else, it is okay for me to do what I want." But, in the body of Christ, you cannot sin independently of others. We are all in one body—the body of Christ. When one part hurts, the whole body feels the sensation.

Others say, "Well, here is what I think!" That does not get God's attention! He is not interested in what we think; He is interested in us learning to walk in the ways of His holiness. Doing what is right in your own eyes is not the same as doing what God says in His Word.

Our tendency is to follow our heart. Be careful though because our heart can convince us that what is wrong is actually right. The desires of your heart are fine to follow when you are abiding in Christ, His Word, and His Ways. But when you are discouraged, in despair, anxious, or confused, it is not a time to follow your heart.

Notice the key thought at the end of this verse: "So that no one listens to Me." There is the problem. If they listen to God, then direction would be right. In order to hear someone, you must be close enough to know what they are saying. God's Word helps you measure whether your ways are right or wrong.

### Focus on Self

To focus on self is simple. Give in to your own desires, thoughts, and wants. Ignore God's Word for a couple of days, or hours, and you will be back to your old way of thinking. But Christ came into your life and made you a new creation. This new being requires a new diet. You cannot feed on twisted imaginations and desires and experience this new life. God's Word is the wonderful new diet that will guide your life from selfishness to service.

## January 6

### Fearful to Faithful

*"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.*

**Jeremiah 17:7-8**

### Focus on Christ

Do you want to be blessed? We all desire the blessings of God. But there is a connection between blessings and walking with Christ. If you want to be blessed, you must extend out your roots toward Christ and drink from the living water that only He can provide. But how do you do that? You must make the effort to have a deep connection with Christ which comes by abiding in His Word. This is the person who will be blessed.

## Gifts From God

Trust is placing your faith in God. Fear comes when you depend on self. You cannot trust God as long as you believe you can provide better than He can, and it is impossible to please God without faith. Many are unwilling to trust God to provide in a way better than human effort. People like this, whose hope is not in the Lord, will have fear when the heat and drought comes.

A tree planted by water does not have any worries about heat. As long as there is water, the tree will flourish. If the water dries up, then the tree may die. As long as there is water, even a drought will not cause the tree to stop bearing fruit. Christ is your nourishment. As long as you depend on Him, troubles may come but they will not stop you from bearing fruit. Christ is your Way, your Truth, and literally, your Life! If you choose to spend time with Him, then everything that is needed in life will be available to you.

### Focus on Self

In Matthew 16:26, Jesus said, *“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* The sad truth is that people will choose comfort, money, a nice house, and a good job at the expense of their soul!

Why would someone exchange the abundant life for fleshly pleasures? Maybe they have never tasted the relationship that is available through the living water of Christ, or maybe they have never learned the nourishment that is available when trusting in God. It is interesting that God stated through Jeremiah 17:5, *“Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.”*

If your heart departs from God, then you will trust in yourself. Many times you may gain what self seeks, but if you do, you will miss out on what God could have provided.

January 7

### Public or Private

*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*

**Jeremiah 33:3**

### Focus on Christ

Do you call on God in times of uncertainty? Do you believe that when you call on Him, He will answer?

On December 21, 2016, Kerry began his devotional time going through the book of Jeremiah. It is amazing how God speaks to us in the private times we spend with Him. Look at his journal entry!

### March 10, 2017: Jeremiah 33:3

Today Elaine and I fly to Atlanta to look for a new house! Excited and challenged. Amazing that God saved this verse for me for today, seeing I started through this incredible book in December 2016.

*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*

**Jeremiah 33:3**

Elaine and I were praying about finding a house in Georgia for the purpose of moving and establishing *Think LifeChange Institute of Biblical Counseling*. We lived in The Woodlands, Texas. We needed to reduce our cost of living. In order to do this, we needed to down-size our home and move to a less expensive place to live. We knew that we would have to live off the equity of a home we would sell. After searching the Internet for homes, we traveled to Georgia to begin the house search. God had provided an amazing, godly realtor to help us in the process.

We looked at a great number of homes, but nothing in our price range fit what we needed. We were tired and almost hopeless. Then the realtor said, "I have one other home I would like you to see. It is not on the market. Friends of mine have just made a decision to sell and no one else knows about this home. Is it okay to go there?"

Immediately, this passage came to mind, "*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, **which you do not know.***" Amazing! God not only saved this verse for me in my quiet time but showed us a house that we did not know about! It was not even on the market yet! We placed a contract on it on March 11, 2017! It has been a perfect place for us!

### **Focus on Self**

Can you imagine the disaster that would come if a person was unwilling to allow this verse to penetrate the heart?

*Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*

**Jeremiah 33:3**

If you do not call on God daily, He will not answer you, and you will not see great and mighty things which you are already blind to. If self were the focus, instead of calling on God, Elaine and I may have found a home and missed out on the perfect one we needed for following God. Please do not ever assume that your way will be better than what God has planned for you. You will never know His Way if you do not spend time with Him in private.

**January 8**

### **Seen or Behind the Scene**

*Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:...Therefore prepare yourself and arise, and speak to them all that I command you.*

**Jeremiah 1:4, 17**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Has God ever revealed something in His Word that you didn't want to do? When He does, preparation for the task ahead is the next step. You must saturate your mind in the Word of God to gain a proper perspective. When God's Word is absolutely clear to you, it is time to respond obediently. Waiting is no longer an option, action is the answer.

If you chose not to obey the Word, it is likely because you fear how people will respond if you follow God's direction. You may think you will look like an outsider if you do something others are not willing to do. Guess what? You will! You will look like Jesus who always stood out in a crowd. When the Voice of God speaks through His Word, carry out what He says without doubting or fear. When the Word is in your heart, it burns like a fire and will not let you go! You must speak! Resistance at this point takes more energy than simply obeying.

You should fear God if you are unwilling to carry out what He says. Do not waste time trying to decide what to do when you know the truth. The great antidote for a fear of people is a healthy fear of God. Jeremiah thought he could not speak for the Lord because he was so young and inexperienced. He was afraid people would not respect him. Age doesn't matter when God is the one giving the assignment. God wanted him to have confidence in Him, not his personal abilities. Where is your confidence? In Christ, or in your skills?

## Focus on Self

Self is the greatest roadblock to speaking on God's behalf. As long as you are worried about self, you will not exalt Christ. If you want to experience what any other person on earth experience, you probably will. But wouldn't you rather experience something that is not of this world? Something that contains the unsearchable riches of Christ? You can, but it is only available through a deep walk with God!

January 9

## Inner or Outer Circle

*Then the LORD said to me, "You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word."*

Jeremiah 1:12

## Focus on Christ

What or who can you count on in life? Sometimes people we thought we could count on simply do not follow through with what we were depending on them to do. Maybe your bank account did not fulfill your need, but you can always count on the promises of God. When God is ready to accomplish His Word, it cannot be slowed or restrained.

Jesus promised abundant living in John 10:10: "...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Jesus promised companionship in John 15:15: "...but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

God promised a renewal in Jeremiah 24:7: “Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.”

Jesus promised to fill our spiritual hunger in John 6:35: “And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’”

God was watching to make sure His Word would come to pass. Whatever God begins, He finishes. In Philippians 1:6 the Scripture states, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

### Focus on Self

In Jeremiah’s day, God gave the people land and provisions, but they defiled the land by pursuing everything but God. How often does this happen to Christians? When we are going astray, and God deals with us in a gracious manner, we are blessed. But many times when things are going well, we tend to defile what He has given us. To focus on self blinds you from the blessings of God. You need to praise God for His marvelous provisions knowing that God has and will perform what He has said!

## January 10

### Pride and Power

*I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.*

**Leviticus 26:19-20**

### Focus on Christ

What is the real connection between pride and power? God took care of His children and gave them all they needed. If you feel you have power over some thing or some person, then you will have pride. Pride wells up in us when we raise the value of our own self. Christ asked us to raise how we value Him by denying self.

In Leviticus 26, God gives a list of the blessings of obedience and then gives a list of the curses of disobedience. In this passage, God withholds the rain so that the ground is hardened by drought. Think about that. If you were proud of your crops and thought it was all because of your own efforts, then God can simply turn off the rain and “break the pride of your power.” It does not take God long to help us see our need for Him.

Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). He also said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

You must learn that pride keeps you from abiding in Christ. If you think you can accomplish everything in life without Him, then pride fills your heart and destroys your effectiveness. Sometimes people think they are humble because they always talk about their low-esteem and lack of value. But notice, their conversation is still about self. This is false pride.

Seek Christ! Exalt Him! Spend time praising Him for His awesome works and you will see that this is the formula that will, “break the pride of your power.”

January 11

## Arrogance and Knowledge

*Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed.*

1 Samuel 2:3

## Focus on Christ

How proud are you? Are you proud of what you know? Maybe you really do know more about some things than most everyone else you know. Do you take pride in how well versed you are in your career or in the strength of your position in your family? Are you more concerned about your knowledge of the things of this world than about the knowledge of Christ?

Christ has always been and will always be. He is the Word of wisdom! If you want to know the truth about something, ask the One who knows more than you do. Christ will not withhold the wisdom and knowledge you need for godly living. Understand, “*but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men*” (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).

Christ is the One who has all knowledge. Your actions are measured by Him, not by your standards. Be careful that you do not assume you know more than your Lord! If you do, your pride will keep you from knowing real Truth. To build a strong relationship with Christ requires you to depend on His knowledge more than your own. Only then will you begin to grasp the meaning of the abundant life that Jesus offers.

## Focus on Self

Many believers are not concerned about others knowing more about Christ and His church than they do. If there is anything you should have a healthy pride about, it should be about your relationship with Christ.

Most want to know more than others about a particular sport, hobby, career, trivia, or car. You can hear it in their voice when they speak! Do not let arrogance come from your mouth. When you do, it publicly reveals your heart. Once you share your pride, you cannot take it back.

It is then more difficult to admit that arrogance has trapped you. Ego-tism will stand firm making you believe it is too costly to ever admit that you might be wrong. The trap is set and you cannot worship God and self at the same time.

Give up and exchange your knowledge for the wisdom of God!

## January 12

### Pride and Speech

*May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaks proud things, Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; our lips are our own; who is lord over us?"*

**Psalm 12:3-4**

#### Focus on Christ

Have you ever seen people who are full of pride? It is easy to recognize by the way they talk about their accomplishments and how often they speak about self. The person speaking is often unaware that their words are annoying to those listening. Their flattering lips deceive them into believing they are so wonderful that everyone would want to hear of their achievements. They really believe that if they boast enough, then maybe they can reach their goals.

Christ is more interested in what His Word performs in us, than in what words come from our own lips. His Word is without error and always gives perfect guidance. Proverbs 8:13 states, "*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil.*" When we receive wisdom, it will teach us to hate evil. God's Word is pure, undefiled, and true. Human speech without biblical truth is faulty, vague, wrong, and arrogant. Christ can convert even the foulest lips and tongue to be clean, pleasant, and informative.

#### Focus on Self

If you are tastelessly confident in yourself, then your lips will reveal your heart. Pride is not hard to see when it is someone else's. It is more difficult to see when it stems from your own heart. When that is the case you become even more selfish. To fail to deny self is to exalt self. That means you placed yourself in a dangerous position because God hates, "Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth..." (Proverbs 8:13). Though He loves the sinner, He will not tolerate sin. As the children's song goes,

“There's a Father up above  
And He's looking down in love  
So, be careful little mouth what you say.”



# Gifts From God

January 13

## Humility and Relationships

*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*

**Micah 6:8**

### Focus on Christ

Do you have a relationship with God? Do you love God? How would you describe your relationship with God?

In this passage, God's people moved away from an intimate relationship with Him. The way they were relating to Him was through cold hearts going through the routine of ritual and sacrifice. Their hearts were no longer in love with God. While they were offering animals, oils, and anything else that was temporal, God was desiring worship from the inward heart. He wanted their hearts!

Christ wants you to worship Him inwardly. When you do, then the outward acts in this world will be based on your love for Christ. No longer should you serve others just because there is a need. You should serve, "For the love of Christ compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14).

God is looking for service out of a love for Him. You can help people and not love God. This is not the Love of Christ. It is much more personal and relational when you desire time with Christ. Many are trying to buy a relationship with Christ by what they do for Him. He wants you to spend time with Him.

Notice 3 things in this verse that helps us relate properly to God.

1. Act justly
2. Love mercy
3. Walk humbly

If the heart is right, then the action is right. When the heart is right, mercy will be shown to those who need help. When you walk humbly, you will grow in your relationship with God. You cannot separate these three. They all happen together when you are rightly related to God.

To walk humbly means to be in an open relationship with God that is empty of pride and arrogance. An open relationship means to show yourself to other people without hidden agendas or a deceptive heart.

God loves you and desires a closeness with you. Sometimes people think God does not love them because they have encountered difficult times. Christ answered the question of His Love for you when He gave His Life for you. Jesus went through a difficult time when He offered Himself as a sacrifice for your life. Because of this great Love, He wants you to walk humbly with Him. Recognize you have nothing to offer God and a renewed humbleness will be present in your heart.



**Focus on Self**

Self will always find a way to see the best possible perspective of your thoughts and actions. An examination of self often reveals, however, that we do not want to treat everyone justly, nor show them mercy. Having wrong motives does not come from walking humbly with God; it comes because you are focused on your own desires, wants, and recognitions. Want to be humble before God? Bow your knee, confess you cannot be humble, and ask God to renew your heart to be as tender and merciful as He is toward you.

**January 14**

**Ordinary But Useful**

*...and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.*

**1 Corinthians 1:28-29**

**Focus on Christ**

Why does God choose the base, ordinary, common, everyday, plain, simple people to do His Work? It is not that He cannot use talented people. Rather, it is that talented people usually see no need to help God because they are so busy focusing on themselves. The more you own, the more you tend to esteem yourself higher than others. The more you possess, the more your possession owns you. The more attention you receive, the less you think you need from God. Wealth, power, influence, and positions stroke the ego and make you feel invincible. God's response is to simply move His Power and Influence toward those who know that if anything good happens, it can only be explained by God. There is a danger in natural talent. This talent can be viewed as something you possess and not viewed as a gift from God. A person with this mindset tends to be haughty, smug, and high and mighty. This attitude does not give God the glory.

God uses willing vessels, not vessels that want to be displayed and admired. A coffee cup is simple but it is used more often than fine china. It is common, useful, and comfortable. The fine china cup is not for taking in the car, placing outside on the deck, or carrying along in a boat. It seems too fragile for everyday use. God takes the humble and makes them strong and durable for difficulties in life. He uses those focused on service, not those focused on being on display.

"No flesh should glory in His presence." When you spend time with Christ, you are not worried about what everyone around you sees in you. You are more concerned with what Christ sees. He is the only One that counts when it comes to knowing your heart and mind. When He finds a humble mind, He empowers it to be used for displaying His glory, not to show your glory. Follow Christ and He will make you usable and honorable.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

When you focus on self, it should indicate that you still have enough independence to believe that you can make it on your own. When you deny self, you discover that Christ is all you need to make it in this world. Self exalts, Christ humbles. Humility is a godly quality that only comes from spending time with the suffering servant—Jesus Christ!

January 15

## Pride and Conceit

*And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*

1 Corinthians 8:2-3

## Focus on Christ

How much do you know? You may ask, “What subject are you referring to?” Does it really matter what subject? What percentage of information do you know about science, languages, art, or mathematics? Most likely a small amount.

If there is one thing you should learn in earning a doctorate degree, it is that you learn how much you don’t know. Some people think the highest degree in education makes them smart. Rather, it shows how finite their mind is compared to God.

Many years of being a born again Christian will reveal how much you do not know about Christ. Do not misunderstand that last sentence. God takes you to incredible depths of learning through a relationship with Christ, but there is so much more to know.

Two powerful truths to learn from God:

1. It is one thing to know what a verse in the Bible says, and quite another to live by what it says.
2. If you truly love God and are obedient to Him, your thoughts are known by Him and He teaches you even more about His Ways.

If you are proud of what you know, then compare your knowledge to God’s and your egotism and conceit will begin to melt away.

## Focus on Self

When your self becomes proud about all your mind contains, it harms yourself and your relationships. Conceit moves you away from serving others to believing you should be served. Before you realize it, your friends, family, and even God become more distant. People do not move toward others who have conceit and pride; they move toward people who esteem others better than themselves.

**January 16**

**Pride and Depression**

*A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.*

**Proverbs 29:23**

**Focus on Christ**

Would you rather have pride or honor in your life? Every human has an innate desire to be the best, but honor comes to a humble heart.

Christ lived as a perfect, sinless man. Since He never sinned and He was the Son of God, He certainly had human reason to be proud in a negative way. What is there that He could not accomplish? There is nothing that He could not accomplish. Yet, His life was a model to us of a humble servant. Notice in Proverbs 29:23 that a *man's pride* will bring him low, but not a humble spirit.

Humility brings honor, not depression. Pride drives a person to attempt to accomplish more than sometimes is humanly possible. If God is not in your core thinking, then you will simply depend on the limitation of human effort.

At some point pride brings depression because a person finally realizes they are not invincible. Dreams are shattered as a person recognizes that they cannot accomplish as much as their pride drove them to attempt. Failure is eventually a reality in this world. But if you think you are great, then failure makes you face up to the fact that you could not do all you expected.

If you try to gain respect in life by your attributes, skills, and commendation of yourself, then you will lose a good reputation and inspire God to humble you. God has no problem laying you low! It does not take effort on God's part to bring a person to desperation. Do not try to impress God—it will not work!

When Christ is at the center of your thought life, you know that He is the one to be exalted. Since Christ came to make your life full and meaningful, you have nothing worth accomplishing more than getting to know the One who created everything, owns everything, and provides everything you could ever need! Humility recognizes that God is God and you are not, and brings honorable living into reality. When you live a humble life, people who are wise and godly will have a great respect for you.

**Focus on Self**

To elevate self is to actually bring a Christian to a low level of living. The Scripture teaches quite clearly that God hates pride and arrogance. Why? Because pride makes one live independent from God. Christ died for you so that He could have a relationship with you. He desires to live in communion with you but He will not do that with a proud person. Pursue Christ and retain honor!

# Gifts From God

January 17

## First or Last Place

*For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

**Luke 14:11**

### Focus on Christ

Are you a competitor? Do you like to win? Our world thinks that competition is good. The reasoning is that you get a better product when you have competition. It drives you to succeed. There is a healthy competition and there is also an unhealthy competition. Many enjoy watching sporting events. These events simply show one person attempting to be better than another person.

This may work in the sports world, but what about living for Christ? Did Christ come to compete? The Scripture states over and over that Christ came to serve, not to be served. It is interesting to try and find competition in servanthood. In serving others the idea is to help someone perform a task or help them become enriched by teaching them to follow Christ.

Christ stated, *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled.”* What did He mean by this? Did He mean that we should attempt to exalt ourselves so we could be humble? No! Did He mean that we should always seek after the best positions, be recognized and rewarded for what we do? Jesus knew that laying self aside, and exalting Him, would bring a better life for you and those around you.

Think about it. Would you rather be around a humble person or a competitive person who is trying to draw attention to their skills? Jesus will exalt a humble person in His kingdom.

### Focus on Self

You can receive your attention on earth or you can be rewarded by God in eternity, but exalting yourself on this earth will not result in eternal rewards. Listen to yourself and those around you. Are they dropping names of those they know, successes they have achieved, or trophies they have won? If so, you probably do not see them as first in the kingdom of God, they probably are viewed in last place.

January 18

## God Upholds the Humble

*The LORD builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. The LORD lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked down to the ground.*

**Psalms 147:2-6**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you ever feel weak? Have you ever been so sick that you just could not function? Have your circumstances ever looked so impossible that you felt helpless?

Christ loves to uphold the weak! Throughout His ministry, the weak, the sick, the helpless, the children, and the sinners were the ones with whom Christ spent time. In Mark 2:17 the Scripture makes it clear when it states, *“When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”*

If you do not think you need any help, then there is no humility. If you are satisfied with your own abilities, then you have no need of Christ. Jesus did not spend His time trying to convince the arrogant of their arrogance. He spent time working with those who needed a Savior. He came to save His people from their sins. But if you have no concept of sin, you have no concept of the need for a Savior.

The people who need Christ the most are the ones who see their inadequacies. The humble know their weakness and they understand their need to turn to someone who is greater than their problems.

It is almost impossible to imagine that the God who created the heavens, people, animals, plants, and in fact everything that exists, is the One who singles out the humble person and lifts him or her up. Why would He do that? Why would the God of the Universe be interested in the downtrodden? Because His Concern and His Love is infinite. Though He loves all and He sent His Son to provide salvation to all, He also knows who is ready to respond to His Love.

In this Psalm, it is as though this awesome God is somehow attracted to the overwhelmed, mistreated, and oppressed. Though He is the only one who can count the number of stars, He is interested and responds to heal the brokenhearted and bind their wounds.

Think of someone you love. Do you love them because they are arrogant, proud, and self-satisfied? You tend to be attracted to someone who is humble, pure, and in need of love. You want to help them accomplish the best things in life. The Lord “lifts up the humble,” but He also, “casts the wicked to the ground.” The difference in lifting up a sinner and casting down the wicked is the motive and knowledge. The humble know they are sinners and know they need help. The wicked do not care that they are doing anything wrong, and they certainly do not believe they need God to help them. Wouldn’t you rather be upheld by God, knowing that you are a sinner in need of a Savior?

**Focus on Self**

When you continually turn to your own strengths, depend on your own intelligence, and put your hope in your careful planning, you will miss out on the uplifting power of God. If you believe you can make it in life by your own strength, then God will let you try. Why not confess you do not know everything nor possess everything needed to make it in this world? Humility is wonderful! It brings a feeling of safety when you depend on the God of the Universe.

## Gifts From God

January 19

### Hope and Right Living

*That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments...*

**Psalm 78:7**

#### Focus on Christ

I hope we will have world peace. I hope there will be no smear campaigns in the political election. I hope that when I get to work someone has caught up on all my work. I hope that all my bills will be paid by a friend who knows I need a little help. These are examples of wishful thinking, not Christian hope.

Hope does not depend on setting your mind to believe something long enough that it comes true. That is simply wishful thinking. When Christ becomes the center of your life, hope is one of the benefits of that relationship.

To have hope that things will go well in your future is positive thinking, but it is not the same as keeping God's commandments. There is a direct connection between hope and keeping His commandments. Your spirit is inspired with hope as you keep doing the things Christ asks you to do. Obeying Christ brings fulfillment to a true believer. It is a joy to keep the commandments when you love Christ. Obedience to Christ doesn't necessarily make life easier, but obedience to Christ makes living in the Spirit easier. Christ said that if you love Him, you should do what He says. This love is evidenced by obedience. Obedience results in a deep hope that knows God will do what He has promised.

#### Focus on Self

It is when the believer sees his or her weakness that he or she will seek help from the power of God. Anything short of that will turn to self. If you turn to self, then you will either be a person without the hope of God or a person who clings to a deceptive kind of hope. A deceptive hope will perish when a person dies (see Proverbs 11:7).

Wouldn't you rather be a person who has a hope that is anchored to God? When you are, you will realize that God's Love is not rationed out a little at a time, it is poured out to an overflowing capacity into your life. God's Love ultimately brings true abiding hope.

January 20

### Hope Shelters The Mind

*I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law. You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.*

**Psalm 119:113-114**

**Focus on Christ**

What makes you more comfortable, a divided mind, or God's Word? A double-minded person means one who has vain or skeptical thoughts. David wrote about his thoughts, instead of the thoughts of others. He hated his own thoughts that were divided and vain. The psalmist could not read the mind of others. He could not know what others were thinking, but he knew his own thoughts, and did not like some of them. Vain thoughts hurt the believer and should not be taken lightly. They are sinful. The source of hope and cleansing for these thoughts is the Word. God directed Jeremiah to share these words, "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?" (Jeremiah 4:14). If you are to experience true hope, then you must get rid of the wrong thoughts by sheltering your mind in the Word.

To hope in the Word is to be sheltered by God Himself. Maybe you remember when you played hide and seek as a child. Though you were not in real danger, it was a tense time when you were waiting for someone to find you. You needed a place that would hide you so well that no one else could imagine where you were. If you thought you had a good place, then you could relax. As an adult, you hide from something because you are in danger. If you could go to a safe place that no one else knows about, then you could relax and feel that no harm would come to you.

God's Word gives you a hiding place from the troubles of this world. While many challenges may come your way, the Word is the only thing that can keep you sheltered from a divided mind and skeptical thinking. When you think the wrong thoughts, hope flees from you, and discouragement takes over.

Christ places His Spirit within you to guide you, teach you, and to be your Wonderful Counselor. Relax in His Word, let Him be your hiding place and shield.

**Focus on Self**

If you insist your thinking is good enough to guide your life, you will miss out on the full abundant life that only Christ can provide. Does He know when your next crisis will arrive? Is it possible that God knows more than you do? Wouldn't you want to know if your thinking was wrong? The answer is to realize your mind is limited. God knows more than you do. His Word has so much sheltering power for your mind and heart. The more you fall in love with God's Word, the more it will saturate your mind and cause you to hate selfish divided thinking. Be sheltered in the Word and hope will be your guide.



# Gifts From God

January 21

## Hope and Health

*Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.*

**Proverbs 13:12**

### **Focus on Christ**

Do you live with great expectations for the future? Is hope a guiding thought to your mind daily? Do you live as though you are free? Christ is the express reason for believers to have hope. His Life was given for you so that you might be set free. Now that you are free, do you live as though you are?

Hope brings peace to the body through the mind. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 makes this clear, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation." When you put on a helmet, the symbolism is to protect the mind. Being grateful for your personal salvation received through Christ is like putting on a helmet of the hope of salvation. This thinking protects your mind from becoming negative by focusing on the fullness of life in Christ. Proverbs 23:7 reveals, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." If you think you are hopeless, then you will be hopeless. If you think you are of no value, then you will feel worthless. But when you have hope, it gives you joy for living.

Christ knew that to live in this world without Him is hopeless. If you are hopeless for an extended period of time, then your body will respond. If you are hopeless, then the heart becomes sick. The Scripture reveals the condition of the mind and spirit. A person becomes unhappy, distressed, and miserable if there is no hope. Many times you may turn to the medical world for help. Christ should always be the first place that you turn to for help. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1). To have hope does not mean you will never be sick, it means that your mind will not contribute to unhealthy thinking, which may affect spirit, soul, and body. Just as a tree gives life, so hope refreshes the soul.

### **Focus on Self**

It is easy to focus on self when your hope seems to have departed. Real disappointments in this world will negatively affect feelings and thoughts if your mind is not on Christ. There are times when you know you should not be hopeless, yet you are. When you fall into despair, the result can cripple your faith. Christ is the answer. Turn to Him and share your despair, He already knows what you are facing and what you are needing from Him. His Hope will not make the heart sick, but rather will bring incredible joy.



**January 22**

**Belief and God's Presence**

*Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

**Matthew 13:58**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you believe in God's Word? Do you believe that Jesus did all the things the Bible records? Do you believe Jesus saves? Do you believe Jesus can save you?

When Jesus arrived at a place where the people had unbelief, He would move on to the next place. If you truly believe in Christ, then you want to see the mighty works of our wonderful Savior! When you read the Scriptures, your mind should be encouraged and challenged when you see the wonderful things that your Lord did while He was on earth. Would you have a deep belief in Jesus if you saw Him heal the blind, raise the dead, and cleanse the leper?

Yet, you have the Scripture that records all of these wonderful works. You can read about these over and over. And every time you read them, you are enlightened by each of these miraculous events. But do you believe Him enough to trust Him with your daily life? There are several areas of life that reveal how much you truly believe Him. If the disciples needed help with their unbelief in the midst of living physically with Jesus, then most likely you need your belief in God strengthened.

Here are a few areas of difficulty concerning belief:

1. Do you believe that God can really bring peace to your life in the midst of anxious times?
2. Do you believe that if you give God's tithe to Him that you can survive on the remaining portion?
3. Do you believe that God can bring that wayward friend or family member back to Him?

Each of these challenge your belief. You may find that your level of belief in God is measured by the amount of God's Word that is hidden in your heart and mind. When your thoughts are His thoughts, your belief is strengthened. When your prayers are continual and intimate, your belief is strengthened. When your obedience is immediate, not delayed, your trust is confirmed. When you share what God's Word is speaking to you with others, your belief is renewed.

Christ is believable, but your mind can be corrupted from Truth. Stay connected to Christ through His Word and your belief will increase every day. If you want Christ to remain in the activity of your life to do great and mighty things, then keep on believing! God's Presence will be with you when your focus is on Him.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

The worries of this world will crowd out belief in your mind. When you are consumed with doubts as to what God can do, it is more likely that He will move on to the person who does believe. Positive thinking will not cause God to do what you want. This verse says, "Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." If you are doubting what Christ can do, then you will miss out on developing your belief in Him.

January 23

## Believe and Receive

*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*

John 1:11-12

## Focus on Christ

Have you ever made a return visit to a place where you used to live? You were excited to see the house where you once lived, or the family you had not seen in a long time. Maybe you even visited a former church you attended and you expected to have a great reception. The only problem was that the people there had their own routines and plans that did not include you. They said hello, asked a few questions, and then were on their way. You made a great effort to visit, but you were not received well.

Jesus must have sensed that also. He left heaven, came in the form of a baby, lived perfectly as a human, and His own did not receive Him. How sad! His own people did not want a relationship with Him. Though Jesus never sinned, His Spirit must have been grieved. He made a long trip to give them a full, abundant, meaningful life, yet many did not receive Him.

How about you? If you have received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then how do you welcome Him into your life and home today? Do you look forward to spending time with Him everyday? When you meet Him are you in a rush to get on to something else? Jesus wants to be welcomed, received, believed, and accepted. When you truly believe in Him, your time for Him will reveal your belief.

## Focus on Self

Are you looking to satisfy self with your schedule, or do you have time to spend with Jesus? Self is anxious about how you spend every minute. The ones who receive Jesus are gifted with the right to be children of God. Children like to spend time with parents. Spend time with your Heavenly Father.

**January 24**

**Belief and Gratitude**

*Yes, they spoke against God: They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?" Therefore the LORD heard this and was furious; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation.*

**Psalm 78:19-22**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it take for you to believe in God and His Ways? When you read about God's people in the Old Testament you sometimes think they were just foolish, ridiculous, and double-minded people. How could they see God part the Red Sea and then wonder if He could provide water to drink? After the walls of Jericho fell by simply obeying God's simple instructions, why wouldn't they believe? Or how about when God brought plagues and provided manna, yet they still turned from Him? They simply did not trust Him for the next need. This kind of believing seems juvenile.

In this Psalm, the people said in verse 20, "Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?" It does not take long to forget God's last provision. When you do forget, belief in Him seems to be shattered.

Maybe there is a direct link between gratitude and belief. When you are thankful for God's provisions, you seem to remember and keep current in your mind that God is a God who provides. This remembrance keeps your faith strong and your believing current. If you do not stay up to date with God in your daily walk with Him, then your belief can quickly turn to unbelief.

Psalm 78:22 says, "Because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation." God had provided food and water for His people and they still did not believe. Be careful, because unbelief can lead to what God did next to discipline His people. "The wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel. In spite of this they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works" (Psalm 78:31-32).

Christ answered all of your future needs when He provided so great a salvation to you. He provided love, abundant living, hope, peace, joy, and eternal life. What more do you need to believe Him? If you spend time with Him, you will learn of His faithfulness.

**Focus on Self**

When your thankfulness for God's provision only lasts until another need arises, and then faith diminishes, self is stronger than

## Gifts From God

\_\_\_\_\_ faith. Self makes you just like the people in the Old Testament. You  
\_\_\_\_\_ become shallow, foolish, and short-sighted. Trust in Christ! He will  
\_\_\_\_\_ strengthen your belief. The more often you spend time with Him, your  
\_\_\_\_\_ unbelief will turn to gratitude.

January 25

### Believing is a Shield

*As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven;  
He is a shield to all who trust in Him.*

**2 Samuel 22:31**

#### Focus on Christ

\_\_\_\_\_ Has God ever been your shield? You may say, “What would that  
\_\_\_\_\_ look or feel like?” A shield is an instrument of protection. If someone  
\_\_\_\_\_ is trying to hurt you by swinging a weapon toward you, then a shield  
\_\_\_\_\_ would be a great protection. God acted as a shield for David. There  
\_\_\_\_\_ were many times David was in physical battle. He needed protection  
\_\_\_\_\_ that only God could provide. God’s protection as a shield is much  
\_\_\_\_\_ more than just physical protection. When you truly believe in God,  
\_\_\_\_\_ protection begins.

\_\_\_\_\_ What about those times when you have mental, emotional, or spiri-  
\_\_\_\_\_ tual attacks? Remember David and Goliath? David was protected when  
\_\_\_\_\_ God gave him spiritual, emotional, and mental strength. Of course a  
\_\_\_\_\_ young shepherd boy would need mental strength to go against a giant.  
\_\_\_\_\_ His emotions could have easily overpowered him to back away from  
\_\_\_\_\_ the battle, but God was his Shield. God gave David the right perspec-  
\_\_\_\_\_ tive and confidence to follow through with the assignment.

\_\_\_\_\_ Have you recently had an emotional, mental, or spiritual attack?  
\_\_\_\_\_ The battle is first won with God! If you do not come to see God’s per-  
\_\_\_\_\_ spective on the attack, then you will lose the battle. When you are in a  
\_\_\_\_\_ battle, turn to God’s attributes and your perspective will be adjusted.  
\_\_\_\_\_ In the larger context of this verse of Scripture, God was Strengthener,  
\_\_\_\_\_ Shield, Rock, and Refuge. He is a Subduer of enemies and a Support  
\_\_\_\_\_ in time of need. Whatever kind of shield you need for protection, God  
\_\_\_\_\_ is that shield.

\_\_\_\_\_ Christ is your Protector every day. He is waiting for you to come  
\_\_\_\_\_ and let Him prove that, “His way is perfect; the Word of the LORD  
\_\_\_\_\_ is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.” Jesus Christ is the  
\_\_\_\_\_ Savior. He is in the saving business. He can save your emotions from  
\_\_\_\_\_ doubt, your mind from mistruths, and your spirit from discouragement.

#### Focus on Self

\_\_\_\_\_ You can choose to try and be mentally and emotionally tough  
\_\_\_\_\_ enough to make it through your battles. The problem with this ap-  
\_\_\_\_\_ proach—stamina! You will never be able to always be strong. Abandon  
\_\_\_\_\_ selfish protection and turn to Christ. His protection is never limited,  
\_\_\_\_\_ weak, or absent.

**January 26**

**Who Do You Trust?**

*The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.*

**Psalm 9:9-10**

**Focus on Christ**

Who do you trust? Do you trust people who you do not know? Do you trust people who have harmed you? Maybe they have physically harmed you. Maybe they have mentally abused you or emotionally attacked you. No matter what the offense, you will not trust people who mistreat you.

What about those friends and family members who shelter you, love you, and seek ways to encourage and help you? Do you trust them? Certainly! Trust is given to those who nurture you. Remember, no one nurtures you more than Christ! He loves you so much that He entrusts you with His Holy Spirit. He gives you eternal life! His Spirit guides and teaches you in the Ways of the kingdom of God. The benefits of His Spirit are true love, joy, peace, and many other wonderful character qualities.

When God is your refuge, you are in a powerful place of protection. He is your stronghold in times of trouble. When you are shaken by the events around you, turn to Him as your haven of rest. The One in which you put your trust is the One who is your shelter from danger. Trust is freely given to the One Whom you know will protect you during the storms of life. Your belief in God is strengthened when you see His Hand of Protection guide you through daily challenges.

**Focus on Self**

Self tends to retreat into personal protection by withdrawing from relationships that are damaging and destructive. If you rely on personal protection from the insults and attacks of others, then you become shy, lose your confidence, and have sinful reactions. Turn to Christ and He will encourage you by reminding you that you are blessed when persecuted for righteousness sake. He always works to redeem you from sin or negative attacks. Truly, Christ is a refuge in time of need.

**January 27**

**Fear and Respect**

*The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.*

**Psalm 25:14**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Has fear ever protected you? If you fear the law, you will obey the law. The thought of going to jail brings a fear that guards you against doing what is wrong. In this way, fear is really a respect for the law. If you have no respect for the law, you probably will not care about disobeying the law.

When Kerry was growing up, he had a healthy fear of his dad. This fear kept him from doing many of the things his friends were doing. He was not as afraid of peer pressure as he was of what would happen if his dad found out what he had done. This respect kept him from being involved with friends who were drinking and doing drugs.

This Psalm states, "The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him." The word, *secret* has incredible meaning. It means the friendship or intimacy with the Lord is with those who fear Him. When you have a deep relationship with Christ, you are more concerned with what He thinks of you than what your friends think of you. If you respect Christ, you will have a deep fear of Him. You will be more concerned of what will happen to your relationship with Him if you disobey, than what benefits you will receive if you go along with your worldly friends.

A person who fears the Lord is one who listens to and obeys His Word. Only the intimate friends of Christ will enjoy the deep truths revealed through an abiding relationship with Him. He will confide His deep truths to His friends. The psalmist states it this way, "and He will show them His covenant." Do you want to enjoy the deep things of God? You can! The only cost is to have a healthy, reverent respect, and fear of God.

## Focus on Self

Many people fear people more than God. Their concern is focused on what others might think if they do not join in with worldly activities and pleasures. This lifestyle focuses on self, not God. Self is more interested in comfort than in holiness. But true pleasure for the believer is to obey Christ, follow in His Ways, and experience true abundant living. This implies respect for God.

January 28

## Fear without Faith

*Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men..."*

Isaiah 29:13

## Focus on Christ

Have you ever told someone something you did not really mean? Maybe you said, "I am sorry," but you did not really mean it.

In Isaiah's day, the people had left their heart at the door when they came to worship. They continued their practice of worship, but it was only from their lips, not from their hearts and minds. This was not really worship at all. It was ritual. The same can be done in our day. You can say you are going to worship on Sunday morning but what comes out of your lips may not be from the heart. Maybe you lived all week without spending much time with Him and then expect Him to believe you are glad to worship Him on Sunday. Through the week you may have been more afraid of what others thought about you than what Christ thought. God is not interested in lip worship only; He wants your heart.

How is it possible to live a faithless, anxious, discouraged life through the week, and then in public worship, act as though everything is great between you and God? You would have to be like the people in Isaiah's day who used their own thinking and man-made regulations for worship. They were good at religious performances. The problem was that God knew their hearts. Entertainment does not impress a Holy God.

It is true that God wants you to worship with your mouth, but what comes out must come from a genuine heart of love and the fear of God. Worship based on the heart will be authentic, personal, and accepted by God. Fear of God without a real heart of love and faith is unacceptable.

Christ is worthy of your worship. He is not to be worshipped by your own intentions and inventions but is to be worshipped based on the premises of His Word. No longer should you claim you do not need to attend church to worship—that is a man-made thought and regulation. Since Christ is the head of the church, and the Scripture tells us to not forsake the assembling together for worship, you cannot make your own rules and worship properly. Do not resist His Word! Fear toward God, as taught by the commandment of men, is not the right approach. Yield your spirit to God and worship Him with a godly respect, awe, and reverence for Him and His Word.

### **Focus on Self**

It is amazing how self comes up with regulations that are comfortable, but not necessarily obedient to God. Worship that is not from your mind and heart is really self worship. Consider your heart. Ask God to cleanse it from sin, self, and false regulations. Then love and worship God with faith in Him and respect in your heart!

**January 29**

### **Fear and Holiness**

*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

**2 Corinthians 7:1**



# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Sometimes people disapprove of you by saying, “You think you are so holy!” While it can have a negative meaning that you are acting morally superior to someone else, it can also be a statement that reveals their own guilt.

Why wouldn’t you want to live a positive, holy life? Christ died on the cross, was buried, and raised from the dead so that you could be saved from your sins and strive toward perfection. He said, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

When Paul wrote, “Therefore, having these promises,” he was referring to the promise that God would be with you and would spend time with those who obey Him. But you cannot spend time with Christ with a dirty heart. You must be cleansed from all impurities in order to fellowship with Him. What impurities? All sin of the flesh and the spirit. Anything that is in your mind, heart, and body that would separate you from fellowship with Christ must be removed.

How do you perfect holiness in the fear of God when you are not perfect? The key is the fear of God. To have a deep respect for a Holy God moves you to a desire to obey Him. As you obey Him, you move toward holiness. Continued obedience produces consistency resulting in a maturing faith. You will not be sinless but you will be moving toward perfection.

If you love Christ, you will obey Him out of a healthy respect and fear. This doesn’t make life miserable; it makes life abundant and full.

## Focus on Self

To be afraid to live a holy life because someone might call you self-righteous is focusing on self. Be more concerned about what Christ thinks of you than what others think. True self-righteousness is worshipping self. Holy living comes because you desire to be like Christ.

January 30

## Forgiveness is Conditional

*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

2 Chronicles 7:14

## Focus on Christ

Which of these do you think most people choose? 1) To be forgiven, or 2) To turn from their wicked ways. You might be surprised at the answer. People seem to think that being forgiven relieves them from the guilt of sin, but they don’t think they have to turn from sin to be forgiven. They want it both ways, to be forgiven and to be able to continue living as usual.



Christ will forgive you of your sin. The reason He came to earth was to save His people from their sins.

These are the conditions for forgiveness:

**First**, you must humble yourself. That means you must pray and humble yourself enough to admit the wrongness of your ways. It is hard to admit you are wrong. If God is to hear your prayers from heaven, then your prayer must humbly admit to your sin.

**Second**, you must seek His face. If you have humbled yourself properly then you realize the depth of your wrongs. This leaves you nowhere to turn for help except to God. Getting face to face with God is when you seek His direction. If you do not know what to do with your sin, then seek God! Christ put His Spirit in you to guide you into all Truth. Seeking His face is personal, intimate, and comforting.

**Third**, you must turn from your wicked ways. Your ways will not seem wicked until you have come face to face with Righteousness—Jesus Christ! Once that happens, you can no longer live in, maintain, and continue in your wickedness.

But look at the result! If you will humble yourself and pray, He will hear from heaven. If you will seek His face, then He will forgive your sin. If you turn from your ways, then He will heal your land. Forgiveness is guaranteed to those who meet His conditions and brings a fresh breath of freedom in Christ.

### Focus on Self

If you never admit you are wrong, you will never experience forgiveness. Your will is a gift from God but can also be a curse to your soul. Determine to have your way, and you will find a life empty, disabled, and void of Christ's Presence. Yield your spirit to Christ, and you will find true peace.

January 31

### Fear and Guilt

*When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Psalm 32:3-5

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever tried to hide something that you did wrong? Kerry recalls a childhood experience:

*I remember such an occasion when I was a young boy. We lived next door to the church where my dad was the pastor. I was playing with a large truck tire that was heavy and hard to control and roll. One time, I made it roll really fast. It rolled down a hill, hit a concrete*

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*curb, bounced over it and slammed into the side of one of the church's water-cooled air conditioners. It broke the side wall and water started gushing out! I did what any nine-year-old would do—I ran and hid. My thought was that if no one knew, I would be safe.*

*The problem was my own guilt. My mind began to think about what would happen if my dad found out. I was miserable. After a few hours, I couldn't take it anymore. I went into the church where my dad was studying and asked him to go into the worship center. I kneeled at the altar and confessed what I had done. Confession relieved my soul but my dad's forgiveness cleansed my mind and made things right.*

Christ is the only One who can truly forgive you of sin, but He will not until you acknowledge your sin. If you don't acknowledge your sin, then Jesus will come after you and convict you of sin. If you do not repent, then you will become more miserable until you do. David was affected physically and grieved in his spirit. His vitality was sapped like a fever in the body. Most often guilt will not kill you, but it will take your strength and make you feel like you will die! Conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit is miserable, but it is not there to leave you in a sinful condition. Conviction is the first step of redemption.

When you confess your sin, God will remove the sin and the iniquity or guilt of your sin. What an incredible blessing!

### Focus on Self

If you enjoy misery, then continue in your sin and experience the result of selfishness. A focus on the protection of self will keep a person in miserable sin. You can run and hide from others but not from God. Jesus will save you from your sin but only after you acknowledge it.

February 1

### Forgiveness Requires Calling On God

*For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.*

**Psalm 86:5**

### Focus on Christ

Remember the last time you called a close friend and asked for help? When you called, did you have any doubt that they would be ready and willing to help? Of course not! If you thought the friend would be unresponsive, then you would not have called.

Don't you think Christ loves to help you? Yes, He is waiting on a call for help in order to provide all the essentials for living. His mercy withholds from you what you really do deserve, and His grace provides love, joy, peace, and many other abundant living resources that you do not deserve. His goodness encourages you to seek Him for whatever you need.

Notice in this passage that God is always ready to forgive. His ability to forgive you is unlimited and inexhaustible. There is nothing you can do that cannot be forgiven. But the problem is that while Christ is ready to forgive, you often are not ready to repent. He is waiting on a call from you. But if you do not want to change, then you avoid talking to Him. Lack of communication results in missing out on the goodness and forgiveness of God. Instead of avoiding Christ, you need to approach Him with a yielded heart, recognize your weakness and His strength, and He will forgive. Why would anyone avoid this healing power of forgiveness?

Christ came to forgive. You know this is true when you see the price He paid so that forgiveness could be offered. He showed you how much He loved you when He left the glory of Heaven, came to earth as a baby, lived a perfect life, gave His life on the cross, and was raised from the dead to provide a full, abundant, and meaningful life.

If you need forgiveness, then simply call upon Him. Out of His goodness and His abundance of mercy, He will answer your call. And when He gifts you with forgiveness, you will then have a precious gift that you can share. If you then share forgiveness toward others, you will discover there is nothing that brings you to be more like Jesus than when you forgive others.

### Focus on Self

If you are too proud to turn to someone else for help, it means that you are a selfish person. A humble person will quickly turn to Christ for help. Recognizing the abundant mercy of Christ will help you lay down your pride, call on His name, and receive His forgiveness.

## February 2

### The Holy Spirit and the Mind

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*

**John 16:12-15**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been so tired that you said, "I cannot learn any more right now! I just can't take in anymore!" The disciples were at this point in their learning from Jesus. They were not only tired, their hearts were hardened to learning. They did not like it that Jesus told them that He would die and leave them. They did not understand why He would leave them. Hearing that one of them would betray Him

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and that the others would walk away brought their minds to this, “But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart” (John 16:6).

Sorrow of heart can stop the learning process. But when you are open to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, your mind gets back on track with learning the Ways of Christ. That is why Christ said He would send His Spirit to guide and teach them.

Have you become hardened to learning the Ways of Christ? Maybe difficult times have clouded your mind from seeing more of Christ. He has much more to teach you than you already know, but maybe you are resisting what He has already shown you in His Word. It is not that you don’t need to learn more, but “you cannot bear them now” because you have hardened your heart.

Wake up! Come back to your senses! The Spirit of Truth lives within you! He will take from the unlimited treasures of Christ’s Knowledge and give to you what you need to know. But this will not happen if you resist the teaching ministry of the Spirit. If you are weary, distracted, and defeated as the disciples were, then you will miss out on the awesome, life-changing wisdom of Jesus. Your wrong perspective will be corrected when you come to the end of your own wisdom and are willing to hear from Christ’s Holy Spirit.

### Focus on Self

When your mind is tired, confused, and ungrateful, self will make horrible decisions. You may think you have reasoned everything out and know the direction you should go. But until you deny self and follow Christ with all your heart, you will miss out on the true perspective that the Holy Spirit has waiting for you.

February 3

### The Holy Spirit and Speech

*For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.*

Luke 12:12

### Focus on Christ

What do you say when you are caught off guard? You can’t always have a speech prepared so that you know what to say and how to say it. Have you ever responded quickly to a surprise or an attack and something came out of your mouth that you should not have said? One pastor made an announcement one time as he was watching a group of loud and unruly children. He didn’t mean to say what he did, but it accidentally came out as he spoke. He said, “The fellowship will be after church, and we will have cages for your children!” That was an embarrassing moment!

How can you protect your mouth from saying the wrong thing? You cannot! Only a heart that is walking with the Holy Spirit can

accomplish that. Jesus taught His disciples to be fearless. He knew that one day they would be taken before authorities who did not want them to teach and preach about the things of God. In those moments, He did not want them to worry about what they would say. Instead, He reminded them that the Holy Spirit would be with them.

While the Holy Spirit lives within believers and is always with them, believers must be in tune with the Spirit. Staying up to date in an abiding relationship with Christ is what protects your speech. When you are walking in the Spirit, relax and He will give you the right thing to say in the very moment you need to speak.

### Focus on Self

The mouth reveals what the mind is thinking. If you are walking in the flesh, your speech will reveal wrong thoughts. Self wants to get even with people, tell a person off, or set someone straight. Walk with the Spirit and your speech will be full of encouragement, tact, truthfulness, praise, and pleasant words. Be prepared not with a written script but with a Spirit-filled mind.

## February 4

### The Holy Spirit's Presence

*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

John 14:16-17

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been physically present with someone, but it was obvious their mind was somewhere else? In that situation you don't necessarily enjoy their presence.

Christ said He will give you a Helper, His Holy Spirit, who will abide with you forever. He will live within you. The Scripture uses the word *dwells*. That means He takes up residence and lodges in you. It also means to stay, settle in, continue, and endure. How great is that? Hebrews 13:5 says, "...For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The presence of the Holy Spirit is assuring. But it is not enough to have His Presence, you must also recognize His Presence. The result is to receive all He provides to guide, teach, comfort, convict, and to impart the Love of God. The Father tells the Spirit what to teach about the Son, which is the Spirit's primary role. If you want to know Jesus, then recognize the Spirit's Presence and listen to His teaching.

The Holy Spirit is always focused on you. He is not like someone who is with you but whose mind is far away. The real question is, "Are you focused on Him?" When you are, it is incredible what happens.

## Gifts From God

There is no concept of time when you are with someone you love. Why? Because you love being with them, listening to them, and experiencing life with them. You can't wait to hear what they will say. There is an inward desire to be with them. Time passed quickly for Jacob, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20). That is how you should be with the Holy Spirit.

Christ is present and real through His Spirit who dwells in you. Take advantage of this permanent Guest. Spend time with Him and your recognition of His Presence will grow stronger.

### Focus on Self

If your mind is on self, then you will limit your experiences in life. If your mind is on Christ, then your life will be abundant and free. Self confines and reduces life to one's small thinking. To follow the Spirit's Presence allows you limitless and unknown qualities of life and peace.

February 5

### Feelings are Not the Same as Being Spirit-Led

*However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

John 16:13

### Focus on Christ

Have your feelings ever misled you? Has something ever felt so right only to find out it wasn't true? Feelings are not necessarily the same as facts. Issac's feelings told him the person he was touching was his son Esau. The truth was it was his son Jacob. His mind thought otherwise, but he allowed his feelings to guide his thoughts (see Genesis 27:20-23). He made a wrong decision.

God gave you sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch to allow you to relate to people, places, and things. He gave you His Spirit to guide you into all Truth and a human spirit to relate to Him. Christ paid a great cost to leave you the Spirit of Truth—the Holy Spirit. Notice the Scripture says, "for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak." Even the Holy Spirit is guided by what God the Father would tell Him to teach us about God the Son.

Feelings can make you wish and want something so badly that you can believe it is right, even when it is not based on the truth of God's Word. If you don't spend much time in God's Word, then you will not be led by the Spirit of Truth. Your feelings can make errant decisions.

People today behave the same as they did thousands of years ago. They look to the sky, birds, animals, and the stars searching for something they want to be true. When there is a tragedy, their emotions start trying to interpret the meaning instead of turning to God's Word and

letting His Spirit give meaning. Never forget that God is more than a God of grace, He also is just, merciful, and the One who disciplines those He loves. He came to convict the world of sin (see John 16:8), not just try to make everyone feel accepted. You will be accepted when you receive God's Son.

Do not wait on your feelings to guide you. Feelings can lead you to half-truths which are mistruths. Choosing the wrong way like Isaac chose the wrong son brings disaster to future decisions. Follow Christ's Spirit by reading the Word and He will guide you in all truth.

### Focus on Self

Self wants everyone to feel good. Sin will never be the subject of conversation with self. But wouldn't you want to know if your decisions were wrong? Feelings do not guide you into ALL truth, the Holy Spirit does. If you aren't sure how to follow the Spirit, start finding true direction by reading God's Word.

## February 6

### The Holy Spirit Causes You to Remember

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*

**John 14:26**

### Focus on Christ

How easy is it for you to forget something? Maybe you forget someone's name, birthday, or an old phone number. Most of those failed memories do not require immediate recall. You can take your time to think about it or look it up. But when you are in a critical situation, you need instant recollection.

One man said he wouldn't have any trouble remembering the words of Scripture. Recalling his educational days he boasted of how much he had to remember in pharmaceutical studies. A few weeks into memorizing Scripture he said, "This is harder than I thought. Why is it so?" This kind of memory is not as much educational as spiritual. You must be in tune with Christ and rely on His Spirit to grow spiritually.

The Holy Spirit not only teaches you, but also He brings to your memory the things He has taught you in the past. Many times while teaching or preaching the Word the Holy Spirit brings to the mind of the speaker something previously learned. It was something not considered while studying to present the topic.

Your mind simply cannot remember everything there is to know about Christ, His Ways, His Truth, and His Works. Yet, all of those are helpful for living the Christian life. Would Christ ask you to obey His commandments if He did not make a way for you to remember them? No, that is why He left His Spirit with you.



## Gifts From God

It is important to know that Christ helps you to remember what you have already learned. He doesn't bring to mind what you have never considered. To remember something means to recall what was already placed in your mind. The Holy Spirit will teach you all things about Jesus and bring to mind all Jesus said, but you must first read the Word to get it in your mind.

The wonderful gift of remembrance is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Spend time in God's Word; and, when there is a need to recall the truth, the Spirit will help you.

### Focus on Self

Depending only on your mental abilities to remember spiritual truth is not enough. We are limited. The Holy Spirit is unlimited in knowledge and understanding. Self wants to do things on its own. But the Christian life is a yielded life that takes advantage of the abiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

February 7

### Consequences of Your Actions

*Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.*

**Proverbs 20:17**

### Focus on Christ

How often do you consider the consequences of your actions? Most people never do. Many think that what they do today will be forgotten.

If you keep doing deceitful acts, then you will become accustomed to lying. If you lie and deceive others often enough, then you will believe your actions are acceptable. The danger of establishing sinful habits is that your character begins to change. If it is wrong character, then you and others around you will suffer from its effects. Christ wants you to establish spiritual habits not human habits. These spiritual habits will begin to shape your actions into developing you in righteousness and holiness. To avoid these spiritual habits is to become self-centered and humanistic in your thinking.

As long as your actions seem to be working for you, blindness sets in, and you begin to take the wrong way. It may look like a good loaf of bread, but one day you will have to eat what you sow. Hopefully what you developed is not poisonous.

If deception yields the result you desired, then it will taste sweet for a while. As long as you receive your desired result, you will justify your lie. The proverb states that afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel. At this point, what started as bread is now hard, tasteless, and destructive. Sin, when it is finished, brings death not life.

The bread of life satisfies and nourishes. What begins with self-denial becomes the most satisfying taste on earth. This life in Christ truly is the only satisfying full course meal. Why would you choose food that leads to death instead of a buffet of food that leads to life?



**Focus on Self**

Self has no interest in waiting on something that will provide fullness for eternity. Self is interested in fast food. It has no desire to wait for a home cooked nutritious meal. Christians should not accept drive-through food when they have the ability to feed on Jesus. The soul will never be satisfied with anything else.

**February 8**

**The Holy Spirit and Love**

*Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

**Romans 5:5**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever been disappointed because something you hoped for did not happen? Maybe you shared with others that you knew something good was coming your way or that a decision you made was going to pay off financially. If your hope did not materialize, then you felt shame because you boasted about your expected outcome.

Paul shared in this Scripture that God's hope does not disappoint. If you hope in Christ, then He will fulfill what He has promised every time! Psalm 22:4 states, "Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them." God's Hope is fulfilled in the heart of believers by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit pours out into our hearts the Love of God. When you pour a liquid out, it flows everywhere except where there is a restriction. Only resistance to the Presence of the Holy Spirit will keep you from experiencing the deep Love of God. If you want to experience the Love of God that is eternal, freeing, and fulfilling, then walk in the Presence of the Holy Spirit. His Power will produce a Love that cannot be overcome.

Many believers miss out on the benefits of the Love of God. They avoid an abiding relationship with Christ by failing to spend time in the Word; and, therefore, do not apply the Truth to their practical life. But when the Love of God is poured out into a receiving heart, the sky looks bluer; relationships are deeper; joy is abundant; and hope is fulfilled. If you want a deep relationship with God, then receive His Love and experience His perspective for the world around you. This will enable you to endure any afflictions or persecutions.

How will you experience this? By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All wonderful, godly character and fruit comes from the influence of the Spirit. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" If He dwells in you, then all of God's Love is available to you.

**Focus on Self**

Self will never experience God's Love, only selfishness. If you want to miss out on what the Love of God can do in your mind, heart,

## Gifts From God

and spirit, then focus on the earthly possessions and power that pleases you. When Christ is exalted, self is denied. It is then that the Holy Spirit will pour out the Love of God in your life. Then you will begin to experience the deep things of God.

February 9

### Personal Favoritism

*Then they asked Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth."*

**Luke 20:21**

### Focus on Christ

Do you have a favorite person in your life? Of course you do! The question is not is that person your favorite, but whether you show preferential treatment to that person at the expense of others. When you are unwilling to help others because you have a favorite person, it has become favoritism.

The Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus in a trap. They wanted the crowd of people around Him to see something He taught that could be viewed as wrong. They tried to make Him feel like they were impressed with Him by saying, "You do not show personal favoritism, but teach the way of God in truth." They did not know how accurate that statement was. But why would they use personal favoritism as an example? Often, Jesus made it clear that the Pharisees wanted favoritism. In Luke 11:43, He said, "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces."

What kept Jesus from showing personal favoritism? He focused on teaching the Way of God in truth! When your focus is on Christ, His Word, His Ways, and His Truth, you will not share Him with one person at the expense of others. Rather, you will be willing to share the truth with everyone. It is true that you will spend more time with some people than others, but it should be that your time is spent with them because they receive and practice the truth more than others. Jesus did not spend His time with those who did not believe in Him. He simply went to the next assignment looking for those who wanted the truth.

Showing personal favoritism is a work of the flesh. Loving others is a work of the Spirit. Be willing to help those God brings across your path who want the Truth and are willing to practice the Truth.

### Focus on Self

Self will choose to be only with people who make it feel comfortable. God will send you to those who He has been drawing to Himself. When you are willing to share your life with those God brings to you, personal favoritism is not an issue. Love God, His Word, and you will love people. Do not try to teach people who are not yet ready to learn.

**February 10**

**Partiality is Sin**

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

**James 2:8-9**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever noticed partiality at the workplace, at school, or even at church? When you know that one person does not deserve more attention than others, and yet it is given, it seems justice has not been served. It can be very repulsive.

Have you been impartial? You may not be convinced that you are partial but know that partiality is wrong according to God. James made it clear that to love your neighbor is a royal law. That means it is very noble to love your neighbor. Other laws are important but this law is excellent and is the king of laws. It is not as though a king made the law but it is chief among other laws. To obey this law is to obey God by loving others. To disobey this law is to have favoritism. Love is right and builds relationships. Favoritism is sin and destroys relationships.

Partiality tore apart one relationship after another in Joseph's family. Issac showed partiality for Esau because, "Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents" (Genesis 25:27). Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau and said, "...Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me" (Genesis 27:13). Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph "more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age" (Genesis 37:3). Jacob revealed that he wanted Benjamin protected more than the other sons. "But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, 'Lest some calamity befall him'" (Genesis 42:4).

This partiality did not build a great family; it made it difficult for the family to be used by God. Yet, God found favor in Joseph and redeemed the family through his faithful and yielded life. How well do you love those God put in your life? Are you faithful in your love toward them?

**Focus on Self**

While it is wrong to show partiality or favoritism toward others, you can also be guilty of wanting others to show favoritism toward you. Self always desires special attention. It seems to always look at things through the visual glasses named "Me." Self says things like, "Why don't you treat me better than others, I am special!" "I want this, or I want that!" Christ says, "I came to serve, not to be served!"

# Gifts From God

February 11

## Joseph and God's Favor

*But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

**Genesis 39:21**

### Focus on Christ

Does someone in your life show you favor? Why? Is it because you have wealth that they want? Maybe you know something about them that they want you to keep secret from others. Or, maybe your personality or your background matches up well with them.

Joseph found favor with God because he was a faithful servant. No matter what trials came his way, Joseph remained loyal, dependable, and unwavering in his devotion to God. Yet Joseph was not perfect. He made errors. Scripture states, "But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy." It is obvious that Joseph loved God and God loved him. This is an incredible formula for faithfulness.

Christ has always been loyal to you. You have found favor in His eyes because of His Love for you, not because you have always made the right decisions. He has provided grace and given you salvation you don't deserve. He has also provided mercy many times to withhold from you what you really did deserve. Favor is not the same as favoritism. God's favor is out of love and provides opportunities to accomplish His Purposes in your life. Favoritism is based on selfishness that gives one person something at the expense of another. When Christ shows favor to one person, His Love is not diminished toward others.

In Genesis 39, we find four times that the Word states, "The LORD was with Joseph." This should be what every Christian should desire. When the LORD is with you, the Presence of the Holy Spirit will prosper you. God is looking for those who want to learn deep things about Him. He wants to love you and wants you to love Him with all your heart! When you do, the favor of God will be on you.

### Focus on Self

If you want to strive for success without deep loyalty and unwavering devotion to God, then you will receive temporary rewards. Self favors self. God favors faithfulness. Love displays favor in your life that others see and know it is from God.

**February 12**

**Hate and Relationships**

*But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more...And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.*

**Genesis 37:4-5, 8**

**Focus on Christ**

Is there a midpoint between hate and love? What would it be? "I half-love you? I half-hate you." One time a person was having difficulty with a person at work. The person was intimidated by someone who was hindering his effectiveness.

He was asked, "You hate this person don't you?"

He responded, "Hate! That is a very strong word!"

Then, he was asked, "Then let me put it this way. You love this person don't you?"

His response was "Oh, no I don't!"

If you love someone, then you want to help them, pray for them, and do good to them. If you hate someone, you will avoid, deny, and even try to get even with them. Joseph's brothers had a deep hatred for him. Their hatred didn't begin with his dream about them but with their envy over the love their father had for him.

The religious leaders of Jesus day envied the fact that He was getting more attention from the people than they were. This hatred drove them to do evil against Jesus. "For he knew that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy" (Mark 15:10).

Joseph's brothers hated him for his father's love, for his dreams, and for his words. This hatred drove them to break relationship with him, throw him in a pit, fake his death, and sell him into slavery. But God put Joseph in charge, placed him in prominence, and saved his family.

Christ died for those who hated Him, took death by the throat, was victorious over sin, and saves those who want a relationship of love with Him. If you would simply treat people the way Christ treated His enemies, then you would love them, pray for them, and do good to them. The Love of Christ will strengthen not destroy relationships.

**Focus on Self**

Selfishness destroys personal relationships. To love self will drive you to hate others. But when you fall in love with Christ and His Word, you will build strong relationships. If you are having trouble building friendships, then maybe it is time to focus on Christ and deny your selfish ways.

# Gifts From God

February 13

## Whatever You Desire

*So Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you."*

1 Samuel 20:4

### Focus on Christ

Do you have a friend who will do anything to help you? A friend who never wavers is rare. If you find one who loves you with the Love of God, then hold on to them! A true friend will try to help you no matter the cost. It is so comforting to have a friend who loves you, prays for you, and will do anything to help you. Of course, giving them what they desire must be lawful, ethical, and spiritually moral. "A friend loves at all times..." (Proverbs 17:17). Though you may have a great friend, you will also tend to have a great enemy.

Jonathan and David had their hearts, minds, and souls knit together. 1 Samuel 18:1 reveals the depth of their friendship when it states, "Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." While Jonathan was such a deep friend to David and was willing to do whatever he desired, David also had a strong enemy. The enemy, Jonathan's dad, was the king on the throne.

Jonathan gave to David his clothing, his armor, and his weapons, and David gave trust to Jonathan. Christ gave His life for you. Your response should be to trust Him. Between friends, one gift is not greater than another. You give to a friend because there is a need and love motivates you to fill that need. A friend then gives trust to you, and that is a precious gift.

Christ is a friend at all times Who gives to you the godly desires of your heart. He said, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). If you want an unwavering, fulfilling, and deep relationship, then Christ is the One Who can deliver. He gives good things to those who follow Him. If you need peace, then look to the author of peace. Need hope? He can deliver. Need love? He embodies it. Need comfort? He gives His Spirit to you. Whatever you ask, whatever you desire, He can fulfill those things. Have enemies, He will deliver you. Persecuted for righteousness, He will bless you. While you may have a very honorable loving friend here on earth, there is no friend who can compare to Jesus.

### Focus on Self

Selfishness will not try to fulfill the desires of a friend. Self will try to meet its own desires. Most likely these desires will not be godly and will not produce godliness. Christ's Spirit will develop you into the kind of person who is more interested in esteeming others. When you abide in Christ's Love, you will have something more valuable than gold to share with your friend!

**February 14**

**Desires that Distract**

*...and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.*

**Mark 4:19**

**Focus on Christ**

What are you trying to accumulate, collect, or gather in this world? Is your greatest concern your retirement account? Could your focus be on a larger house? Maybe you desire attention from others so much that you attempt to accumulate a large group of followers who think you are the greatest leading authority on a particular subject. Do you desire respect from others? How about achievements? Or do you desire to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind? You cannot have both the desires of this world and devotion to God.

Jesus said the cares and pleasures of this world make you unfruitful in His kingdom. Why? They take up all your time. When you are focused on this world you become anxious, worried, fretful, and impatient. These cares and desires rob you from spending time in God's Word. You become bound to fulfilling your cares of this world. Pleasure, lust, and fun become your focus and choke out the Word.

Jesus said the deceitfulness of riches can choke out the effect of His Word in your life. Riches are difficult to handle. The human spirit has within it the desire to do great things in this world, and that usually requires money. Many claim they want money so they can do good things. If people had pure hearts, then why doesn't God give them money? Maybe God knows that riches would rule them instead of them handling it properly. You cannot know your own heart.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10), and, "...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). This should get your attention more than the cares of this world. If it does not, then something has your heart other than God.

All of these desires rob your time and energy and leave only the leftovers of your life for God. Focus on Christ, give Him your best, and you will become productive in His kingdom work.

**Focus on Self**

Self will wear out your mind and body as you try to accomplish and accumulate things, cares, and desires. Why not use all your energy for Christ and His Work? The benefits are peace and abundant life. There is no comparison between eternal investments and temporary accomplishments.



# Gifts From God

February 15

## Evil Desires

*So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels.*

**Psalm 81:12**

### Focus on Christ

Do you wonder why you sometimes choose to do the wrong thing when you know you shouldn't? You know that God has been good to you, saved you from sin, delivered you from darkness to light, and set your feet on the right path, yet you sometimes go after your own lustful heart. How is this possible?

In Psalm 81:1, the people were to, "Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob." Why? Because God had done so much to set them free from bondage in Egypt. "This He established in Joseph as a testimony, when He went throughout the land of Egypt..." (Psalm 81:5). Joseph was a picture of Jesus our Savior who set the people free from their evil ways and the awful bondage of worshipping false gods.

But when the people rebelled, God gave them over to their own evil, lustful, stubborn hearts. No longer would they do what was right in God's eyes. They would be in bondage to their own evil, misguided hearts, and the counsel of their own wicked imaginations. They needed to walk in the counsel of God's Word.

People try to convince themselves that when their thinking and desires are left to them, they are not evil or sinful. But you must remember that Christ did not shed His blood for you because you were good. He knew you needed to be saved from yourself.

Sin makes your troubles continue as long as you are willing to rebel. Your lustful desires and wrong thinking become worse than your physical enemies. Christ came to set you free from your rebellious and sinful ways. He does not want to leave you to yourself, but He wants you to experience the power of His Spirit working in your hearts and minds to live a godly life that brings peace and rest. No longer are you forced to be slaves of sinful desires. You have freedom from bondage through Christ our Savior.

Jesus said, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). He desires that none should perish. In order to experience eternal and abundant life, you must give up your own desires and human counsel and submit to Jesus as Lord. Until you do, the Truth will be hidden from you. Repentance from the wrong way to the right way of living is the key. Obedience to the Ways of Christ breaks you from your bondage of selfish ways.

### Focus on Self

The selfish mind thinks it knows better than God how to live in this world. When you give in to thinking that is void of God's Word and



His Ways, you settle for less than the best. Turn back to God. Depend on His Spirit to show you His Ways through His Word and you will experience His Life and His Peace.

## February 16

### Envy's Outcome

*And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt.  
But God was with him...*

**Acts 7:9**

#### Focus on Christ

Does someone who you know have something that you wish you owned? Do you ever find yourself so focused on what others have that your thoughts cannot stop thinking about how to possess it?

The desire to have what someone else has can drive a person to do things that are sinful. This desire has no godly qualities. Envy distorts your mind so that you start feeling sad about other people's good fortune and satisfied in the presence of their failure. It is an ugly sin that moves from an uneasiness about another's possessions to a hatred for the person who possesses it.

The lives of the first two brothers on earth, Cain and Abel, are recorded in Genesis 4. There was no model for Cain to follow on how to be envious of Abel. No one had to teach Cain to desire what Abel had. Sin had moved Cain from envy to hatred in such an intense way that he murdered his brother. God warned him, "And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). Cain failed and envy brought death.

Joseph's brothers envied the position that he held, and it brought huge problems in their family for years to come. The brothers' envy was for something they believed they deserved, their father's love. Their heart moved from envy to hate as they sought death for Joseph.

King Saul was the first king of Israel. Envy toward David and all the people who followed David drove Saul crazy. He did not finish well. In 1 Samuel 18:12, Scripture reveals, "Now Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, but had departed from Saul." Saul was envious that the masses loved David and that God was with David. Envy drove Saul to attempt murder.

Jesus was hated by religious leaders. They wanted the followers He had. After all, they were the well-educated ones who held religious positions. Why didn't the people follow them instead of Jesus? The sin of the leaders that motivated them to have Jesus killed was envy.

The Jews hated Paul because the multitudes showed up to hear him teach the Word of God. "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 13:45). Paul was constantly obstructed because the Jews wanted him to be either thrown out of their cities or thrown in jail.

## Gifts From God

Christ came to give you the opposite of envy—Love. He left you with His Spirit who would continually provide you with His Love, Joy, and Peace. He can turn a hateful, envious person into a loving, caring person who is joyful about the good fortune of others. Why would you want sin instead of grace?

### Focus on Self

Self wants to look good to others. It desires anything valuable that other people have and will go to any measure to attain it. While self wants to appear good in public, it is vicious and ugly. But denying self is exalting Christ. When you allow the Holy Spirit to be your teacher, you will learn how to live abundantly with godly qualities. These qualities will bring life and peace not death and hate.

February 17

### Power with Purpose

*But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.*

Micah 3:8

### Focus on Christ

How would you compare your physical strength to your spiritual strength? Are you stronger physically or spiritually? Many times people think they are strong when they are healthy. But comparing physical health to spiritual health is like comparing a painting of a waterfall to a real waterfall. Physical health is temporary and weak. Spiritual health is established by God and is eternal and strong because the Holy Spirit lives in you.

Micah was a prophet who was full of power, justice, and might. The Love of God in him sustained his strength for the task at hand. His mission was to tell the nation of Israel of their great sin and of God's impending judgment. The false prophets were telling the people that peace was coming. What kind of power was needed to give a truthful but negative message of doom?

Micah needed to be full of the power of the Spirit to accomplish the task. How would he receive this power? Through a close walk with God. God's Spirit is mighty in the lives of people who love Him, His Word, and His people. You cannot fear the world and stand firm for what God has called you to do. Physical, mental, and emotional strength can fail you when the multitudes say the opposite of what God has assigned to you. Only the strength of God's Spirit will endure difficulties, delays, and discouragement.

Christ gave you His Spirit to teach, comfort, and empower you for every assignment. While the crowds may not agree with you and may even oppose you, His Strength will enable you to endure loneliness that comes when people reject you. When you speak the truth with the pow-

er of the Spirit, people are convicted of sin and must choose to turn back to God or reject Him. Your power must be from Christ living in you not from human stamina. When you speak, lead, and teach with His Strength, others may not agree but they will not be able to deny the power and authority of His Spirit in you.

When you take a stand for Christ in His Strength, God Himself reveals His Power and His Presence. God's people should be thankful to hear the truth of the Word even if it calls for correction in their life. Why? Because Truth sets us free! Since many oppose the truth of God's Word, you need spiritual power and wisdom to continue your mission and share the truth without fear.

God's Power never stops working. You will find spiritual strength encourages you to fulfill the task at hand with joy.

### Focus on Self

To worry about how you are perceived by others when you take a stand for Christ is selfishness. A call to follow Christ is a call to be misunderstood. Christ can empower you with His Spirit to sustain any attack, rejection, feeling of loneliness, or discouragement. The benefits of spiritual strength far outweigh the trials of life.

## February 18

### Christ's Gift

*Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*

**John 16:7**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever lost or had a favorite item stop working? Maybe it was a watch, a phone, an article of clothing, or a car. You didn't think anything could replace it. Nothing new would be better.

The disciples must have felt that way when Jesus said He must leave them. What were they to do? No one could replace His Presence in their lives. At least, that is what they believed. But it was necessary for Christ to leave for the Spirit to come. Since the disciples thought it wrong or hard to believe that He would leave, He said, "I tell you the Truth," to emphasize the importance and the reality.

The disciples were used to Christ's physical presence. They thought it would be difficult to learn to follow His spiritual presence. How do you replace a physical person with a spirit? How do you recognize a spirit over someone physical?

The price for providing the presence and fruit of His Spirit was His own death. He knew how important His Spirit would be for the church and all believers. The Holy Spirit would provide purpose, presence, and power so that every believer could live as though Christ were physically present.

## Gifts From God

The presence of Christ's Spirit would be better than His physical presence. How could that be? Christ could not physically walk with every believer, speak to every church, and be in every prayer meeting—but His Spirit could. He said in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." It would not be possible to be everywhere in physical form, but it would totally be possible in the Spirit.

Now you simply have to learn to stay in the Spirit by staying in communion with His Word! Now that the Spirit lives within, you can experience Christ every minute of every day.

### Focus on Self

If you get mad because someone is not with you, then misery sets in. If you get upset because you think God is not physically present, then you will always be upset. But if you welcome opportunities to fellowship, talk, and pray together with His Spirit, then your spirit is refreshed. Do not be selfish, seeking what you cannot always possess. Instead, focus on and thank God for the presence of His Spirit!

February 19

### Fear and Comfort

*Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.*

Acts 9:31

### Focus on Christ

Are you at peace when your life is in danger? If someone is chasing you for the purpose of harming you, are you at rest? Does fear cause peace? Certainly this kind of fear does not.

The church was experiencing a time of rest because persecution had not been as intense. For many reasons since Stephen's death and Saul's conversion, there was less persecution against the believers than previously. And so the church was at peace. You too will have trials and troubled times, but there also will be times of rest.

When times are peaceful, it is not a time for inactivity; it is a time to prepare. Why? Because living in this world will bring more struggles in the future. You will need preparation. Notice the Scripture states, "And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." While they were at rest, they walked in the fear of the Lord.

What is the fear of the Lord? It means to have a worshipful and reverent awe of God. This fear does not move you to run from God because you are afraid; it moves you to run toward God because you respect and desire to be under His protection. Just as a fear of justice keeps you on the right side of the law, a healthy fear of the Lord keeps you stable, consistent, and firm.

Christ's Spirit produces in you a worshipful and reverent awe of God the Father. This fear moves you to walk deeper into His Ways. As your relationship with Christ increases, your awe of God increases. As you spend more time in Christ's Word, you learn to walk in the fear of the Lord. This deeper walk prepares you for the next challenge in life. Your faith will be evident in your conversations. If you have the fear of the Lord, then others will notice it by your constant desire to talk about godly things.

You must also walk in the comfort of the Holy Spirit. This comfort is your peace and joy in believing Christ, Whom you follow. Not only did they have a faithful walk, but they also had a joyous walk with God. When you live with the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it will be recognized by your joyful and cheerful spirit. Do you think others see Christ in you when you are discouraged and doubtful? No!

When you walk in the fear of the Lord, you walk in the comfort of the Spirit. This comfort is always available during times of rest and peace, and times of trouble and challenges.

### Focus on Self

Self will defeat your Christian walk by focusing on the need for a life void of trouble. When trouble comes, the strength of self collapses and your weakness is revealed. But, when you walk in the fear of the Lord, comfort is available in your trouble. Christ Himself will walk you through personal struggles if you fear Him by running to His arms for comfort.

**February 20**

### Fear Reveals Godly Desires

*The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.*

**Psalm 145:17-19**

### Focus on Christ

How do you know if you will receive the godly desires of your heart? Do you think that because you are a Christian God will give you what you desire? How do you know if your desires are selfish or godly?

“The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18). When you call on God to give you the desires of your heart, you must call from a faithful and trustworthy heart. The LORD is near to a reliable, genuine, sincere person. James 4:8 states, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” If you have a pure heart and spend time consistently building a strong relationship with Christ through His Word, He will draw near to you.

## Gifts From God

Our deepest and best desire should be to learn of Jesus Christ by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. If you have a deep fear of God, then you will be afraid to disobey Him and at the same time will have a godly desire to want to obey Him. If you love God, then you will desire more of God. If you fear God, then you will have a desire to obey Him. If you obey God, then you will desire righteous living. These are the desires you should seek.

The greatest gift in life that you should desire is the gift of Jesus. The Holy Spirit seeks for you to honor Jesus in and with your life. While you cannot experience everything about Jesus because His riches are unsearchable, you can find as much of Him as you desire. But, if you do not have a holy fear of Him, then you will not discover as much of Him as you could.

### Focus on Self

Self wants selfish desires. God wants you to desire the fullness of life in Christ. If you don't fear God, then you will lower your standards to selfish wants. If you fear God, then you will have a high standard of Christian living. Seek the best gift—Jesus!

February 21

### Who or What Guides You?

*The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them.*

Proverbs 11:3

### Focus on Christ

Who or what guides your life? Do you listen to the latest fads for direction? Maybe you attempt to find a person who has a new insight into life that can enrich your days. Honestly, if you are looking to people for guidance, then you must be careful as to who you follow. Paul said, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). Jesus said, "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:38).

Integrity is lacking in our day, as well as, honesty, blamelessness, and righteousness. To have integrity means to be complete in your faith, lacking nothing in your walk with God and having the morality that is founded in the truth of God's Word. When you are determined to walk in the Ways of Christ, integrity of your relationship with Christ will guide you. We are not to imitate people, except those who have a deep walk with Christ. Even then, you cannot imitate everything about their life because they are not perfect as Christ. When you choose to imitate, you should only imitate what is like Christ. He will never lead you away from the right path.

The Holy Spirit always guides you in the right way. His ministry is to teach you the Ways of Christ and to bring to your remembrance all that you have learned of Christ. When God's Word is in your mind and the Holy Spirit is your teacher, it is an awesome combination that

keeps you living in an upright and righteous integrity. The consistency of your walk in the ways of righteousness will be a model and encouragement to those who are observing your life.

What about those who are living in the ways of the world? If a person claims to be a good person but lives a perverse and unfaithful life, then that person will experience utter destruction. You cannot live a life that ignores God and His Ways and be successful in a life of morality. Stubborn, corrupt, and depraved thinking results in immoral living. This kind of lifestyle does not end in hope, joy, and victory, but in a lonely, shallow, and hate-filled existence. Who wants to live this kind of life? In fact, this is not living at all.

### Focus on Self

Focus on your own shallow ways and you will reap shallow relationships. Walk in the Ways of God and you will reap deep relationships built on the Love of God flowing through your life. Why would anyone think a perverse lifestyle would end in joyous living? Focus on Christ and you will be guided by His Spirit and His Ways. This will bring a full abundant life that will guide you in the integrity that only comes from righteous living.

## February 22

### Keep The Flame Going

*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.*

**1 Thessalonians 5:19-22**

### Focus on Christ

How do you stay warm when it is cold outside? Do you put on more layers of clothing? Maybe you stay inside and turn the heat up or build a fire in the fireplace. Do you eat or drink something warm? Whatever you do, you have to keep doing as long as it is cold.

In the Bible, a symbol for the Holy Spirit is a flame or fire (see Matthew 3:11). 1 Thessalonians 5:19 teaches to not quench the Spirit. Quench means to extinguish, dampen, or hinder. How do you quench a fire? There are several ways. You can pour water on it, throw dirt on it, or remove the fuel from it. Remember, the Spirit is in your life to teach you by enlightening your mind, warming your heart, and empowering you. The amazing thing about the Holy Spirit is that He is always with you, but you can dampen and hinder His work in you. How?

First, if you do not place God's Word as a priority in your daily life it is like taking fuel away from a fire. The flame will die down and all you will be left with is a smoldering effect. The Spirit will still be present, but hindered. The Word of God should always be where you put your trust not the words of people. Test what people say by the truth of God's Word.



## Gifts From God

Second, if you are not devoted to Christ, you will give in to the lusts of the flesh and become carnal (1 Corinthians 3:1). Hold on to what is good. Stay away from every kind of evil. When your mind is on earthly things instead of Christ, you quench the Spirit of God.

It is hard to believe that the Holy Spirit's effect in your life can be diminished, but if you resist the Spirit you extinguish the flame. Christ wants you to add the right fuel to the fire. Continue in His Word, pray in faith, love one another, and others will know you are His disciple. His Spirit will grow in you as you obey Him.

### Focus on Self

If you enjoy temporary and limited love, joy, and peace, then you can simply quench the Spirit. You don't have to work hard to avoid God's Word. These excuses will hinder your relationship with God: "I don't have time; I don't like to read; or I can figure out life for myself." Self will dampen the power of the Spirit in your life. Christ gave you His Spirit to enable you to do all things in Christ. Fan the flame!

February 23

### The Holy Spirit and Wisdom

*And Pharaoh said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you."*

Genesis 41:38-39

### Focus on Christ

There is value in a person whose life gives a testimony of the Spirit of God. It is awesome when a person gives everything they know about themselves to everything they know about God! Wisdom beyond their years is the result. That is rare but it shouldn't be. What would people say about your life? Would they say, "It is obvious that the Spirit of God is strong in your life?"

Joseph lived a life of faith, peace, trust, loyalty, and devotion to God. Because of His deep relationship with God, he was entrusted with great positions and assignments. Even Pharaoh (representing the world), saw the incredible wisdom and discernment in his life. There is no evidence that Joseph received training or a degree in business administration, yet he was given the power and authority to run a nation. Where did he receive his wisdom? From the One who has all wisdom, the Spirit of God.

Christ gave to every born again believer this same Spirit. If you desire wisdom, then walk in the Spirit! This wisdom "...is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). All of this is available to a humble person. You do not have to receive a special degree, be from a prominent family, or have special learning skills. You



simply have to obey God one day at a time and watch Him work as you are faithful in the little things.

Do you want this wisdom and discernment? Are you willing to devote time in God's Word every day? Will you meditate on God's Word and obey whatever He shows you? There is no valid reason to live life any other way.

### Focus on Self

How much knowledge do you contain in your mind? You may have incredible thinking skills, but that is not the same as being a person full of the Spirit of God. Give up your pride and depend on Christ for wisdom. You will live in amazement at all He will teach you and remind you of in His perfect timing.

## February 24

### Paul Sees and Hears the Spirit of Christ

*So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

**Acts 9:6**

### Focus on Christ

How do you hear God's Spirit speak to you? Do you think you should have a burning bush experience as Moses did or perhaps see a great light as Saul experienced? It is not likely that you will have those experiences. Those experiences were specific to Moses and Paul. Will your emotions be what leads you to know what God is saying? No, Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to live within believers so the Spirit could teach you through the Life and Words of Jesus.

"This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2). The Spirit is heard by faith. When you read God's Word, He speaks to you and becomes the standard for what you are thinking. If God's Word does not teach you what you are thinking, then your thinking is off target. Paul heard the Voice of Christ on the road to Damascus. You will hear the Voice of Christ when you read His Word. Why do people avoid reading the Word? They must not want to hear from God. Possibly something in their life does not line up with what God wants, and they do not want to read about it.

Paul's life was in opposition to Christ. When Christ spoke to Paul, the encounter changed his life. He saw and heard a message from God. You also see the work of the Spirit in your life and in the lives of other believers. When you see a person transformed from hate to love, discouragement to joy, drunk to sober, or pride to humility, you see the work of the Spirit. When you read, study, and consider the Word of God daily, you learn the ways of righteousness, peace, and abundant living. By His Spirit, you learn the Ways of Christ.

## Gifts From God

When Christ speaks to you through His Word, you will tremble as Paul did. When the Word convicts, comforts, or convinces you of Truth that you need, it is obvious that the Spirit is at work in your heart and mind. Think back to the change Christ has brought to your life, and you will be amazed, thankful, and ready to serve Him with all your heart. Your response to Christ should be, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

Understand, though, that He may not reveal everything to you at once. With Paul, Jesus first gave him one command to obey, but that was just the beginning. Not until Paul followed the one command would Jesus reveal further steps. You may tend to want everything now. A true obedient believer does not demand knowledge of the future, the believer is satisfied to obey the first step.

If you obey Christ, then His Spirit will show you what to do next by confirming it in His Word and in your spirit. When the Spirit gives direction, those who are walking with Him will know what He is saying, know what He means, and be willing to say, “Yes, Lord!”

### Focus on Self

Self wants to tell God what to do. God wants you to yield to His Will and His Ways. If you are uncomfortable trusting God for the future, then you will never start with the first step of obedience. However, if you read the Word and listen to the testimonies of others, then you will discover that the Spirit really does show you through His Word what is the best way to live. Try living by His Way instead of relying on your limited information and faulty intellectual thinking.

February 25

### Our Weakness But His Strength

*And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

2 Corinthians 12:9

### Focus on Christ

How strong are you? Can you always withstand any physical, mental, or emotional attacks? If you are like most people, then you can be strong sometimes, but never all the time.

Paul recognized that he had many weaknesses. He learned that his weaknesses did not have to stop him from serving Christ. Everyone has weaknesses. While you may attempt to be strong, there are some things you just can’t withstand. How do you handle those moments?

Paul pleaded with the Lord three times to remove a weakness. The Lord’s response was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” This is something most Christians have yet to understand. How is Christ’s strength made strong in our weakness? This can only be understood as you learn what Paul wrote in Galatians 5:16. “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust

of the flesh.” Only by learning to walk in the Ways of Christ, by the power of His Spirit are you made strong enough to withstand the works of the flesh.

If you are always strong with human strength, tenacity, and endurance, then you will never see a need to trust God. When God’s grace enables you to be unaffected by the troubles of this world, God alone receives the glory. To be so conceited that you have to get the credit for your success brings no glory to God.

The power of God rested on Paul only when he boasted in his weakness. To share your weakness with others is powerful. It allows them to see Christ help you accomplish things that can only be explained by God.

**Focus on Self**

Conceit is an unattractive trait. People are not impressed with things you brag about. Your testimony will be attractive when you share how Christ accomplished something in and through your life that can only be explained by His Strength in you. Are you feeling weak today? The Power of Christ rests on you when you boast in His grace.

**February 26**

**God Alone Knows Our Ways**

*Talk no more so very proudly; Let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed.*

**1 Samuel 2:3**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever surprised yourself? Maybe it was one of those negative times that you said something publicly that you shouldn’t have said. Afterwards, you probably said, “I don’t know where that came from!” Possibly it was a positive moment when you helped someone without giving it any thought. Afterwards you may have said, “I was shocked that such a natural response of good just happened!”

God always knows what your next response will be even when you do not. Nothing takes God by surprise. He truly is the God of all knowledge. Since the Holy Spirit lives within believers, all wisdom and knowledge for doing the right thing is available to them. Do you know what will happen next? You can guess. You can hope. You can reason. But only God knows.

How do you know if you are doing the right thing, thinking the right thoughts, or giving the right advice? Do you decide what is right because of your past experiences? How will that work when you have not experienced everything? Do you decide what is right because someone taught you how to make decisions? How will that work when you have limited knowledge? Do you decide what is right because people tell you that you are right? How will that work when they might be wrong? Only God can say if what you are doing is right.

## Gifts From God

Christ gave you His Spirit to teach you and guide you into all Truth. Until you see things from Christ's perspective you will have no assurance of right motives, thoughts, attitudes, or actions. The Scripture states, "Let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed." There is no one like Him. He is Holy, Strong, All-Knowing, and full of Discernment. He is the only One who can accurately discern whether you are right or wrong. Your solution is to fill your heart and mind with the Words of Christ and allow His Spirit to be your guide for daily living.

### Focus on Self

Do you think you are always right? If so, that is your first and biggest mistake. Self is naturally arrogant and proud. Stop defending your ways and begin living out the commands of Christ. They are much more fulfilling and will lead you to real life and peace.

February 27

### Trouble Generates Arguments

*So he sent his brothers away, and they departed; and he said to them, "See that you do not become troubled along the way."*

**Genesis 45:24**

### Focus on Christ

Don't you love being with people who agree with your thoughts, discussions, and decisions? These kind of people are so easy to be around. When things are calm, and there is no crisis, friends and family can relax and enjoy those times.

Quite the opposite tends to happen in moments of high stress, strange events, and unexpected crises. Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers. His original dream came true. God sent him to Egypt to preserve their lives. The pressure was being released on his brothers. Now Joseph would send them home with all the supplies needed to bring Jacob and the rest of the family back to Egypt. But before they left, Joseph gave them a caution, "See that you do not become troubled along the way." He knew arguing and quarreling over what had transpired through the years could keep them from completing their mission.

The same can happen to families, friends, and churches. Everything can be going well with relationships until a crisis occurs. That is the time when arguments, complaining, and fighting begin.

Arguing takes you off course. One person calls something that is obviously sin, a mistake. Another begins to argue the point, and now both are moving away from the mission that Christ gave them. Don't fight over things that are wrong and then try to prove you are right. You will never be on mission for Christ when His Word calls something sin and you try to make an excuse for it. Sin cost the life of God's Son. He saved you from sin, He did not create a way to defend sin.

Jesus gave you a new commandment to love one another in the same way He loved you (see John 13:34-35). Whatever happens in this world should not cause you to argue and fight with one another. When your mind is distracted from Jesus, you lose focus. “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You”(Isaiah 26:3). When you start focusing on your troubles, you will get anxious, worried, argumentative, and become ineffective for Christ. A watching world is waiting to see Christians quarrel. God is watching to see us love one another. When that happens, the world will see the mighty works of God through His people.

**Focus on Self**

Adultery, divorce, deception, lying, drunkenness, and hatred are not Christian! They are acts of selfishness. Give up calling things that are wrong Christian acts. They are sin. Get back to the Truth of Scripture. Jesus will set you free and give you a Spirit of love and peace as you obey Him by living out true Christian ways.

**February 28**

**The Best Gift of All**

*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.*

**2 Corinthians 13:14**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever received a gift from someone for which you were so excited until you discovered that one piece of the gift was missing? Or maybe you put a puzzle together and couldn't find the last piece? Incompleteness is discouraging.

You never have to worry about incompleteness when it comes to Christ. “...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...” (2 Peter 1:3). But how has He given us all things?

Christ the Son has given grace to you as your Savior and Redeemer. This grace is His favor that has blessed you with every spiritual blessing. God the Father has given you His Love by sending His Son to be your Salvation. The Holy Spirit has given you His Presence and instructed you in the Ways of your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Which member of the Trinity takes priority over the other? None of them. Each is a Person of the Godhead. You cannot separate or prioritize them. They all are a gift to you that you might develop a relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. There is nothing lacking in this gift. Everything you need for life and peace rests in this gift.

Nothing can make a believer more joyous than to have grace from Jesus the Redeemer, Love from God, and the Presence and Communicator of grace and love, the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is complete and perfect in every way. What greater gift could you desire?

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self sees no need for grace, doesn't understand the Love of God, and has no desire for spiritual teaching. A yielded and humble heart desires all that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit provides. When you have a relationship with Christ, it is natural to deny self and follow Him. When you break fellowship with Christ, your tendency is to exalt self not Christ. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." We should join the Apostle Paul in saying, "Amen" (so be it).

February 29

## Who Is Your Family

*Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."*

Matthew 12:47-50

## Focus on Christ

Do you have a close knit family? Are your relationships with your family strained? What about your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you close to them? Individuals in a family usually defend each other. Sometimes even to a fault. There is an old saying, "Blood is thicker than water." It means that family relationships should be stronger than friendships.

That is not what Jesus said. He knew that His half brothers did not support Him. John stated, "For even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5). Jesus was preaching and yet His family was standing outside wanting to speak to Him. Why didn't they come inside to hear from Him? Not only did they stay outside, but they also interrupted His teaching. This sounds just like family. They were so close and familiar with Jesus that they didn't see their need to hear from Him. Jesus knew this and later stated, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4).

While many look to receive special favors because of their family affiliation, Jesus refused to call those that did so His family. Obedience to God, not blood relationships, is the reason why Jesus saw people as His family.

You will not be a part of the family of God because of your last name, family heritage, wealth, or popularity. The question is not "Are you special because of your accomplishments or for being well-known?" The real question is "Does Jesus know your name because of your faithful obedience to His Word?" If you are faithful, then your obedience will hold more weight than your family name.

A married couple left home and family to pursue God's call on their lives. There were many difficult times having to be away from family. They observed friends in college doing the same as they were doing, while others refused to walk away from family to follow God. Some friends shared with them that they could choose to stay with family while following God. Another friend said that the Great Commission says to go and that you have to get special permission to stay.

However you view it, there was one thing certain for this couple. They realized this truth, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). There were times when they asked God if this was really true, and they learned that it was. God gave them friends who are closer than family. After all, "whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

When you have a friend who does the Will of God and you also follow the Will of God, your relationship will be closer than a physical family. Why? Because they are now a spiritual family member. Religion and family relationships do not make you Jesus' disciple—obedience does. Obedience puts a special bond between you, your friend, and your Savior.

### Focus on Self

Self will convince you that family comes first. The Holy Spirit will convince you Jesus comes first. Love your family with all your heart and love God even more. You will find that only when you learn to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul will you truly be able to love your family to the fullest.

## March 1

### Love As I Have Loved

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

**John 13:34-35**

### Focus on Christ

How much do you love others? How do they know that you love them? What would you give up for them? Do you seek to be known or do you seek to help others become the best they can be?

These are challenging questions that test the motives of your love. Christ told you to love others as He loves you, but His Love is different than human love. Many times people only show love to others as love is shown toward them. If they are not treated well, then neither will they treat others right.



## Gifts From God

Jesus' Love had nothing to do with how He was being treated. His Love was pure, undefiled, genuine, honest, and internal. His life was love that gives, no matter what it gets. Treat Jesus wrong and He still loves. What difference would this kind of love make between friends, marriage partners, or even enemies? This kind of love enables believers to survive, endure, continue, and thrive in a world that is hostile to the Ways of Christ.

His Love prays for you, when you are doing the wrong thing, comforts you when you are hurting, teaches you when you are confused, treats you kindly when you are not kind, seeks not its own, stands up for you when you are accused, and endures every difficulty a relationship encounters. Does your love toward others look like this? When the Love of Christ permeates your heart, you will esteem others better than yourself and will desire for them to have everything better than what you experience. No jealousy, envy, or coveting will be present. This love builds up others and never tears them down. This new commandment to love is like taking an old stiff, cracked, worn-out leather cover on a book and putting a brand new soft, pliable, beautiful cover on it. Everyone will notice the difference and receive the benefit.

Jesus didn't say that others would know you are His disciple if you become famous for your good deeds, teach larger groups of people than others, perform miracles, lead large ministries, or have many admirers. He said others will know you are His disciple by the way you love. Are you living up to His standard of love?

### Focus on Self

Do you love self more than others? Does your love seek your own benefits? Selfish love is really a hatred toward others. God's love has nothing to do with other people. His Love is the fruit of walking with Christ in a vibrant and real relationship moment by moment. Focus on Christ, and you will learn the deep Love of God.

## March 2

### Nothing Comes Between Us and the Love of Christ

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ...For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Romans 8:35, 38-39**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been separated from someone whom you deeply love? It is not a good feeling. Separation gives you a sense of loneliness and emptiness. You just don't feel the same without that person.



Kerry remembers a time when he was first dating Elaine. She went on a family trip from Indiana to Arizona. He had a difficult time being separated from her. It seems as though things go better when you are with the ones you love.

Christ loves you so much, He will never allow separation between you and Him. He left His Spirit in you to keep you closely connected to Him. In this passage, the love represented is not your love for Christ but His Love for you. And what can separate His Love from you? Seven things are listed in verse 35. It seems these are very powerful but not as powerful as the Love of Christ. Paul most likely experienced all of these: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. (see in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). No matter what you go through in this world, Christ's Love is still present through His Spirit.

You are drawn closer to Christ when you go through difficulties. Instead of running from Christ, when you feel lonely, distressed, or discouraged run toward Him. Christ is a true friend in time of need. There will be times when people, things, and purposes try to draw you away from Christ and separate you from His Power, Presence, and Love. If you seek worldly help, then you will miss out on the real help that Christ can provide through His Love.

Paul stated in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Whether good things, negative things, high things, low things, death, good living, or spiritual powers are at work in our lives, God works them for good to those who focus on living according to His Word. "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Christ's Love for you will take you through difficulties and lead you to triumph!

You may be separated on this earth from a close friend or family member, but you will never be separated from the Love of Christ.

### **Focus on Self**

If you are depending on the love of others to give you comfort and security, then you will sadly be disappointed. Loving others for what you can get out of them will not bring lasting relationships. But if you walk with Christ, learn His Ways, depend on His Spirit, and believe in Him, you will always know that His Love can never be taken away from you.

## **March 3**

### **Home is Where Love Is**

*Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."*

**John 14:23**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

What are you willing to do for the person you love? If they ask a favor of you, will you fulfill their request? Of course you will. It is easy to want to help someone you love. What is your response to an enemy's request? Most likely you will ignore, dismiss, or reject the request.

The key to following the commandments of Christ is love. Jesus said that if you love Him you will keep His Word. The way you know that you love Christ is that you do not resent, dislike, or take offense at what He asks you to do. When you love Him, you have a desire to do what He asks. Love is not a task, it is a privilege.

Jesus said that if you show evidence that you love Him, then His Heavenly Father would love you. If you are disobedient to Christ's teachings, then He will not clearly show you Himself. If you want to get to know someone, then you must prove that you are trustworthy, reliable, and dependable. When a person feels safe with you, they reveal more of themselves to you. Christ reveals the Ways of God to a person who loves Him. Your obedience continues to grow out of your love for Jesus and His Word. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3).

When you have a long day away from home, you can't wait to return to the comfort, security, and safety of your home. That is where you can relax. Home is where your loved ones reside. The blessing of obedience is that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit take up residence with you. That means He makes His home in you. His Presence never departs. Obedience leads to the comfortable Presence of God while disobedience leads to feeling miserable. When you are obedient, Christ brings you comfort, and takes pleasure in being with you. He will make your heart His Home.

## Focus on Self

Self wants to accomplish its own goals, instead of the wishes of someone else. Love wants to esteem others first. If you focus on selfish ways, then you will never learn the deep things of God. His Ways are revealed to those who love and obey Christ. Imagine the blessings of having Christ abide in your heart! If you haven't experienced this, then start loving Him.

**March 4**

## Love Keeps Us Together

*Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

**Romans 15:30-33**

**Focus on Christ**

How do you pray for others? Do you only pray for those who are on your team? Do you pray that others will become what you want them to be? There certainly is a need for all kinds of prayer in all kinds of situations.

Paul begged the people in Rome to be motivated by the love given by the Spirit to pray for him. He needed prayer to be delivered from the unbelievers who did not want him to succeed and for his ministry to be accepted. After all, Paul had once persecuted Christians and now was being persecuted for delivering the Gospel to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Paul believed they could strive, fight, and make an effort together in prayer to accomplish what was needed. What was needed? The love given by the Spirit. Love keeps us together. This love from the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit not our love for the Spirit. It is the love the Spirit provides that encourages us to do any work of the ministry of Christ. When two or more people are walking in the Spirit, His Love will bind them together.

It is the love from the Spirit that brings discernment and a desire for everyone to grow closer to the Lord. Paul wanted believers to have a deep walk with Christ. When you desire others to know the Love of God, you will ask others who are like-minded to pray for you. You can ask them to pray that you will be able to accomplish what Christ has placed on your heart and pray that as you do, you will rest and be refreshed together. God's Love keeps you focused and motivated to do His Will.

Why should love be the basis of prayer? God's Love "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:7-8).

**Focus on Self**

Being motivated to accomplish goals so that others will see you as successful is selfish. The Love of Christ should motivate you to prayer, work, and service. Self is a taskmaster. Love results in satisfaction and rest that keeps us together.

**March 5**

**Love That Grows**

*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...*

**Philippians 1:9**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you seen an artesian well? It is a spring of water that flows under natural pressure without a need for pumping. There is an artesian well in Texarkana, Arkansas. De Soto drank from it in 1541, and it still flows today. Supposedly, an artesian spring will never run dry.

## Gifts From God

Christ's Love reveals new life every day. It does not have to be recycled or filtered because it is a fresh and natural thirst quencher for life itself. Many Christians miss out on this eternal flow of love because they spend little time in building a deeper walk with Christ. He is the source of love. To understand more of His Love requires drinking from the well of Living Water. To drink you have to take in the Word daily. It takes effort to drink.

This love is not some simple emotion that makes you feel good. It is not a physical attraction between two people. This love is abounding in knowledge and discernment. When you have deep spiritual knowledge of the spiritual Ways of God you will know how to love God and others. This love keeps flowing through your life to others as you stay connected to the source of the flow, the Holy Spirit. Christ's Love gives you spiritual knowledge, spiritual sight, spiritual hearing, and spiritual taste that allows you to see others as He does. This love gives you the right spiritual perception for daily life. You know what to do when God's Love flows through you because it gives you the right discernment to help you approve what is excellent (see Philippians 1:10). Are you growing more and more in abounding love? You will if you stay connected to the source.

### Focus on Self

Self has difficulty loving people and God more than itself because it's focus is on improving self. Love focuses on God first, then on a proper view of self, and then on others. Self-love is limited, temporary, emotion-based, and calloused. God's Love is eternal, limitless, selfless, warm, discerning, as well as corrective. Why would you want to know anything but the Love of God?

March 6

### Pure Undeified Love

*Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith...*

1 Timothy 1:5

### Focus on Christ

When you hear the word commandment, what comes to your mind? Most people think a commandment is an order, demand, or mandate to do something they do not want to do. Resistance is the normal response for most people when someone tells them what they should do. This kind of rule following is not driven by a spirit of love. If you are not in love with the person who commands you to do something, then conflict is the result rather than joy.

The purpose of Christ's commandment is not to produce resistance but rather to produce love. When you love God with all your heart, He will develop a deep love in you for Him and for others. When this love is realized, you will realize "love from a pure heart, from a good

conscience, and from sincere faith,” resulting in a godly desire to follow this commandment. Love is the deep motivator for wanting to do what is asked of you.

Love from a pure heart is priceless. You cannot buy this purity in a store, inherit it from your family, or develop it from continuous training. This free gift of love expands and develops as you walk in Christ’s Holy Spirit. Human attributes cannot produce a love that is pure and undefiled. When God develops His Love in you, your friends will know it because they will experience the benefits. This love gives without expecting anything in return, comforts a friend when they are hurting, and provides security that protects. This type of love is what forms a deep and honest relationship. Godly Love will never be corrupt, immoral, or dishonest in its affections toward others.

Your love must also come from a good conscience. That means there must be no sinful intentions; rather, there must be a right and moral reflection of goodness and love. When a good, clear, and innocent conscience is present, pure love can flow through the mind, strengthen the heart, and bring about right living. While a pure heart and a good conscience are necessary, there is also a need for a sincere faith. This faith does not act like you love when you really do not; it lives out love by living works of pure love. This faith does good and blesses others out of a sincere and genuine love for them.

### **Focus on Self**

Self wants other’s love for its own benefit. Self seeks to be known, get attention, and demands loyalty. Pure undefiled love looks for opportunities to help others and does not seek its own.

Paul said, “...love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:10). When your actions are based on love, the commandments of God are a pleasure to obey. Do you want this kind of love? It is found as you deny self, follow Christ, and walk in His Spirit.

**March 7**

### **Bond of Perfection**

*But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

**Colossians 3:14**

### **Focus on Christ**

What holds you together in a close relationship? Attention? Special things a person does for you? Physical attraction? All of these things can change. Only something that has eternal value will stand through changing times. What could it be?

Love. Love is at the top of the list for holding a relationship together. Yes, it’s true that Paul said to “...put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another...” (Colossians 3:12-13). Each of these

## Gifts From God

graces are wonderful to have in a relationship; but, without the cement of love, a relationship will fall apart.

Whose love is this addressing? God's Love! His Love is the only thing that makes all of these other wonderful graces have a lasting effect. God is Love. Not God has love, but He is Love. When you relate properly to the God of Love, you can relate properly to others. Whether they treat you right or not, you should respond with love if you are a Spirit-filled believer. It is amazing how love is the bond of perfection. It is hard to ignore someone who loves you with Christ's Love. This love is selfless and seeks to provide everything possible to help. It is like a magnet that holds on and never lets go.

Christian unity is bonded together by mutual love. What holds a family together? Love. What holds a marriage together? Love. What holds a friendship together? Love. What holds a church together? Love. Since God is Love, you can replace the word *Love* with *God* for each answer. God holds everything together. Love is the cement that will never let a relationship fall apart. Christ is the answer of Love for your need to be cleansed from sin. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

### Focus on Self

Selfish love wants personal attention. Selfless love wants to pay attention to the needs of others. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). God's Love can be overwhelming. It is difficult to understand how perfect love can flow from an imperfect human. Pay attention! The God of Love is perfect, lives in believers, and can bring a bond between them that is impenetrable by the worries of this world.

March 8

### The Same Love

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

Philippians 2:1-2

### Focus on Christ

Do you love everyone the same? Parents are often asked, "Do you love one child more than the others?" They usually say, "Of course not!" The children rarely agree. Why is it one can be favored over another?

Christ has the same Love for all. He died for the rich and the poor, the leaders and the followers, the educated and the uneducated. It doesn't matter who people are or what people do: Christ died for all. How do you learn to love God and others in this way? Do you have this kind of unifying love?

In order to have fellowship through the Spirit, one must have four essential elements: like-mindedness, the same love, harmony, and one purpose. When love is in the list, it is the dominant and superior factor. If you have the same love, then you will have like minds. Unity will not exist because two people like one another so much with human love; rather, unity exists because the Love of God is being expressed through each person. Two people who love God with all their heart, mind, and soul will have like-mindedness. These two people are in harmony with the same intentions and purpose. If the same love is in them, then they can't help but be together. The deeper their walk with Christ the deeper their unity grows.

Christ has one purpose and one love. If your mind, love, harmony, and purpose are not like Christ, then your mind is simply not together with His Mind. If your mind is not like the Mind of Christ, then you are not experiencing His Love. The fruit of His Spirit is Love. Walking in obedience to His Ways reveals this Love in your heart. You reap what you sow. Sow Christ's Love in others and you will reap Christ's Love. Though this is simple, many believers wait on love to come to them before they attempt to love others.

Paul knew that our thoughts and our attitudes would direct our emotions, speech, and behavior. If your mind is not motivated by love, then it will be short-sighted, insensitive, harsh, and uncaring. However, when the Love of God permeates the mind, you will be focused, sensitive, humble, and caring. Which person is the most pleasant?

The Love of God can move two totally different kinds of people toward harmony, good-will, and a common purpose. This Love comes from one unifying source—God.

### Focus on Self

Self desires a common purpose with self. Love desires a common purpose with Christ. If you focus on getting others to be on your agenda, then they may resent your selfish ways. If you serve others with the Love of Christ, then you will reap what you sow and gain godly friendship.

**March 9**

### Love Covers Sin

*And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*

**1 Peter 4:8**

### Focus on Christ

What are you willing to do for those you deeply love? Would you help them in their deepest moment of need? If they are struggling with a weakness would you shame them or would you love them? Love makes you blind to the faults of those you love. Real love will always come to others' aid but not at the expense of ignoring their sin.



## Gifts From God

True love will not make an excuse for or ignore sin. This type of love provides compassion and help to others as though they had not sinned.

Christ never excuses your sin, but He so loved you that He died for your sin. He did not take your sin lightly, but His Love for you resulted in treating you as though you had no sin. Why would anyone die for an awful, mean, guilty sinner? Love! Christ covered your sin with His Love.

When you truly love someone, you overlook their faults. You are kind toward them even when they are at fault. This does not mean that their sin is removed. They still must seek forgiveness from Christ; but your extreme love for them, even though they are guilty, helps them see that their sin is forgivable. Only Christ can forgive and truly cover over their sin.

There are times when you need the love of a friend who will keep on loving you no matter what the offense. Love is not blind to the sin, but it does overlook the fault in order to keep loving the person. When you know that another believer is sincere in their faith, you will overlook their problem out of love while still guiding them to the truth of their situation. This love accepts the person, not the sin. Christ accepted you because of His Love but had to die to pay the price for covering your sin.

### Focus on Self

Self love condemns others of their faults. Self does not persevere, overlook, or endure. True love from God leads you to care and comfort as well as correct. This love has the best intentions for the guilty friend but will not ignore the need to deal with the sin.

March 10

### Love Knows God

*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

1 John 4:7-8

### Focus on Christ

What does love mean to you? Do you see it as human affection? As a loving attitude one human can have for another? Or do you see it as forcing yourself to be kind toward someone who is difficult? The Bible helps you discover a love that is not of this world. It is not human love; it is God Himself.

Loves comes down from heaven; it does not originate from earth. For the Christian, true Love is God. But what does it mean that God is love? It means that God does not contain love, He does not have a characteristic of love, He does not show love, He is Love! God doesn't love you because you have some special need or because you have special qualities. Love is His nature.

How do you acquire this kind of love? The Spirit of Christ living in you is the heavenly gift from above. You do not have this kind of love because you live in such a way that you accomplish and obtain it by your actions. Rather, the Spirit is a gift only realized as you walk in obedience to Christ. Obedience is the key to experiencing the Love of God. As you obey Christ, God's Love deepens within you.

How do you learn to love others? You don't! The Love of God is not learned but it is His Spirit growing in you as you learn about Jesus, develop your relationship with Him through His Word, deny self, exalt Christ, and have an unhindered, unlimited fullness of His Love. This Love flows from God into your heart and mind. He fills you with His Love so that you experience Him. When this happens, you experience true love, because love is the nature of Christ who dwells in you. In order to know Love, you must know God. When you know God, His Love flows through you. When others encounter your life, they encounter God and He expresses His Love to them through you.

You will never run empty of God's Love. It is His nature living in you. However, if you do not spend consistent and daily moment-by-moment time with Him, then you will not recognize, develop, or be led by His Love. When you are transformed by the Love of God, you will love others because it is your new nature to love.

### Focus on Self

If you have ever tried to love someone you didn't like, then you probably failed. If you walk with God and experience His deep love, then you begin to recognize a new nature that cannot stop loving others. This godly love may be recognized as a renewed prayer life for others, a willingness to correct those going the wrong way, or finding a way to bless them. Whatever the action, God's Love works to redeem a person.

**March 11**

### Listen to Speak

*The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens my ear to hear as the learned.*

**Isaiah 50:4**

### Focus on Christ

Remember those times when you were caught off guard with a situation? Maybe a friend came to you with a troubled heart and asked you a difficult question. You had no idea they were experiencing such trouble. What do you say to troubled people? The answer depends on where your mind is at the moment and what you have been focusing on recently.

## Gifts From God

Christ was never caught off guard. His fellowship with the Father was constant, consistent, and intimate. No matter what Christ faced while He was here on earth, He had the right perspective. He was never confused, flustered, or disconnected from the wisdom from above.

It is critical that you stay up to date with Christ through the teachings of His Word guided by the Presence and Power of His Spirit. Every day should be spent reorienting your mind to His Word and putting more distance in your life from the instruction of the world. Waking day by day to the instruction of the Word gives you wisdom, confidence, and practical and godly principles for daily living. How do you receive speech that is instructed by God? By hearing from Him. “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). There is no substitute for God’s Word.

If you desire wisdom, then you must spend determined, consistent, prayerful time taking in God’s Word. The Holy Spirit will then take the Word of God, teach you the Ways of Christ, bring to remembrance what He has taught you, and give you the tongue of the learned to speak “a word in season to him who is weary.”

### Focus on Self

Self is so limited and carnal. It has so many weaknesses that it cannot instruct hurting people with complete truth. But in Christ you have the Wisdom of God. Live in the Word, listen to Christ, and you will have a resource that will bless your life and those you influence.

March 12

### Spiritual Speech

*But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.*

Luke 21:13-15

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been with someone who used many words but talked about nothing of importance? Though people have intelligence to think and a mouth to speak, it doesn’t mean that what comes out of their mouth is wise. “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:10).

Christ shared with His disciples that difficult days would come when they would have to defend their beliefs and actions. When you are under pressure, you need to respond with the right spirit and the right speech. Human reaction to persecution will try to defend, protect, and justify self. Christ wants you to speak with wisdom from above so that your adversary will not be able to “contradict or resist.”

Jesus often was in situations where others were trying to trap Him with trick questions. He always had the wisdom to answer in such a way that He could not be refuted, disproved, or invalidated. This same

wisdom is available to you through His Spirit. How do you make sure that your mouth is filled with this wisdom? Jesus said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ ” (Matthew 4:4).

The key to speaking wise words is having a mind full of God’s Word. If you are in a tense situation but your mind is full of worldly thoughts, imaginations, and reasoning, then you are less likely to think of God’s Ways. You have to spend enough time with Christ so that your relationship with Him permeates your thinking.

As I (Kerry) write this, I am experiencing a week with my two best friends, Elaine, my wife of 46 years, and my spiritual daughter and ministry partner, Alison. Our minds are together. All we talk about is what God has done and is doing in our lives. We spend time throughout the day talking about Scriptures that God has put on our hearts. We can’t seem to get enough of God’s Word, His Love, and His Wisdom. This relationship with God fills us with His wisdom. The more your mind is saturated with Him, the more your mouth speaks about Him.

The key to having a mouth full of wisdom is to rest in your relationship with Christ. As you do, your speech will reveal the results of walking in the Spirit. You will not have to think up, contrive, or invent what to say based on your human abilities. As you abide in Christ, His thoughts will become your thoughts, and your answers will become His answers.

### Focus on Self

Self brings trouble to others. It speaks an answer without running it through the truth of the Word. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). Speech is corrupt if it is not Truth. Guard your speech by taking in healthy amounts of God’s Word every day.

## March 13

### Obedience Deepens Relationships

*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’*

**Matthew 7:21-22**

### Focus on Christ

How well do you know Jesus? How would you describe your relationship with Christ? How would He describe His relationship with you?

## Gifts From God

Many Christians say that Jesus is Lord and, at the same time are, holding on to something He asked them to give up. Others say that Jesus is Lord but will not begin doing what they know they should. Obedience really is the evidence that a person will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the Will of God will be in heaven.

Did you know that you are built spiritually to obey not command? When a person comes to faith in Christ, that person will submit to His Will and Ways. Many want to talk about the greatness of salvation, but obedience shows the heart. Obedience is practical not theoretical. God doesn't want you trying to choose the best way to live. He wants you to get into His Word and discover how to obey Him.

For example, many Christians wonder why God doesn't give them an answer about buying a house, yet they are not obeying Christ in their giving. Additionally, Christians may want more wisdom in their life when they are not obeying God by spending time in His Word. Others wonder why they can't have greater peace in their life, yet they do not obey the Lord to be filled with the Spirit everyday.

Some people say, "I cannot give up things that are good and that I love." Some people think that obedience means living a miserable life. Rather, it is just the opposite. When you obey Christ, life becomes abundant and free.

Romans 6:16 states, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" If you are a slave to sin, then you will experience death. However, being a slave to obedience leads to righteousness. Obeying God frees your spirit to do something worthwhile. The only things you will understand about the Christian life are the parts you obey.

### Focus on Self

Self wants everything and everyone to adjust to its comfort. Self wants others obedience. Biblical obedience produces right feelings and right living by adjusting a person's life to God. When obedience takes place, your relationship with Christ deepens. Why? Because obedience is the result of love.

**March 14**

### God's Discipline is to Redeem

*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

**Hebrews 12:11**

### Focus on Christ

No one seems to enjoy discipline. Children don't want it; employees don't enjoy it; and Christians avoid it. Do you enjoy discipline? What comes to your mind when you think of the word *discipline*?

Usually, people relate discipline to abuse. This is because most discipline comes from an angry heart. This is not God's discipline.

Christ disciplines those He loves, but His discipline toward believers has a different purpose than what the world wants to do to believers. The world persecutes believers because they live for God. Christ chastises, reprimands, and admonishes you because you aren't living up to God's standards. While God's discipline, chastening, and correction can be painful, the purpose is to produce righteousness that results in peace.

Christ rebukes you for your sin. Why wouldn't He? He came from heaven to earth as a baby, lived a sinless life, died from persecution caused by sin, and was victorious over death, hell, and the grave in order to save you from your sin. If you remember this, then you will not faint and collapse under correction but will learn through the correction.

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Hebrews 12:5-6). Every child of God needs correction at some point. If God doesn't correct you, then you aren't in His family. Be glad that God loves you enough to discipline you.

Correction is much easier when you submit. The opposite of submission is resistance. It is harder to resist God than to submit to Him. While a parent corrects a child's physical actions, God corrects your spirit, which can be so stubborn. The more you resist, the stronger God disciplines, because His Love is strong.

God will do anything to make you more like Christ. When He deals with your sin, it is painful. Yet, the result of the affliction is peace. It is much better to have pain followed by a cure, than to live in pain (sin) the rest of your life. Christ loves you too much to leave you like you are. He offers a full and abundant life.

### **Focus on Self**

If self resists God's discipline, then it sinks deeper into sin and discouragement. But there is another way. Yield yourself to Christ. His care for you is to redeem you from your selfish ways.

**March 15**

### **A Pure Heart**

*Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart...*

**1 Peter 1:22**

### **Focus on Christ**

How does a believer purify their soul so that true love permeates their heart? Does a pure soul develop out of a faultless discipline to

## Gifts From God

practice Christian ways? Can you purify your soul by reading your Bible for 1000 days straight?

Purity of the soul requires obeying the truth in the Spirit from a loving sincere heart. What does that look like? Purity requires holy living. When you obey the truth of God's Word, it refines, improves, and clarifies your character. If you desire to have godly character, then you must practice holy living through the Spirit. That means that the Spirit guides you to live by the teachings of the Word. You will never be purified by human devotion. Purity requires the Holy Spirit to guide your mind in the Word so that you learn to enjoy obedience.

An incredible benefit of obeying God is that you learn the Love of God. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). This love allows you to have a pure, undefiled love for other believers.

The Scripture states, "Love one another fervently with a pure heart." The word *fervently* means to love with real sincerity and intense intentionality. Loving another person with this kind of pure heart can only come from a person who is obeying the truth through the Spirit and practicing holy living. If your life is pure, then your love will be pure. You will know it is pure love if it seeks to give more than it gets. Why is there not more of this kind of deep, pure love among believers? Disobedience to the truth prevents it.

### Focus on Self

Selfish love seeks its own benefits. Selfish love thinks it deserves special treatment. If you focus on this kind of love, then you will be very lonely. Pure love seeks the best for others. It is never satisfied with mediocracy. This true love does not seek its own but focuses on finding ways of doing good, praying for, and blessing others.

March 16

### Godly Responses

*...who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...*

1 Peter 2:23

### Focus on Christ

When you are attacked, what is your first response? Do you attack, fight back, try to get even, or retaliate? Is your response stronger when someone acts against you unjustly?

Jesus' response was perfect. He did not react to unjust threats. His reaction was non-threatening silence. This is rare in a person. People feel they must respond to injustice. They speak up quickly to defend self. When this happens it is obvious what is in your spirit. Jesus stated in Mark 7:20-24 that what comes out of your life proceeds from your



heart. If anger and revenge is your response to an unjust action, then you are walking in your own way not the Ways of Christ. Love came from Jesus' heart when He was treated wrongly. His response was to die for your sins. He was not fighting against injustice; He was dying as a sacrifice for your salvation. He could have responded and killed all the guilty revilers, but He chose love. He endured the pain of your sinful ways so that you might be set free.

You must believe that Christ's death made it possible to live for Him. When you walk in His Ways, His Spirit empowers you to live by His standards, not simply by human emotions. Anger, revenge, and the drive to retaliate are sinful actions in response to feelings. If Christ had lived on your level of response, then there would be no salvation. If you are to help others, then it requires dying to self.

Christ committed Himself to His Heavenly Father who would judge righteously. He did not have to take action against others, He instead trusted God to do what was needed and necessary. Do you trust God to act on your behalf, or do feel you have to be the one to take action?

### Focus on Self

Dying to self is humanly impossible. Only when Christ is exalted in your life are you able to walk in His Spiritual fruit. Revenge can only be done justly by God. Give up your right to selfish ways and yield to Christ who made a way to enable you to righteous living.

## March 17

### Take Thoughts Captive

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...*

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

### Focus on Christ

How hard is it for you to keep your mind focused on Christ when you are going through difficult situations? When you are discouraged, it is hard to get the right perspective. When you know what God wants, but something or someone is hindering you from God's Will, how do you keep your mind focused during times of waiting?

Christ experienced many disappointing situations, but He kept His Mind on His mission without wavering. When His disciples didn't agree with His decisions, He never faltered. Satan couldn't defeat Him with temptations. He wasn't distracted by John the Baptist's death. His friend Lazarus' illness didn't change His timeline. Beatings and ridicule didn't make Him change His Mind about the cross. What kept Him focused? His relationship with His Heavenly Father through prayer.

## Gifts From God

How do you keep your mind focused? Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. As long as you obey Christ, you will not waver. The act of obedience will arrest every wrong thought, destroy everything that is against Christ, bring your thoughts to see the Mind of Christ, and bring joy to your current situation.

Quit thinking about your future and focus on loving God today. How could you be discouraged if your mind and heart is full of the Love of God? When you pray as Jesus did in the wilderness, in the garden, and on the cross, your thoughts turn toward His Will and purpose for your life. When you are reminded of His mission for you, all your thoughts will center on obedience, not struggling. Nothing can stop you from fulfilling God's call on your life when your thoughts are His thoughts. God Himself will keep you focused. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

False reasoning, human philosophies, exalted esteem, and half truths have no power in the Presence of the Holy Spirit. When you obey God in the moment, His weapons of warfare are divine and will cast down, destroy, and make false thinking fade away. How great is that?

### Focus on Self

If you are always worried, then your mind is on self instead of God. If you are always discouraged, then God's Word is not central in your thinking. However, when you daily exchange everything you know about yourself for everything you know about God, your mind will stay on His Ways, His Mission, and His Purpose. Self will be defeated and Christ will be exalted!

**March 18**

### Who Is In Control

*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.*

**Romans 7:19**

### Focus on Christ

What do you think gives you the most trouble? Some say it is a terrible past, the way they were raised, a difficult background, or the wrong influence from ungodly people. For others they say it is a struggle that comes from a lack of finances, an absence of education, or not getting a good opportunity to advance. Sometimes people truly believe their troubles come from the wrong parents, unbelieving spouses, or challenging employers. All of these factors can make life difficult.

The real difficulty in life for a believer is in dealing with their old nature that never disappears. That nature is sin. Not someone else's sin, not something else's influence, not some lack of opportunity in life, it is sin that dwells in you.

Many speak about this chapter in Romans to comfort themselves when they do the wrong thing. People think that if Paul did things that he should not, then it is okay that they are that way. That is not the point! Paul was not lowering the standard of Christian living when he shared that you have a sin problem. Remember his other teachings, and you will see the complete picture. He also stated in Galatians 5:16, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

If there is one thing that you must pay attention to as a believer, it is that you still have an old nature that will lead you to sin if you drop your guard. The key is not to drop your guard so often. How do you do that? Consistent, moment-by-moment walking with Christ in the power of His Spirit. The Apostle Paul did not teach that there is no power over sin. He taught that you have no power over sin. When Christ is exalted, Satan flees, self is defeated, and you experience the abundant Spirit-filled life.

When living for Christ, you experience a new nature. This nature is who you really are. It should be the predominant way in which you live. However, when you do the wrong thing, it is not your new nature that acts, but your old nature. Live up to who you really are in Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self is full of sin. Sin is in control when you walk in the flesh. The only way to defeat sin is to live up to a higher standard, life in Christ. Self will tend to choose easy and comfortable decisions whether they are right or wrong. Love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and you will see a consistent walk of holiness. Only then will Christ be in control.

**March 19**

### Half Truths Corrupt

*But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

**2 Corinthians 11:3**

### Focus on Christ

How does someone influence you to change your mind about something? They certainly do not do it by disagreeing with you. If they want to influence you, they will affirm, approve, or confirm you.

Satan was crafty and deceitful with Eve. She lived in a place where sin did not exist and had every reason to keep living as she had been living in a wonderful place. Yet, the evil one deceived her in the midst of perfection. Paul said "lest somehow." The tempter will use any means possible to gain your attention away from Christ. Sometimes it will be flattery and other times seduction. Any means possible will be employed to make you think that what you are offered will not draw

## Gifts From God

you away from Christ but will satisfy your desires without corrupting you.

Our minds are capable of being corrupted. It does not take much to tarnish the truth. A half truth is a lie. Satan tries to corrupt you with these half truths. A thought like, “God wouldn’t discipline me for my wrongs, He is a God of Love” is a half truth. God is Love, but the Scripture states that He disciplines those He loves. If you are not well-versed in the Word, then Satan, the world, and your selfish thoughts, will corrupt your mind.

Stay focused on simple truth, such as a relationship with Christ. Develop a deeper relationship with Him. Spend time getting to know Him by immersing your mind in His Word. Talk to Him often. Ask Him for wisdom and guidance, and His Spirit will teach you what you need. Spend time with others who are focused on the simplicity that is in Christ. Stay away from people who try to lead you astray with half truths. Your mind will only be corrupted when your affections move from loving God to loving self.

### Focus on Self

Self is easily corrupted. Things of this world such as success, money, security, pride, and ambition can quickly move a person from the simplicity that is in Christ, to living by half truths. Follow Christ, deny self, love God, and spend time with those who live that way, and your mind will be protected.

March 20

### Peace Comes From Jesus

*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

John 16:33

### Focus on Christ

Where do you turn for peace? Many turn to people, places, or activities. Others look for peace in the hope for a perfect day. Jesus said that He spoke so that in Him you would have peace.

How does that happen? The believer who loves God will keep His commandments. When a true believer lives out the Words of Christ, this obedience brings an inner peace that results from your spirit being in agreement with the Holy Spirit. But when the believer sins, there is an unsettling in the spirit. The Holy Spirit brings a holy discomfort to the sinful heart of a believer. Isaiah 32:17 states, “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.” If you want inner peace, then obey the truth of God’s Word.

In Christ you will have peace. Not in the world, in self, or in others, but in Him. The world offers trouble. If you love Christ, then expect tribulation, misery, distress, and sorrow from the world. The good

news is that this world's tribulation is temporary in its existence, defeated in its advances, and hopeless in its hardships.

The world, sin, and Satan were defeated through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. You don't have to live in distress, inner conflict, misery, pain, and torment. The peace of Christ is available, active, and real to an obedient heart.

**Focus on Self**

The only peace available in self comes from busy activity. If you stay busy enough, then you may not notice anxiety, unrest, and tension. The problem is that self can't keep up the pace. Die to self, fill up on Christ, follow His Ways, and you will experience true peace.

**March 21**

**A House Built By God**

*For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.*

**Hebrews 3:4**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever watched a house being built? It is amazing to watch the process. Many different skills are employed to construct the house. Each skilled worker is an expert, but they are not an expert at every skill needed to build the house. A house is not like planting a seed and watching it grow. It does not grow; it is built.

Christ is the One who builds the church. The writer of Hebrews does not make a huge distinction between God and Jesus. Yet, there are different functions listed throughout Scripture. *House* here represents the family of God. The builder of the house is more important than the house. In this passage, it is obvious that God is the Creator of all things and that Jesus is the head of the church and the One who created the church. Yet, if you separated the roles, then you could explain it like this: God is the architect and designer; Jesus is the builder; and believers are the servants of God.

Who do you trust for the structure of the house or the church? The Builder or the one who lives there? You trust Christ. He lived perfectly, sacrificed Himself obediently, and defeated death and hell soundly to provide a house for God's people. Never think that the believers are the ones who develop and build a great local congregation. Only God through Christ can build the church. Many want to take credit for building a large church, but they cannot. Only God can build things that have a spiritual foundation, whatever man says he has built is not the true church.

Spirit-filled believers are not interested in building their own kingdom. True believers want God to work through them by Christ's Spirit to produce a spiritual-based church in which only God can receive the glory. While you may be a skilled laborer who He has chosen to

## Gifts From God

work on the building, God is the architect and designer. He knows what He wants to build and will chose the right laborers for the right job.

### Focus on Self

Who are you building for, God or yourself? Self wants to receive recognition for what it can accomplish. God is not interested in sharing His Glory. When you die to self and live for Christ, others will see evidence of it. When others see what you have done, they should be saying, "Look what God did through that person!" It is much more fulfilling to live in a house built by God than in a house built by human hands.

March 22

### God's Tender-Hearted Mercy

*But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

Genesis 39:21

### Focus on Christ

Who deserves mercy? Do you think that you deserve mercy from God? Do you show mercy to others? How do you decide who will receive judgment? Mercy is a wonderful gift from God.

Do you understand the depth of God's Mercy toward a repentant heart? Mercy can be described with many words that give you insight into its riches. Mercy is compassion, pity, kindness, sympathy, and leniency.

Joseph went through many trials and challenges. His brothers made fun of his dreams, hated him deeply, considered murdering him, threw him in a pit, sold him into slavery, faked his death, and told his father he was dead. His faithful service to Potipher ended with the false accusation of having a sexual encounter with Potipher's wife and resulted in imprisonment.

After all of this injustice toward Joseph, God had mercy on him. God's mercy is a kind, tender-hearted compassion. In the midst of unfair abuse, God was tender toward Joseph and showed him favor. Maybe you had been mistreated or were experiencing discouragement. In that moment your friend showed love, compassion, and a tender-hearted care for you. That is mercy.

Christ has shown much mercy to you. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Only a tender-hearted love would lead Christ to die for the ungodly. That is mercy. How much mercy do you show to your friends, family, or work associates?

There are improper times to show mercy. If someone is rebellious and hard-hearted without any indication of his need for change, then it is difficult to extend mercy. Only God does that. One thing is for certain, though; it is easy to show mercy to a repentant person.

**Focus on Self**

Self does not give mercy unless it receives mercy. If it has not received mercy, then self tends to lean toward judgment. Love gives mercy to the humble with unlimited measure. There is never a time you need more of God's Mercy than when you are going through difficult times. Why not be an instrument of God's mercy to others?

**March 23**

**Mercy is for Those Who Love God**

*Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments...*

**Deuteronomy 7:9**

**Focus on Christ**

How faithful are you to your friends? How about family members? Are you able to keep being faithful to them even if they are not faithful to you? That is a difficult situation. If your character is based on a relationship with God, then you will have unchanging faithfulness, love, and mercy.

God is merciful to those who love Him and keep His commandments. He does not promise to love you without discipline. If you sin, then His covenant to provide mercy can be removed. A covenant goes two ways. If you do not keep His Ways, then He may not provide mercy. While God is capable of giving mercy to those who do not deserve it, you cannot expect it will always happen this way.

The one place where mercy will always be provided is in the offer of salvation. Christ died to save you from your sins. But mercy only continues as you love God and keep His commandments. You should never want to weaken your relationship with Christ by disobeying His commandments. To love Him is to obey Him. Often in the Scriptures, you are taught that to obey Him brings spiritual and physical blessings. One of the most familiar passages is, "...if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). Notice the Scripture says *if* and *then*. It is a conditional statement. If you turn to God...then. Do not be so arrogant as to think God will give you what you want whether you obey Him or not.

Look at the promise. "The faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments." That means He is faithful and merciful forever and ever to those who love Him. God's faithfulness and love toward His children is absolutely amazing!

**Focus on Self**

Self is faithful only to self. When Christ comes into a person's life, love, trust, faithfulness, mercy, and truth become a new way of



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living. No longer can you live for self; you must live for Christ. As you keep His commandments and grow in a loving relationship with Him, you experience the covenant life of mercy and truth.

March 24

### Don't Cheat Your Mind from the Truth

*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*

Colossians 2:8-10

#### Focus on Christ

How would you know if you are wrong when it comes to biblical teaching? Do you rely on pastors, teachers, or famous Christian leaders to tell you what is the truth? It seems as though you cannot always rely on others because they may not always use biblical wisdom to interpret truth. Don't cheat yourself from truth by depending on others. Depend on the Holy Spirit to guide you into the teachings of Christ.

The Apostle Paul gave a warning that you should not let someone spoil or rob your thinking of hope and faith in Jesus Christ. How could others do that? The teaching of the world makes sense if your mind is not grounded in the Word of God. The philosophies of the world bring wrong thinking into your mind and try to paint them as being reasonable and right. Philosophy means the study of knowledge. Some philosophies say there is no God. Others believe you are your own god. These kinds of philosophies will rob you of biblical thinking if you let them.

You must be grounded in the teachings of Christ if you are to remain faithful to biblical truth. Christianity cannot be summed up in a philosophy. Christianity is a way of life. In fact, it is a changed life. This life is based on the teachings of Christ and empowered by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Empty or vain deceit is actually error. Christianity is based on truth. The value of God's Word is that it is the only infallible book in the world. It does not just contain truth, but it is truth.

Don't let others cheat you from the wonderful truth of God's Word. Saturate your mind in His Word and your thinking will recognize error when it comes. Develop a desperate and dependent life in the Word of God and the Holy Spirit will guide and protect your mind from the vain philosophies, empty deceit, and traditions of men.

#### Focus on Self

If you want to know the truth, then admit that self is limited in its thinking, egotistical in its reasoning, and fallible in its conclusions. Only God's Word will reveal all truth. Soak the truth up like a sponge,

and the overflow will lead you in the right direction. Only then will you be complete in Him and understand His Ways.

**March 25**

**The Spirit Wars Against the Flesh**

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*

**Galatians 5:16-17**

**Focus on Christ**

Flesh is everything that the Spirit is not. Your sinful nature is what Paul referred to as your flesh. Any thought, attitude, or action that goes against God’s spiritual standard is sin. Every omission of following the commandments of God is also sinful. How do you win out over sin? Does your flesh give you trouble?

Walking in the Spirit makes it impossible to walk in the flesh. To remain faithful to God, you must realize this is a spiritual walk. Acting spiritual is a work of your flesh. Walking in the Spirit signifies being led by the Spirit and living in the Spirit.

Flesh wars against the Spirit. The one you submit to is the one who has the most influence. These two cannot co-exist. The flesh tries to destroy the Spirit and the Spirit seeks to destroy the flesh. The Spirit of truth will not be deceived by sinful actions. Believers cannot sin against the Spirit of Truth and remain comfortable. The Spirit will not let you rest. Only God’s Spirit can dominate, control, rule, and master our fleshly nature.

**Focus on Self**

It is impossible for self to will, wish, determine, or resolve itself to be spiritual. To live in the Spirit you must walk in the Ways of the Spirit. If you are inconsistent in reading and applying God’s Word, then you are not living in the Spirit. Resist your flesh and obey Christ daily.

**March 26**

**The Riches of Christ Will Supply Your Need**

*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

**Philippians 4:19**

**Focus on Christ**

What kind of needs do you have? The needs that tend to get our attention are health, financial, and difficult relationships. It is amaz-

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ing how life is fine, the bills are paid, your health is good, and no other problems seem to be present; but, then a huge change in just a few short minutes redirects your attention to crisis. How do you respond? Do you panic, cry, pray, or turn to others for help?

God will supply all your needs. He does not owe you anything, but you owe Him everything. Even so, He continues to be kind and supplies your needs. When He supplies your need, you must remember it is not your wants He supplies, but your needs. He will not let His children go without help; but He will determine what kind of help, where it will come from, and when it will be delivered. You should be grateful that He will supply according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. That means there are no limits to His supply. He will give you what you need to continue to grow in Christ and depend on Him. Nothing Christ does for you will push you farther from Him. His Purpose is to draw you closer to Him.

Though we may not realize it, developing a deeper walk with Christ is your greatest need. For only when you are close to Christ will His Spirit guard your heart and mind. Though you may have a need for finances, health, or relationship issues, what you really need is a spirit full of Love, Joy, and Peace that only Christ can supply. Can you imagine facing those needs without walking in the Spirit? It is a wonderful blessing when God supplies finances that are needed, but there is nothing greater than when He provides His generous supply of Love.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to solve its own problems. Pride drives you to believe that you can do it yourself without the need for others. God knows better. He knows that you cannot supply your own needs. Without Christ, you can do nothing. You must learn to depend on Christ. Remember, "...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness..." (2 Peter 1:3).

March 27

### God Looks at the Heart

*But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

1 Samuel 16:7

### Focus on Christ

Do you judge people by how they look on the outside? Would you have chosen David to fight against Goliath? People tend to focus on what looks good. People get attention based on fitness, weight, hair, looks, and attire. Seldom does the world ask about character first.

When the nation was looking for a king to replace Saul, even Samuel thought Eliab was the logical choice. After all, he was the oldest

and looked the part. Yet, God redirected Samuel to look at the situation differently. God wanted a man who had a high measure of character. The only way to see that is to see what God sees.

Since you cannot read the heart, you must receive the Wisdom of God that can permeate your heart and mind so that you will know God's choice servants. Why do you need this wisdom? God gives you many relationships in life. So you need wisdom to choose godly people. It could be to choose the right friend, partner in business, spouse, pastor, or teacher. Many look at appearance to make these selections and often never look at character. Many disasters come because character was not a priority.

God looks at the heart. He knows what a person is thinking, feeling, and desiring. He is looking for those whose heart is yielded to Him. Would you say you spend more time daily on your physical appearance or spiritual heart? If so, you will not attract those who have an in-depth walk with Christ. Do you want to be with people of high moral and spiritual standards? If so, you must be a person of integrity in order to seek, discover, and identify other people of integrity.

### Focus on Self

Self-help books flood the market. God's Word is the only one that will stand forever. If you want to develop godly character, then understand it will not happen by focusing on self. You must focus on walking with God and letting Him develop a strong spiritual heart.

**March 28**

### Help in Time of Need

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

**Galatians 6:1**

### Focus on Christ

No one is above getting overtaken in a trespass. We all need help from spiritual people from time to time. Do you have anyone in your life who calls attention to your faults? If not, you need someone who is spiritual enough to do that. Everyone needs someone who loves them so much that they will not let them fall into a trap.

Paul encouraged the Galatian church to look for spiritual people who would restore others in gentleness. Several factors are needed for this to be done properly.

First, a spiritual-minded person is needed to do the correcting. Often people are afraid to correct a friend because they don't want to lose that friend. However, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear..." (1 John 4:18). Love is more concerned with what will happen negatively to a friend if they are not corrected than what will happen to the one who does the correcting. It takes a spirit-filled, spirit-led person to restore someone.

## Gifts From God

Second, a spirit of gentleness is required to correct someone properly. If anger is what motivates you to correct a person caught in sin, then your correction will not bring restoration, just more conflict. Only a person who is walking in the Spirit of Christ will be able to restore gently. There is a major difference in harsh correction and gentle correction. Remember, the way in which you correct someone is what will be measured back to you.

Third, consider your own weaknesses when you correct someone. When you understand how easy it is to be tempted and fall into sin, then you will be more gentle, kind, and truthful when you correct others. Just as some things are very difficult for you to change, it is also difficult for others to change. Remember, there will come a day when you need help from others.

### Focus on Self

Self often has too much pride to want any help from others. As you die to self and focus on Christ, you realize the value of the body of Christ. There will be times when you need the body and there will be times when the body needs you. Don't ignore the fact that sin affects the whole body, not just the individual. We need each other to correct and restore one another when sin has taken hold of our lives. Hopefully, you spend time with spiritual-minded people who are ready to gently help you in time of need. If not, you may need to find some new friends.

March 29

### Choices

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*

Genesis 3:15

### Focus on Christ

How successful are you at overcoming evil temptations in your life? Would you say that you have total victory over them? Of course not! Evil is a continuous action in this world to attract your attention away from Christ and toward your selfish desires. It is a constant battle. No matter how many victories over sin you may have today, the conflict will arise again.

God said He would put enmity between Satan and the woman. What is enmity? This word is used only three times in the Old Testament. It gives the idea of a perpetual feud between evil and mankind. Satan and all his followers will be in a hostile conflict of hatred, malice, and bitterness against the human race. This verse refers to another feud. The seed of the woman is Christ, and Christ became Satan's greatest target (between your seed and her Seed).

Satan did everything he could to defeat Christ when He was in the form of a human. His attacks were continual and brutal, striking at

the very nature of a human, but he was not successful. Satan tempted Christ in the wilderness with provisions for hunger and thirst and power and pride. He used Judas as one of Christ's own followers to ultimately betray Him. He led Peter to deny his Lord. Satan had religious leaders persecute Him and the soldiers to crucify Him all in an attempt to defeat Christ. All of these actions may have bruised human flesh but did not strike a blow of any sort to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ Himself! Though Satan still tries to defeat Christ and those who follow Him, he is a defeated enemy.

As long as you walk in the Ways of Christ, you are protected by the Spirit of Christ living in you. Your power does not come from your human abilities to resist the devil, evil, and your flesh. The only victory you have is in Christ. He alone has power over death, hell, and the grave. If you want to live this victorious life, then you must love God with all your heart, mind, and soul. Practically, you do that by keeping His commandments and walking in His Spirit. When you do, you will find that "the work of righteousness is peace" (Isaiah 32:17).

### Focus on Self

Adam and Eve sinned by eating what they should not have, and now you suffer and work in order to eat. When you try to do things your way, you suffer from your actions. If you could see the fruit of your sin, then you would be less likely to follow after it. To follow self will lead you directly into Satan's traps. To follow Christ will lead you to abundant and peaceful living. The battle will always exist, but being on the right side of the battle is where you should put your focus. Though Satan can bruise you in the battle, he cannot cause death to a person who is alive in Christ.

## March 30

### Jesus, Our High Priest

*For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens...*

**Hebrews 7:26**

### Focus on Christ

Can you imagine having to be the representative to God for all the people of the earth? Do you think you qualify for such a position? The job description calls for a sinless person who died after living a perfect life and then was raised from the dead. There is no one who can meet those qualifications except Jesus Christ.

Look at the details of the requirements. Christ is holy. He not only was holy as a human but also is holy as your Savior. To be holy means to be sinless, spotless, faultless, guiltless, unblemished, and uncorrupted. Nothing in Christ had any likeness or tendency to sin. Christ

## Gifts From God

also was harmless. That means that He was blameless and innocent. He was undefiled, pure, and sincere. He never got involved in the sin of others. Though He spent time with sinners, He was separate from them. That means that He began with a virgin birth and never took on any of the sinful ways of sinners. Truly He has become higher than the heavens. His holiness far exceeds any created being on earth or in heaven.

This perfect and holy Savior is the One who is High Priest. He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven making intercession for you. Jesus prays to the Father on your behalf. How great is it to know that you have a perfect Savior who has your best interest at heart?

There is no priest on earth who meets these qualifications. Earthly priests still have a nature of sin and cannot live sinless lives. Therefore, there is no need for a High Priest on earth when you have the perfect Priest in heaven. Christians have a holy, harmless and undefiled Savior Jesus Christ!

### Focus on Self

What can self do to represent itself to God? Very little. Without Christ, there is no acceptance of an individual by God the Father. You need no other representation than Jesus. Self cannot present any works, attitudes, or service that would be acceptable to God. Only Christ living in you gives you the right to become a child of God. Take time to thank God for giving you such a High Priest who loves you so much that He desires an eternal relationship with you.

March 31

### King of Kings

*The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.*

Psalm 103:19

### Focus on Christ

Who is the boss? Are you the boss? Does everyone have to listen to your instructions? If you are the boss, then how many people work for you? Do millions of people work for you or have to listen to your instructions? Can you determine the extent of your influence?

God established His throne in heaven. While you may have a small kingdom here on earth, you are not ruler of all. In order to have influence over all the earth, your throne cannot be on the earth. Why? Because if you establish a throne on earth, someone will challenge your right to reign. When God established His throne in heaven, no one on earth, in heaven, or from the depths of hell could overthrow the King of Kings.

God is ruler over all people and organizations. Nothing can challenge God and win. But people attempt to challenge God out of their misguided thinking. They think that because they are smarter than a few people here on earth, they can also challenge God. But they are wrong! The proper response to the God who rules from heaven is to obey Him.



Obedience is not forced by God. But all who really recognize that He is the Supreme God of the Universe will want to serve Him. Once you receive Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will understand the Love, Joy, and Peace of Jesus that cannot be attained, bought, or captured by anything or anyone on earth. These wonderful attributes of Christ are only available as you submit to Him as ruler of all.

Whether you recognize His kingdom or not, His rules are the ultimate authority. While God may allow you to have your way, you will find that your way will end in destruction. Why not submit your life to Christ and faithfully serve His kingdom? It is the only kingdom that will remain standing in the end.

### Focus on Self

God will allow you to try to rule your own life, but you will experience eternal failures. Since you cannot see the future, you cannot know if you are right or wrong in your judgments. Only God knows the future and sets the rules. To enjoy His benefits, all you have to do is to obey His rules day by day. As you do, you will experience what it means to serve the only One who has a throne in heaven.

**April 1**

### The Spirit Gives Life

*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.*

**John 6:63**

### Focus on Christ

Can you imagine a person functioning without a soul? What would it be like to have a body of flesh without a soul? A physical body without a spirit has no spiritual purpose. There would be no experience of real love or joy, kindness or gentleness, just reactions to the physical world around you. How boring.

If Christ only used His fleshly body as a human to attempt to provide salvation, then it would have been incomplete. His physical body is not what gives life; it is His Spirit that gives life. The Spirit quickens the body to respond and love God with the whole heart, soul, and mind. Without the Holy Spirit, you would not know how to experience the things of God, because they are outside the limits of a physical body.

The disciples were concerned about Jesus' teaching that "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). Jesus was not talking about literally eating His flesh and drinking His blood. That is obvious when He says, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." Jesus wants you to take Him into your life spiritually as though you are eating the Bread of life. Only the Holy Spirit can give you the life needed to function in the spirit.

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Notice that Jesus said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” His message was spiritual in nature. If you are to understand spiritual things, then you must use spiritual terms. “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:9-11). You cannot know the things of God without God’s Spirit guiding and teaching you. Only as you abide in Christ and His Words abide in you will you understand the real issues of life.

### Focus on Self

How do you function? Do you depend on the Holy Spirit to guide, teach, and give you instructions of how to live for Christ? Or do you depend on the human senses to try and interpret the spiritual life? If you depend on self, then you will be limited to only knowing things about physical events on this earth. When you deny self, take up your cross, and follow Jesus, you will understand things outside of the physical realm. Living by human intelligence alone is limited, short-sighted, and shallow. Dive into the deep things of God, which is what real life is all about.

April 2

### Ministers of Life

*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*

2 Corinthians 3:5-6

### Focus on Christ

How talented are you? If your close friends rated your abilities, what job would they say you are capable of performing? Could you give leadership to thousands of people? Would you be better at directing the operations of a large factory? Where did you receive your training? These questions are just the beginning of discovery into your talents, skills, and abilities.

Paul said that the sufficiency needed for the ministry of the new covenant does not come from us but from God. In fact, God is the only One who can equip us to do kingdom ministry. He equips our deficiencies and makes them sufficient for doing things His Way instead of our way.

The work of the ministry is difficult, if not impossible, to do with human abilities. If you try to do ministry with human ways, then you will have to devise laws and rules to make sure everything is done

properly. Doing spiritual ministry with legalism kills the spirit of the work. When you follow rules instead of focusing on a relationship with Jesus, there is no life or love. This results in serving a religion, not a Person. When you follow rules you seldom look into the real meaning behind the rule. Jesus brought a new covenant through His personal sacrifice to cleanse you from sin and thereby give you a full, abundant, and meaningful life.

The law was given in the Old Testament to condemn sin by bringing guilt. The law was written on stone, but the new covenant is written on your heart by the Holy Spirit. You are guided by the leadership of the Spirit of Christ living in you. This life is not cold and hard but warm and vibrant. This new covenant is identified by the Love of Christ. While sin must be condemned, the Love of Christ redeems.

**Focus on Self**

If you try to do kingdom work with the world's methods, then you will only draw attention to self. This is what many desire. They want to be known for what they do. However, when you recognize your deficiencies and allow God to make you sufficient for ministry, all glory goes to God. Serve Him and you will experience life.

**April 3**

**The Eyes of the Lord**

*Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it for the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.*

**1 Peter 3:11-12**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you want to experience the blessings of God? Do you want Christ to be open to listening to your prayers and have Him be on your side? All of this is possible as you obey Him and walk in His Ways.

The benefit of seeking peace is that the eyes of God are on you. This means that He looks favorably on your life and listens to your prayers with intent to answer. God will come to the defense of those who pursue peace and righteousness.

What a comfort to know that God watches over the righteous. Nothing can destroy those who have God on their side. "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11). Live right, pursue peace, and God will provide in due time. He will not withhold good things from those who love and follow Christ.

What does God do to those who pursue evil? His face is against them. What strong language! You do not want to have God in opposition to you. God will bring His Power and Might against those who pursue evil and thoroughly defeat them.

## Gifts From God

It is much easier to pursue peace and righteousness than to have God pursue you for doing evil. Follow Christ, learn His Ways, and enjoy the blessings of God.

### Focus on Self

If you seek selfish desires, then you will not follow the Ways of God. This is dangerous for the believer. God wants to bless His children for righteousness, but He will discipline them severely for following their selfish ways.

April 4

### God's Purpose Cannot Be Stopped

*The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand...For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?"*

Isaiah 14:24, 27

### Focus on Christ

How powerful are you? What can you make happen? How much power do you have to stop something from happening? Do you believe you are smarter than everyone else? If not, then why do you tend to think everyone is wrong if they don't agree with you?

When God purposes something to come to pass, no one can stop Him. Remember we are referring to the God who simply spoke and created the universe. Nothing is too large or small for Him.

Yet, finite, limited, and small people think they are the center of the universe. How misguided is that thinking? It is corrupt, sinful, and godless thinking that brings a person to believe this deceptive lie. God is above, below, around, and at the center of the universe. People cannot tell God what to do or ultimately refuse Him when He has purposed the direction for their lives.

No matter how many adversaries you have, they cannot overcome God's Purposes. They may fight, argue, and complain about His direction, but they cannot change His Will. They may delay obedience, but they cannot stop God. If only they could see the future, then they would know their resistance is pointless, ineffective, and worthless. If your plans are against God's Way, then your plans will be destroyed and His plan will succeed.

### Focus on Self

Why would anyone not want to be on God's agenda? It is sad to say that people with little character believe that they are the most important thing in the world. This amounts to little people with big egos. There is coming a day of accountability when even the sinful self will see what a mess selfishness has made. The solution is simple. Just agree with what God has said: "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand" (Isaiah 14:24).

April 5

### The Fear and Knowledge of God

*If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.*

Proverbs 2:4-5

#### Focus on Christ

What would you do in order to find a hidden treasure? Suppose someone gave you a map with a general location of a treasure but told you that it was buried twenty feet deep. Would you put in the effort to dig for it? It would be tedious, hard work, but anything worth finding is worth the work.

To find silver or other precious metals is difficult. In order to find silver and gold, people have to be willing to endure the pain and labor required to find and extract the metal. Miners get up early and work until they are exhausted. They search through every vein that shows a glimpse of prospect. Yet, it seems that many times believers are not as interested in putting forth this same effort to search for the riches of Christ (see Ephesians 3:8). To understand the fear of God requires spending time in God's Word, praying in faith, and worshipping Him with all your heart. This does not happen in a few minutes. It requires effort, time, and sincere effort to build a relationship with Christ.

Often people of the past buried their treasure to protect their valued asset. If a person died and did not leave the location of the treasure, then all would be lost; but, if someone found it in a field, then they might try to buy the field in order to gain the treasure. Jesus said, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" (Matthew 13:44). If you knew there was a hidden treasure in a relationship with Christ, then you would seek it and find the fear and the knowledge of God.

What do you seek? What are you willing to dig for? If you seek Christ, then you must dig for truth in His Word, walk in the Ways of His Spirit, and obey what He is teaching. The treasures will never be found if you do not obey the last thing He taught you. As you uncover truth and respond in obedience, God reveals more truth. The knowledge of God will become clearer as you dig deeper into your relationship with Christ.

When you discover a consistent walk with Christ, you will understand the reverence you should give to Him. This reverence for Christ brings you to deep worship. The result of worship is a deep knowledge of God. These two work together. Reverence brings knowledge, and knowledge of God brings deeper reverence for Christ.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self is focused on sleep, rest, and relaxation. Seeking Christ is focused on discovering truth in God's Word, prayer, and deep worship. If you give in to self, then you will not seek hidden treasure. If you seek Christ, then you will discover the fear and knowledge of God. Who wouldn't want to find these incredible riches?

April 6

## Share Christ's Wisdom

*Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 10:27-28

## Focus on Christ

Suppose you were given a secret message that could change people's lives for the better. What would you do with the information? Would you keep it to yourself for fear that others would not accept you if you shared? If you knew that sharing this message could bring freedom to others but harm to yourself, what would you do?

What qualifies you to hear from God? Having a clean heart, abiding in Christ, being in fellowship with Him, and walking in obedience. Why would God reveal something to you? Because He knows what you need and what others need to hear. These two focuses are present when God speaks.

Christ speaks to you in private to reveal to you the message you are to proclaim in public. What Jesus says in your heart, you must also speak and share with others. The message is not for you alone. If God speaks and you don't share, then no one will know the incredible truth that He entrusted to you. But, when He speaks, His Holy Spirit will guide you in the way and the timing to deliver the word.

Sharing helps you drive the truth deeper into your own heart and mind. There is a saying that states, "Impression without expression leads to depression." If you fail to share what God has placed in your life, then you become unproductive.

Jesus spoke to His disciples about persecution. He said not to fear those who can kill the body. If others stop you from sharing, then they cannot stop the truth of God that has already come from your mouth. If the disciples were killed for sharing, then God's Word would still be alive.

People connect to your relationship with Jesus, not your knowledge. Just hearing someone speak out of knowledge will not move your heart; but, when it is obvious that a person has been with God and heard from Him, it will be clear when they speak. There is great power and authority when a believer is enabled by the Spirit to deliver God's message. The result will be what God has declared: "So shall My word

be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

**Focus on Self**

Self doesn't care about others. What happens if God speaks and you are unwilling to share? There is no deepening. You suffer but so do others when you don't share what God said. You are responsible to share with others what God is teaching you. Wisdom from God is not just for you; it is a gift to the body of Christ.

**April 7**

**Attacked By the World, But Not Defeated**

*And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

**Romans 5:3-4**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you enjoy going through difficult times? Not many do. If you are going to suffer in difficulties, would you rather suffer because of doing the right thing or for doing the wrong thing?

This world brings so many trials to life. As a believer, you will have to face the fact that the world hates the things of God. If you are practicing the Ways of God, then you will face hardships from the world. Some of those trials come from those who are closest to you. These trials seem to be the hardest because you don't expect friends and family to be against you, but a call to follow Christ is a call to be misunderstood. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). When you do not love the things of the world, those whose minds are more in line with the world than with God will misunderstand your way of life. This results in tribulations.

However, these kinds of tribulations can fill your life with joy. Why wouldn't hardship bring joy to you when you know that it comes because of your love for God and His Ways? Wouldn't you rejoice when you know that you love God so much that the world mistreats you? These kinds of trials have another benefit. They produce perseverance. Perseverance is a blessing in the midst of trials. If you have to go through trials, then you need endurance. This endurance is not just a strong stance, but a patient endurance. Spiritual endurance is not the result of a stubborn heart but a fruit of the Spirit of Christ giving you what you need to go through difficult times. Only God can grant you a spirit that glories in trials and produces a patient endurance that will withstand any injustice.

Through these difficult circumstances of life, God produces character. This character shows a maturing faith in Jesus and His teach-



## Gifts From God

ings. You know you have this character when the integrity of heart you display is to continue to live a righteous lifestyle while others are trying to stop you from following God with all your heart. When you continue to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul, no matter what or who is trying to defeat you, a mature and approved faith is evident.

The blessed life is a life producing a joyful hope, knowing that the eternal salvation granted to you by God is worth far more than any difficulty brought on by this world. Though Jesus was not accepted by this world, that did not detract Him from loving His Heavenly Father. Trials did not move Him further away from God, but they drew Him closer to the Father. You should also be drawn closer to God when you go through all kinds of trials for your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self avoids conflicts and trials by taking the easiest road possible. Self would rather have the acceptance of the world than conflict with the world, but to love God with all your heart will result in the hatred of the world. Wouldn't you rather be hated by the world than be unapproved by God? Trials do not seem as difficult when you are in love with God, His Word, and His Ways. Seek God first, and He will grant you the character and perseverance for the trials of the world.

April 8

### The Spirit Led Jesus

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

Matthew 4:1

### Focus on Christ

What or who leads you? Has a friend ever invited you to do something that you knew was outside your standards? Maybe you knew what they wanted you to do was wrong, but there was something exciting about trying it anyway. Your desires overcame your knowledge of right and wrong and you decided to follow your emotions instead of your mind. This is very dangerous.

Jesus was led by the Spirit, not by human desires. This is what makes the difference in a spiritual battle. Most believers experience what James wrote about: "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14). Jesus could not be drawn away by His own desires because He had no sinful nature. He was tempted by Satan. He was drawn into battle by the Spirit.

Make sure that you consistently walk in the Spirit so that, when the battle of temptation comes you can continue to walk in the Spirit. Protection from the corruption in this world is available and powerful when you are walking in obedience with the power of the Spirit.

Satan will find your weakness and make you an offer. Since you do not know when that will come, you must stay suited up for the attack. Jesus was led by the Spirit and His Mind was full of Truth. Satan

shoots his fiery arrows of temptation at you. The question is do you have any arrows to shoot back? The Word of God is the necessary protection you need. If your mind is not filled with God's Word, then you have no arrows for your bow. If you are not continuing daily in God's Word, then you are living outside of God's Protection and will be drawn away by your own desires.

If you resist the devil like Jesus did, then Satan will flee from you. Christ used the Word to resist. He was determined to serve God and Him only (see Matthew 4:10). The Word Jesus used was from Deuteronomy 6:13. Jesus knew and used the Word and so should you. When you are led by the Spirit, it is because you continue in God's Word.

**Focus on Self**

Self tries to make its own way by its own strength, but self does not have enough power to overcome evil desires. It needs a source stronger than human thinking, physical strength, and moral direction. Self needs the power of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit to resist the devil.

**April 9**

**Created By The Power of His Word**

*(as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did...*

**Romans 4:17**

**Focus on Christ**

Are you a creative person? Do you have the ability to create something out of nothing?

It is amazing that God created the world by His spoken word. Man cannot create anything from nothing. Man may plant a seed and watch it grow, but he cannot create a seed from nothing to bring a new plant into existence. God can breath and bring forth life; man can only live if God gives him one more breath. How awesome is it that God can bring life to deadness and make something exist that never existed?

God promised Abraham and Sarah a son. Though Abraham was one hundred and Sarah was ninety, God's promise became reality. It seemed impossible to Abraham and Sarah, but nothing is impossible for God. When God promises something, He calls those things which do not exist into existence.

What is there in your life that seems impossible? Have you taken this impossible task to God in prayer? You may have done that many times. If God promised you what you are asking for, then keep asking, seeking, and knocking. He will bring it to pass in His timing. God said to Abraham, "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you

## Gifts From God

shall be a father of many nations” (Genesis 17:4). God did not say that Abraham might be a father but that he **would** be a father. When God speaks, it will come to pass. The heavens and everything on earth cannot ignore the Voice of God. When He wills something to come to pass, it will be done. People, places, and things may groan and complain, but they cannot resist the Will of God.

Pray that God receives the greatest glory by how He brings things from non-existence to existence. Manley Beasley once said, “Pray for it to be so, even though it is not so, in order for it to be so!” Nothing is too big for God to accomplish. When you cannot understand how something can come into existence, step into faith and ask God with a believing heart. He will bring His Will into your life.

### Focus on Self

When you are discouraged and cannot see how something God promised you could really happen, do not rely on self to keep believing. Go to Christ and ask Him to increase your faith and strengthen your prayer life. If God spoke to you, then He will complete what He has begun. “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ...” (Philippians 1:6).

April 10

### Created in Christ

*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

**Ephesians 2:10**

### Focus on Christ

What does it mean to be created in Christ Jesus? Does it simply mean that when you were born again, you truly become a new creation that has no resemblance to the former life? Does it mean that you are created in a new light to do good works for others instead of focusing on yourself?

God is working with people to make new people out of dead people. His plan of redemption is to transform or create new people. This work can only be done in Christ Jesus. Nothing else can take something dead and make it alive. When Christ does this, He does not simply take a dead body and make it physically alive, but He transforms the entire inner being. He transforms the mind, the emotions, and the inner spirit to be conformed to His image. This change is so drastic that it can be compared to the act of creation when man was made from nothing. When Christ transforms a person, it looks like a whole new created being. This conversion is one that makes a new person have a new mind, new heart, new feelings, new expressions, new motives, new purposes, and new beginnings. If you knew this person both before and after the conversion, then you would hardly recognize that

the latter was the same person as the former. When the old life passes away, it is as though the old never existed. God makes something brand new out of something that needs to be changed.

Old ways that people once had will pass away. Former sins that once were enjoyed are now repulsive. Bad habits, wrong motives, and foul actions melt away. The love of the world and sin pass away. People are so changed by the creative work of Christ that you cannot even imagine their former lifestyle. God changes them to be a wonderful expression of the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Anyone who watches their life would want to imitate them as they imitate Christ.

When Christ transforms a person, He doesn't give grace in order for that person to do nothing. He didn't save you to be good for no reason. You were created for good works in Christ Jesus. He will lead you to do good works and produce spiritual fruit. These good works will not gain you salvation, but salvation will produce good works. New desires to serve God with all your heart is now the motivating force for your new life.

### Focus on Self

Self will always strive to take the easiest road possible. A new creation in Christ will always take the highest road possible. No more giving in to the fleshly desires of this world. A person created in Christ Jesus will love righteousness, truth, and obedience. Give up the old selfish life and give in to a life in Christ that is ready to perform good works and bring glory to God.

**April 11**

### From Rags to Riches

*But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags...*

**Isaiah 64:6**

*"Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."*

**Isaiah 1:18**

### Focus on Christ

How righteous do you think you are? Think of the godliest person you know. Someone you have respected for years and has a consistent walk with God. How do you measure up to their spiritual life? Most of us would say we fall short of the one we respect.

What about Christ? How would you compare your life to His? Though He is perfect, you are encouraged by Him to strive toward that perfection. You will never achieve perfection on earth, but you are to push toward living as closely to God as possible. Why do you need the power of the Holy Spirit? You need the power to live a life striving for perfection.

## Gifts From God

Isaiah states, “our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 54:6). Imagine that! Take all the best things of your life—your attempts to do good, your work toward living a life that you can be proud of, your love being expressed to friends and family, your desire to live above reproach, and your efforts to live a godly life—and you have nothing that will get you into heaven. Only Christ can give you an entrance into heaven. This gift of eternal life is only available by the perfect blood of the Lamb of God.

So, if your righteousness is as filthy rags, what do you think your sin looks like to God? This is the reason why your ways are not acceptable to God. Christ is the only One who can approach God on your behalf and make you acceptable. “Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Only God can take the filthiness of your sin and cleanse it white as snow. What a wonderful blessing! Can you imagine that? Christ is willing to pay the price for guilty sinners to be cleansed and made right before God. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...” (Ephesians 1:7). God can take our rags and turn them to riches.

### Focus on Self

Self tends to think it is worthy of the best things in life, but God shows us that without self being saved by the grace of the Savior, even our best is as filthy rags. You must learn to be grateful that Jesus lived a perfect life, died for your sins, was raised from the dead, and sits at the right hand of the Heavenly Father to make intercession for you. What an incredible blessing! You do not have to measure up to the righteousness of Christ. He does that for you as He lives in you.

April 12

### Righteousness and Peace

*Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed.*

Psalm 85:10

### Focus on Christ

What brings peace to your life? Is it a place? Is it a person? Have you ever experienced the peace that only comes from Jesus?

Peace is a state of mind that almost everyone wants to enjoy. With all the worries of this world, it is certainly a benefit to have peace of mind and spirit. Peace from the world comes in many forms. People look for peace in capsules, from relationships with people, by getting away from a stressful to a peaceful place, and by staying busy.

One place you will definitely not find peace is in the presence of an ungodly lifestyle. Unrighteousness and peace do not fit together. When a believer is walking in the Ways of God, “the peace of God,

which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Many people realize this but do not recognize that the opposite happens when you walk in unrighteousness.

Christ brings a peace that this world does not offer. He told His disciples that His Peace is a gift. Where do you find the peace that only Christ provides? Peace is a by-product of a righteous lifestyle. God does not want His children to be at peace when they are living in sin. That is one of the effects of having His Spirit living in you. When you sin, you are convicted and move into uneasiness, turmoil, and discomfort. This is for your protection. Christ wants you to connect comfort, rest, and peace to righteous living. This comfort urges and motivates you to pursue righteous living and avoid unrighteousness. You will find true peace in the presence of Christ, but Christ is not found in the presence of sin.

Righteousness and peace have kissed. What does that mean? A kiss means to show affection, honor, and submission. When these two elements meet, they simply fit together. When you find righteousness, you will find peace. Where you find peace, you will find righteousness. They submit to and are affectionate toward one another. Do you really want to live in peace? You can do so as you submit to the Ways of Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self seeks peace by desiring everyone to submit to its ways. If only everyone would treat self as a king, then self would be happy. At least, that is what self thinks. If self would deny its desires and submit to Christ, then real peace would be recognized, appropriated, and experienced. Peace comes from a deep and submissive relationship with Christ, not from a selfish lifestyle.

**April 13**

### Rest for the Weary

*“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”*

**Matthew 11:28-30**

### Focus on Christ

Are you tired of struggles in your life? Are you physically tired? Emotionally tired? Spiritually tired? There are all kinds of ways to be tired. You can be physically tired, emotionally tired, mentally tired, and spiritually tired. When you are physically tired, then you need physical rest. When you are emotionally tired, you need the pressures of life to be lifted from you for a while. If you are mentally tired, then you need some lighter moments in life to relieve you of problem

## Gifts From God

solving. If you are spiritually tired, then you need rest for your soul that only Jesus can provide.

Are you looking for rest for your soul? Christ will give you rest, but you must meet His conditions for rest. Many have said that the Christian life is hard. According to Jesus, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Christians are confused about God's Way being difficult. While it is true that walking in the Spirit of Christ does not remove difficulties, it does give you a new way to face the struggles. You will have a new resource to deal with the difficulties when you put on Christ's yoke and learn from Him. Learning His Way will give you a restful approach to life. While it does not mean you will never get tired, it does mean that He will restore your spiritual tiredness as you rest and learn from Him.

What many think is difficult in the Christian life is really resistance to what God has asked them to do. When the believer resists obeying God, the yoke is no longer easy but difficult. Why? Because you are pulling against Him instead of submitting in the harness with Him. Walking in the Spirit is easy with Christ, but impossible without Him. Notice that when you are in the yoke with Him, you learn His Ways and find rest in Him. When you attempt to do spiritual work with human strength, it will wear you out.

Jesus' burden is light. Put your trust in God and then don't worry. That is easy to say but difficult to live out. Jesus wants you to come to Him for rest. You must plan to come to Him, escape from the world for a little while, and meditate on Him and His Word. God's Word will then refresh the mind. Notice that Jesus said He is gentle and lowly in heart. What benefit is it to be with a gentle person? You can rest when you are with a gentle person. If you are with a stressed and abrasive personality, then it seems like hard work. When you spend time with a gentle and humble person, you find rest for your spirit and help for your mind to relax. Be careful who you spend time with, because their spirit can drain you if they are not also in the yoke with Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self is the greatest detriment to resting in Christ. Self always gets in the way and tries to solve all the problems of life on its own. This is so tiring. Learn to lean on Christ who can give you rest. How do you lean on Him? By learning His Ways, spending time with Him, reading His Word, and obeying whatever He guides you to do.

**April 14**

### Clean Hands, Pure Heart, and Special Blessings

*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*

**Psalm 24:3-5**



**Focus on Christ**

What do you think it would take to be able to walk into the presence of God? When you ask people this question you will hear many answers. Some say that they have lived a fairly good and productive life that surely counts for something. Others focus on their religious pedigree, reciting how everyone in their family has been faithful in attending church for years. Who can really stand in the Holy place with God?

The only person who can stand in God’s holy place is one who has clean hands and a pure heart. First, this person has done no violence or caused any wrong doing toward other people. Second, this person is one who does not worship anything or anyone but God. To have a pure heart requires a total abandonment of self and a complete reliance on God. You cannot measure your heart with your own thinking. To find out if you have a pure heart requires God to judge your thoughts, actions, and motives. Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). That means you cannot know your own heart. To see the truth of your heart, you must use God’s Word as a mirror to your soul. Look into God’s Word and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you any wrong way in your life. As He convinces you of wrong thoughts, actions, or motives, confess it as wrong; ask for godly sorrow over it; and ask for forgiveness, cleansing, and empowerment that will bring you to life change. Only when your life is living a repentant lifestyle will you know for certain that you have a pure heart.

When you live this way, you receive the blessings of God. God will bless your life as you live with clean hands, a pure heart, and a devoted life. Living with an honest heart results in God gifting to you all kinds of spiritual blessings. Christ will give you assurance, hope, love, perseverance, peace, and thousands of other righteous rewards as you walk in His Ways. God does not reward a sinful person with righteous rewards. Rather, He brings conviction and discipline.

What will it take for you to receive special blessings from God? Is there anything in your life that is not pleasing to God? If so, repent and begin living a righteous life that will give evidence you have repented. Only then, will the blessings of God become evident in your life.

**Focus on Self**

Self has so many idols that keep it from focusing on the Ways of God. Your idol may be money, retirement, a life of ease, recognition, intelligence, or control. Whatever it is, an idol will keep you from ascending into the presence of God and experiencing the blessings of God. If you want to stand in a holy place with God, then get rid of your selfishness and walk in the Ways of God.

# Gifts From God

April 15

## Are You Pursuing God or the World?

*And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."*

**Genesis 32:28**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been given a nickname? If so, this nickname may not always accurately represent who you are. It is only an attempt to represent you and may stick with you for life.

Jacob made a name for himself. He was a supplanter, that is, one who caught the heel of Esau at birth and positioned himself as first. He was a self-seeking person who would always look for a way to put himself into a higher position. He did it with his brother twice.

Jacob struggled with his brother for a birthright. God sent a man to grab hold of Jacob. Though Jacob had pursued others, now God was pursuing Jacob. In this situation, Jacob wrestled, struggled, and contended with God. Do you ever struggle with God? Maybe you wrestle in prayer with God and keep pursuing Him for your answer. Jesus said to ask, seek, and knock in persistence through prayer (see Luke 11:5-9). In fact, you are to keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

Jacob was defeated by God. He came to his senses and realized he was seeking the wrong blessing. He was pursuing a position in this world and realized he needed a position with God. He would not let God loose. What are you pursuing? The world or a relationship with Christ? You can have either one but not both.

Jacob was renamed Israel, contender with God. If God renamed you, what would your new name mean? Jacob had God's blessing and power but was forever crippled by God as a constant reminder of who was in charge. No longer could he run ahead of God. He had to lean on God for every need in life.

### Focus on Self

Self is so proud that it believes it can win out over God, but pride will blind you from the truth. God can quickly disable you, break your pride, give you new dependence, and set new direction for your life. Pursue God. Don't let go of Him. His victory may reveal a weakness in self, but the result is a strong relationship with Christ.

April 16

### God Knows All

*You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.*

**Psalm 139:3-4**

#### Focus on Christ

How attentive are you to details? Do you think about every action? Can you judge how to shape the next month or year? It is interesting to note that no one on earth has ever accurately predicted the major social events, wars, or natural disasters.

God is acquainted with all your ways. That is comprehensive and hard for people to believe. He knows everything about your past, present, and future. It is awesome to think that He knew it all before you were ever born. He knows all about your busy day. He knows what captures your attention. He knows what you think about when you come to the end of your day. He knows what you say and what you think. Nothing is hidden from God.

Knowing all these things is the very reason He sent His Son, Jesus. God knows your needs and knew ahead of time that you would need a Savior. Every human is cursed with sin. This curse began at the fall of man in the garden of Eden. God knows that sin will be a battle for you to overcome. In fact, He knew that you could not overcome sin. That is why He sent His Son for you.

When you become a believer and Christ becomes the Lord of your life, He is personally available in time of need. Christ knew you before you received Him, He knew your future struggles. Now that He is Lord of your life those facts do not change. He still knows your needs and your struggles. The relationship that you form with Jesus should become your safety and your protection. Because Jesus knows everything about you, you need to have confidence to approach Him at all times. When you hold back on Christ, it only hinders you, because He already knows everything that is happening. Dive into your relationship with Christ and be fully committed to His Ways.

#### Focus on Self

Self wants to hide its problems and handle them on its own. This is such a hard way to live because when it comes to sin, self does not have an escape. Only Christ can save self from its sin. Christ knows you and He loves you. This should drive you to rest and trust in His Ways.

# Gifts From God

April 17

## Pursue God

*Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*

**Psalm 51:6**

### Focus on Christ

Is your mind and heart focused on God? Do you desire to have the Mind of Christ? Two things are required to really get to know God: a clean and clear mind and a pure heart.

When David committed sin, he knew better. He already had knowledge of God in his mind, but he did it anyway. When you sin, your mind gives in to corruption. David saw the awfulness of his sin because his mind knew it was wrong to do what he had done. To sin in ignorance is still to sin, but to sin against God willfully, when your mind knows it is wrong brings awful results.

David also sinned against God from the depth of his soul. He had a wonderful relationship with God. His heart knew of the Love of God. Yet, he sinned because his relationship with God had become weak. Your relationship with Christ will become weak too if you do not guard your heart. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). When you don't spend time in the Word your heart will be weakened toward Christ and strengthened toward the works of the flesh.

David realized he must desire truth in his inward parts, his mind. Truth clears and purges the mind focusing it on the Ways of God. David also understood that wisdom would form in the hidden parts, the soul or the depths of the heart. Knowledge in the mind is not enough. When the knowledge of God is applied to the heart, wisdom develops that will give guidance to your practical life.

A clear head and a pure heart show the inner beauty of a person. The Scripture states, "...rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:4).

### Focus on Self

Self is lazy and wants to put no effort into learning the Ways of God and applying them to the depths of the soul. Gaining knowledge for job improvement is reasonable to self, but reading God's Word is unnecessary work to the foolish of heart. Give up any selfish ways. Repent of avoiding the pursuit of Christ. Desire truth and wisdom with all your heart and mind, and you will begin to understand the abundant life.

April 18

**Prudent Thinking is Useless**

*For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

**1 Corinthians 1:19-20**

**Focus on Christ**

How wise are you? Maybe you say that you are not that wise. Most people think they are very wise. After all, who's advice do you follow most often? Most likely you like your own thinking more than that of others. That is good if your thinking is based on the Word of God. However, how much pride does it take to think it is not worth the time and effort to learn from God because you already know what to do?

Paul quoted Isaiah in this passage. The people in Jerusalem claimed to know God and His Ways, but they were not worshipping God from their hearts. "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men..." (Isaiah 29:13). They had moved away from a heart relationship with God and moved toward obeying laws made by man. They developed a man-made religion. Therefore, God judged them and removed their wisdom to stop them from pursuing their own ways. When their attitudes toward God moved from a fear of God to a fear of breaking their rules, they lost true wisdom that comes from abiding with God.

How many in our day have pursued their own thinking as opposed to the Word of God? Many nominal Christians think they know better than God what to do to preserve their own life. This is short-sighted. One day they will wake up and realize how much time and wisdom they have wasted and lost. Christ wants you to have a full, abundant, and meaningful life. Life is meaningless without the Wisdom of God. Paul said that God would bring the understanding of the prudent to nothing.

Prudent people are so cautious about the future that they fail to make the most of the present. They are so guarded and watchful that they do not depend on faith in God but trust in their own thinking. This is a boring, cautious, and fearful life that does not understand that it is more exciting to trust and obey God. Think about it. Depending on God is more promising than depending on the stock market, the next elected politicians, or a secure job.

God makes the wisdom of the world disappear in the life of His children in order to draw them back to Himself. He will not allow worldly wisdom to take the place of a relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. God is not dependent on the wisdom of man. He created all

## Gifts From God

wisdom. If you really want to be wise, then get to know the God of the Universe. Why do you think God sent His Son to die on the Cross to provide salvation for you? The world thinks the cross is foolish, but the cross will put all their wisdom to shame. One day, all will see the truth, and then judgment will come. Just remember, when God brings judgment, your wisdom vanishes.

### Focus on Self

Self-thinking is godless thinking! Christ came to bring His Truth into your life. Don't give up eternal, perfect, complete Truth for limited, shallow, human thinking. Reach out to God and ask Him for His Wisdom. When you desire a heart relationship with Him, you will see real truth and direction that will make sense for the first time in your life. Only then will you see that the former self thinking you had was so cautious that it left God out of the process. How sad to live a half-full, limited, meaningless life.

April 19

### Bought By The Precious Blood

*And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

1 Peter 1:17-19

### Focus on Christ

What do people think is the most valuable thing on earth? Some would say diamonds, but most think about gold. Many think about the value of pure gold, the rarity of it, and the hard work it takes to procure it. Others think of the streets of gold in heaven. Silver is another valued ore that people seek. The word *silver* occurs 320 times in the Scripture. The word *gold* occurs 451 times. People from all ages see these precious metals as desired possessions.

You were not bought with silver or gold. Why? These are corruptible things. How can you exchange a life for these corruptible objects? You should serve God as your Father, because He will judge without any partiality according to your faith not your work. Christ is looking for the trust and reverent fear of the Heavenly Father. Only those who have placed their faith in His Son Jesus Christ would live according to a deep respect for God. Living this way reveals understanding of the price that was paid for your soul to be set free.

If someone kidnapped your child, then they would probably ask you to pay a ransom. The kidnapper would want as much money or gold as possible. You would do everything you could to pay the ran-

som. Though you pay the ransom, there is no assurance that your loved one will be released. Gold does not guarantee redemption.

God did not offer gold for the redemption of your life but offered His Son's precious blood. Precious means costly, more costly than all the silver and gold in the world. His blood was given to pay your ransom and free you from your captivity to sin. Gold cannot buy salvation, grace, love, joy, peace, or any other fruit of the Spirit of Christ. Jesus Christ could pay the ransom. His life was perfect in every way, and His blood was pure and represented a spotless perfect lamb given in sacrifice for you. Did you catch that? He gave Himself for you who were living a useless and corruptible lifestyle. The hymn *At Calvary* states it well: "Oh the love that drew salvation's plan, Oh the grace that brought it down to man, at Calvary!"

**Focus on Self**

All the money in the world cannot buy the salvation of God. Those who think their money and good lifestyle is enough, cannot buy eternal life, but Christ will pay the ransom for all those awful sinners if they place their trust in Him. If you deny self, see your sin, and turn in repentance and faith toward Jesus, then He will pay your ransom and set you free.

**April 20**

**Be on the Right Side**

*"For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."*

**1 Peter 3:12**

**Focus on Christ**

Who do you listen to for advice? Do you listen to people who disagree with your beliefs, values, and practical ways of living? Or do you listen to those who trust in the same things which you trust? You will not follow the advice of someone who lives by a totally different standard than your own.

Why would God listen to your requests? Does He see that you are living by His standards? According to this passage, God looks at those living a righteous life and listens to their prayers. This person doesn't have a perfect life, but is living more consistently by the Ways of Christ than the ways of evil.

When God's eyes are on you, He is looking on as your Protector. The idea is that He is constantly parenting, looking over every aspect of your life. He is your Provider for everything you need to live according to His Word and His Ways. To watch over someone means to carefully observe the details. Christ is interested in your life. He wants an abiding relationship with you. He has called you friend. His Love is so deep, caring, and committed that He listens to the prayers of the righteous and helps them.



## Gifts From God

“But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.” That is a dangerous place to be. God will pursue and destroy evil doers. To have His face against them means to have His anger and revenge pursuing them. You do not want to be on the wrong side of God. He will certainly judge evil.

You may think you are a good person; but if you are not obeying the Ways of God, then you are not righteous. If you ignore your relationship with Christ, then you are pursuing evil. Evil is not just doing bad things, but it is also ignoring right things. People think ignoring God’s Word is not really bad, but according to Jesus you cannot be His disciple if you do not continue in His Word (see John 8:31-32). Be careful about what you call good and evil. You better use God’s standard instead of your own.

### Focus on Self

Thinking self is safe because you don’t commit what you call “bad sins” is dangerous. God’s care is for the righteous, and His judgment is on evil. Make sure you understand the difference. Ignorance of God’s Word and His Ways does not excuse wrong action. Walk in His Ways and you can relax. Why? Because He will watch over you.

April 21

### God’s Thoughts Are Not Our Thoughts

*“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”*

Isaiah 55:8-9

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been stuck on a thought that you could not let go? Maybe the thought troubled all your thinking. Maybe the thought of it scared you and made you worry that something negative might happen. Maybe you were afraid that sharing this thought would push people away. You knew your thought was wrong, but you could not stop thinking about it. This negative thinking turned into negative feelings. Then, you found out that it wasn’t God’s thought; it was a lie.

The natural thoughts of man and woman are not God’s thoughts. We may have been made in His image; but, when sin took effect, our thoughts were corrupted. God’s Thoughts and Ways for dealing with sin are so different from the way you would deal with sin.

When God thinks about our sin, His first thought is about Love. His Love has no limits and His depth of love is immeasurable. Your love depends on your feelings and how well you are treated. Once again, His Thoughts are not your thoughts. His Love caused Him to give the life of His Son Jesus Christ to save you from sin. You tend to hate those who sin against you. In fact, if your thoughts are not God’s Thoughts, then your thoughts will be sinful thoughts.

When God thinks about sin, He also thinks about forgiveness. Your thoughts concerning sin are full of unforgiveness. His Thoughts and Ways far surpass yours. You tend to want revenge for wrong actions toward you. God offers forgiveness and cleansing of your sin in response to your mistreatment toward Him and others. Your forgiveness is limited with conditions, but God's forgiveness is unlimited and free.

The Cross of Jesus would not be your way. You would not think of dying to provide a right relationship with God. God's Thoughts are full of mercy and grace. If people harmed you and your children, then you would not naturally turn to mercy and pardon. God did.

To understand the higher Ways of God, you must recognize that human ways have low standards. Comparing these two will help you see the superior Ways of God. So what should you do? Forsake your ways and learn the Ways of Christ by developing a deep relationship with Him. His Holy Spirit will guide you into living out God's Ways.

### **Focus on Self**

Die to your selfish ways and thoughts. Quit living by lies and start living by the Truth! Faith based on truth will be victorious over negative thoughts and feelings. Since God's Thoughts and Ways are so much higher than yours, make the adjustment and move out of low and debased thinking by submitting your mind to Him.

**April 22**

### **Esteem Others**

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.*

**Philippians 2:3-4**

### **Focus on Christ**

Is it difficult for you to think first of others before taking care of your own needs? Why is it so difficult to put others first? Is it selfishness? Is it that you were not raised to think of others first?

The church at Philippi had a problem of self-centeredness. This is simply a problem of the work of the flesh. There are two reasons why a person cannot esteem others better than themselves.

The first reason is a lack of humility. If you do not have humility toward others, then you will not consider others first. This lack of humility is directly related to your walk with God. If you have pride in relation to people, then you do not have humility toward or from God. Only when you realize that God loves all people equally will you have humility. If you do not have humility, then you believe you are better than someone else.

The second reason is a lack of God's Love flowing through you. If you love God, then His Love in you will go out to others. When two

## Gifts From God

people love God, their friendship is deepened by His Love. It becomes easy to esteem others. If one of the friends is not experiencing a deep walk with God, then their friendship will have a lack of humility on one side resulting in a troubled relationship. Love deepens the abundant life and results in a deep godly desire to help others.

Do you have humility and love that esteem others better than self? If not, this can only be solved by repenting of a weak walk with God. When you repent, self disappears and love for others becomes obvious.

### Focus on Self

Self seeks its own comfort, and doesn't care about other's needs. This is a poor example of the Christian life. Focusing on self is sin. Love God and you will love others. Humble yourself and you will help others. Churches need a cleansing of selfishness and conceit.

April 23

### Spirit of the Mind

*...and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

**Ephesians 4:23-24**

### Focus on Christ

What does it mean to be renewed in the spirit of your mind? Does your mind have a separate spirit? Is it an attitude or a way of thinking? How does the mind affect the heart and practical living? Does the mind control the emotions and the will? What does this mean?

Renewing the spirit of your mind means nothing less than a radical change in your mental outlook and manner of life. When you know Christ personally, putting off the old self and putting on the new is a requirement. While the old nature is completely evil and sinful, the new nature is completely good. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). When you are born again, grace restores what sin has devastated, shattered, and destroyed. The idea is that you are to be renewed in the attitude of your mind or the spirit that is in your mind. The inner nature of a believer should have the mind of Christ so that the human thinking is renewed for righteous living. For Paul to say to the Ephesian church that they should be renewed in their minds indicates that as we go through life as believers there are times in which we need revival, or renewal.

The idea here is that you must continually be in a step-by-step process of steadily being renewed. This is done by putting on the new nature and taking off the old nature. You must have both. Imagine if all you did as a Christian was live by a list of don'ts. Or, if you only lived by a list of do's. You cannot have one or the other, you need both. The book of Ephesians gives many of both do's and don'ts. Think of it like

this. Imagine a pair of scissors being taken apart. Try using just one blade to cut a piece of paper. It will not work, you need both parts. When they work together, they perform their function perfectly.

You must put off the negative and put on the positive. There must be a balance of both. To say “yes” to Christ is to say “no” to Satan. True righteousness and holiness cancels out the willingness to be sinful. When you put on the attributes of Christ, it seems as though the works of the flesh melt away. But if you walk in the flesh, the works of the Spirit do not seem to be present. One thing is for certain, you must have the spirit of your mind renewed even as a believer, if you are to stay on the right path. When you are renewed, your mind will look like the Mind of Christ which is righteousness and holiness.

### Focus on Self

Self will lead you to practice deceitful desires. When self convinces you to go the ways of its own desires, the lusts of the flesh lead it to a place of destruction. Self does not see it that way. It thinks these lusts lead to joy. Not true. You must put on the new self. This self is created by God to think His Way instead of your way. You have been renewed, are being renewed, and will be renewed in the spirit of your mind, your heart, and your nature, if you walk with Christ.

**April 24**

### The Power of God

*And He will spread out His hands in their midst as a swimmer reaches out to swim, and He will bring down their pride together with the trickery of their hands.*

**Isaiah 25:11**

### Focus on Christ

How powerful is your God? Do you really believe that He can do anything? When you are burdened, distressed, and overwhelmed do you believe God can and will deliver you? Most believers think that God is all powerful. But when they are facing a strong enemy, do they really live as though He is all powerful?

You may encounter strong enemies, but none so powerful as God. If you want to be on the winning side, then be on God’s side. He alone knows all the strategic moves of the enemy. He also knows how to stay ahead of the attack or counterattack. Christ will never let the enemy defeat His church. “In You, O LORD, I put my trust; Let me never be put to shame” (Psalm 71:1).

God will spread out His Hands in the midst of your enemies. The analogy is of a powerful swimmer. A swimmer is continually active, always in motion. God is always at work in your life. Christ always protects those whose heart is to live, follow, and obey Him. Just as a swimmer has both sides active, the power of His Hands moves the troubles out of your way and makes a path for you to travel. His Hands will stretch out and give you a continual supply of His Strength.

## Gifts From God

When God stretches out His Hands, it is a picture of Christ being stretched out on the cross to supply your salvation. Then, when He is raised from the dead He shows those hands to Thomas, who doubted He was Christ. “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). These Hands supply all you need. The penalty of sin’s debt was paid and the provision for a Spirit-powered life was made available.

How much power does God have? Enough to bring death to life, weakness to strength, hate to love, bondage to freedom, and anxiety to peace.

### Focus on Self

Do you think you have the power to overcome all of life’s trials? If you do, then you believe you do not need God. Self will deceive self. The power you need in life does not come from finances, intelligence, or decision making. True power comes when you are in right relationship with the God of all power. Trust in Him. He will never let an obedient child be put to shame by the enemy.

April 25

### God Blesses On Behalf of the Faithful

*So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field.*

Genesis 39:5

### Focus on Christ

How does God use His servants? Does He bless only those who serve Him faithfully? Does He bless people who work hard, set their plans, and reach their goals? Does He bless those who are connected to His servants? Are there special blessings that God reserves for His faithful followers?

There are many examples of responsible servants and leaders in the Bible. Three stand out in the Scriptures. The first is Adam in the garden of Eden. God gave him the responsibility to oversee His wonderful creation. God rewarded Adam’s service with His Protection and Provisions. Can you imagine the intimate relationship between God and Adam before there was sin? What an incredible blessing God bestowed on him.

Another example of a faithful relationship is Joseph. Though Joseph had been mistreated by his brothers, sold out of a pit to strangers, lied about to his father, and became a slave to a powerful ruler of an Egyptian household, his faithfulness to God was rewarded. Joseph was elevated to oversee all of Potiphar’s possessions. Others may never have seen the value in Joseph, but God did. That is all that counts!

Joseph's life of integrity, purity, love, and faithful relationship with and for God brought incredible blessings.

"The LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field." Even a person of the world recognized the incredible blessings coming from Joseph. Amazing that God blesses others for the sake of His servants. When you love God, serve Him, and remain faithful to Him, God will bless those around you, not because they deserve it, but because He honors the integrity of your life. God blesses everything and everyone who is connected with His servants and who oversee and work as though they are serving God alone.

You may have friends who love God with all their heart. Their absolute greatest honor in life is to walk with Christ in an obedient and loving relationship. Though they have faced many distractions, disappointments, and difficulties, they have not wavered in their commitment to Christ. God honors their life with incredible blessings. Wisdom and godliness from Christ is given to them, and it cannot be taken away. No person or thing on earth can remove the presence of God from their life. His Presence is what makes them effective. Not only will He bless them, those around them will be blessed for their sake. "...and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field."

This is the kind of person you should strive to be and the one with whom you should spend your time. If you want God's blessings, then spend time with Him and with His finest servants.

Jesus was and is the overseer of the kingdom of God. God blesses you with everything that Jesus oversees. As you share your life with Christ, you will receive the greatest blessings on earth. Why not experience this life, "as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3-4)?

### **Focus on Self**

Self convinces itself that the reason things are going well is because it works hard and deserves success. But self is blind. Often people are blessed because God has put His choice servant in their presence and He is blessing them for His servant's sake, not because of their abilities. If you are not walking with God, then you will not receive His blessings directly. But, you may receive blessings because of benefiting from those who He has placed in your life.

# Gifts From God

April 26

## God's Power and Love

*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...*

**Ephesians 3:20**

### Focus on Christ

How much do you believe your God can accomplish? The basic answer for the Christian is that of course God can accomplish anything. While it is true that God can do anything, the real question is do you believe that He will?

Now to Him... God is the One who you should direct your attention, prayers, and desires toward. He is the only One capable of doing anything that could be asked, inquired, and desired. God is able, and He will do whatever He desires to accomplish His Will in your life. If God has promised it, He will without question do it without any difficulty. Who else in your life can do anything? There are many people who can fulfill some things for you, but there is only One who can do anything.

Not only can He do anything, He can do it far beyond your imagination. Think about it. If you asked Christ to do something for you, like give you understanding of a particular Bible passage, then He can give you understanding far beyond your possible imagination of the truth. No matter how many people you ask about the truth of that passage, no matter how many books you read about that passage, or how long you think on that passage, He can show you more than all of those sources of information in just a few moments. If you look for peace, then the world can offer counseling, pills, and positive thinking. Christ can give you peace far beyond all of those things. He can bring peace that is deep and real by simply abiding in His Word and His Ways. People are also looking and asking for love from others. But, if you ask God for love, then He will give it to you far above all you can ask or think. No matter what you think is real, true, deep love, God's Love takes you beyond your thinking and helps you feel and understand a Love that is not even possible from anyone in this world.

All of these excesses that God can bring are according to the power that works in you. But what is that power that resides within you? It is the same power that raised Christ from the grave. "And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places..." (Ephesians 1:19-20). Can you believe it? The same energy, strength, and might that was used by God to raise Christ from the dead is the same power that lives within you.

When you were born again, this power was used. No other power could save you and no other power can give you things beyond what you can ask or think. Christ has all power and placed that power in you by His Holy Spirit. "Exceedingly abundantly" means to the degree of



which cannot be expressed. You do not have the intellectual capacity to think about how much power and love God has placed in you. Yet, He is able to give you more than you could ever imagine. You will begin to discover things about God's Love and Power that you could not realize with your human thinking ability. But God can enable you with His power to go beyond your thinking to His Enlightenment.

God can give you more than you desire, more than you pray for, more than you think, and more of His Love, if you only walk in His Ways and obey Him.

### Focus on Self

Can you imagine how senseless it would be to think that you know it all? Of course self does not know it all. Since it doesn't, it wouldn't even know how to ask for it all. But the power of Christ working in you knows what to ask for. Give up senseless and limited thinking and ask God to reveal His deep truths of power and love. He will give you more than you can ask or think?

**April 27**

### Permit It To Be So—Now!

*But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.*

**Matthew 3:15**

### Focus on Christ

What do you permit to be acceptable in your life? Does everything that happens have to be on your schedule? Do your directions have to be followed exactly in order for something to be acceptable? What if some things are not exactly right logically? Can you accept things being done by someone else's different suggestions?

Jesus was speaking to John the Baptist. He asked John to baptize Him. John was trying to prevent Him from doing this just like Simon Peter tried to rebuke Jesus. Baptizing Jesus did not make sense to John. After all, Jesus was the sinless Son of God. Why did He need to be baptized? To them this baptism was a picture of what happens to a person after sin has been removed from their life. They were looking for a sinless Messiah who would be perfectly righteous. While it is true that Jesus had no sin of His own, He carried our sin, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Though Jesus did not need baptism, He said to John, "Permit it to be so now" to affirm that Jesus was coming to take away the sin of the world.

When Christ approaches your life, what will you permit to be so now? What if He asks something of you that does not make sense? Will you battle Him and try to convince Him that your way is right?

## Gifts From God

Sometimes what you think is the right direction is not absolutely wrong, it is just not the way that Christ chooses at the time. Notice that Christ was not referring to the future of how things might be, but of what must happen now in the present. “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10). We would not have chose sufferings. His Way does not always coincide with our way. Jesus was brought into the world as a baby and would need to grow as any other boy. Jesus knew this act of baptism would be fitting to help the people see that if He would be righteousness for sinners, then He would need to be publicly identified with sinners in the beginning of His ministry.

People tend to interpret events through their own eyes of pride. Whenever something is about to happen, they often don’t look at it from God’s perspective, but from their own. Christians, leaders, and churches often do this. They tend to interpret everything from the aspect of how things relate simply to them or their church, not according to the bigger picture of God’s kingdom.

Jesus knew that it would be different for Him to be baptized and He had to firmly convince John to permit it to be so now. Jesus was humble, but He also refused John’s direction. Christ will guide His Own Way, whether you understand it or not. But if Christ had a better way to accomplish the beginning of His ministry, He would have chosen that way. And so it is with your life. For righteousness to be accomplished, the right way must be followed. The right way is always the Way of Christ.

One thing that stands out in this passage is that spiritual minded people see things differently from arrogant people. Spiritual people see their need for future growth and are willing to see their wrongness and adjust their lives to Christ. Arrogant people do not see their wrongness and are comfortable and clueless in following the wrong way. Even the most godly people have a need for Christ. In fact, the closer you get to Christ, the more you realize what you do not know and need to learn. Godly people will not follow arrogant thinking. They will see that without Christ, they can do nothing. With Christ there is nothing that is impossible.

What is now, is what Christ has permitted. Allow it to be so. Yield to His Ways and follow Him. The future may be much different, but be satisfied with now.

### Focus on Self

Do you see everything in your life from just your own thinking? If you do, you are arrogant and clueless to the Ways of God. God has a great purpose in this world, and you fit in wherever He chooses. Accept what He has permitted now and you will be able to relax in the Ways of Christ. His Way truly is the best way for your life.

April 28

**Not By Sight, Nor by Hearing**

*His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears...*

**Isaiah 11:3**

**Focus on Christ**

How do you determine if something is of good quality? Do you examine how beautiful it is or how well it is made? What about people or their actions? How do you determine if they are right or if they are making the right decisions? Do you determine that according to what you view as being successful? Most people make judgments based on the world's standards of success.

Jesus did not do that. He had standards that were not of this world. First of all, His delight was in the awesome respect of the LORD. His Ways lined up with the Ways of His Heavenly Father. Second, Jesus did not make decisions based on the sight of His eyes. What we see does not determine the condition or the intent of the heart. Third, Jesus did not decide by what He heard others say. If He determined His direction of ministry based on what He heard others say about Him, He would have given up. This is the way you should make decisions, with the fear of God, not by what we see and hear. You should have the determination, perseverance, and courage to follow what Christ has instructed you to do.

Can you imagine Joseph the dreamer being seen as right when he was in the pit, or sold into slavery, or in prison? His future did not look promising. Most people would assume that since things looked bad for him that he must not be walking with God. Their sight might say to them this doesn't look right. They also might hear others talking and saying that surely he is not following God. But, they would be wrong. In fact, often the opposite is true. There are many people who appear to be right, sound right, but are not right. Righteousness is the key. When you are convinced that God has directed you, and it is confirmed in the Word, then you should continue on even if others don't think you appear or sound right.

Jesus did not judge on sight and sound. At times in your life it does not look or sound like what God said is true. Spiritual things are not based on sight or sound but on righteousness. In 1 Corinthians 2:12-13, the Scripture says, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." That means that you judge spiritual things with spiritual words, not by sight or hearing. Judging in righteousness is spiritual, not physical.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self has a hard time ignoring the physical evidence. Self has a difficult time believing something that doesn't appear or sound right. But God looks at the heart. He does not let the things of this world make decisions, but rather empowers those who follow Him to be the true spiritual leaders who will end up as Joseph did, the deliverer of God's people. God took something intended to be wrong and turned it right. He can and will do that in your life too, if you only believe without wavering.

April 29

## Practice is Better Than Knowledge

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

James 1:22

## Focus on Christ

Have you ever given advice to someone that you didn't apply to your own life? Maybe you have read God's Word and knew what it said but didn't know how to teach others how to practice what you read. There is a godly skill required to take the Word and help someone know how to apply it. A godly Christian said, "What you are teaching me from the Word is not what others leaders have shared with me. It is so obvious when I hear you teach. Why have others not taught me how to practice the Word?"

Do you listen to a sermon and then walk away unchanged? If you do, then you deceive yourself. You hear the truth but you do not live by the truth. To know the truth and not listen is deceiving yourself from the truth. This self deception cheats yourself from hearing the real truth. Pastors and teachers should challenge you to not just hear it, repeat it, take notes on it, and think on it, but to be doers of the Word. Put the truth into practice.

How many people keep building their Christian knowledge without transferring it to practical living? Some leaders care about growth and numbers and serve the people instead of God. But if you serve God you must help believers move from being hearers to doers. Doing should be the measuring stick for a good ministry. Many Christian leaders work on helping the sheep get fat on the Word. They teach so much about the Bible, but they do not help them know how to do it. Why would you not move Bible knowledge to Bible practice? Probably because you do not know how. After all, if you knew how to help others practice the Word, why would you hide that from them?

When you read the Word you should think, meditate, examine, and analyze it to get the full meaning. You must then move it to outward practice that results in absolute obedience. Three things make you a doer of the Word: faith, love, and obedience. You certainly should hear the Word, but don't stop there. Do something about what you hear.

Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40). Paul said to Timothy, “...always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Again, Jesus said, “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock...” (Matthew 7:24).

People deceive themselves by having a good view of themselves. They listen to the Word and think that is good enough. But Jesus said the key was to do something, not just call Him Lord and think by so doing you are good enough.

### Focus on Self

Self deceit is the worst deceit of all. Why? Because deceiving yourself brings confusion and makes your thinking seem right. Now you are in double jeopardy. You are wrong, but think you are right. Knowledge alone will leave you deceptively separated from God. Listening to the Word without action on the Word, will bring a greater judgment on you. It is simple if you follow this Scripture. Be hearers and doers of the Word.

**April 30**

### Who Should You Follow?

*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

**Luke 14:26**

### Focus on Christ

Do you love or hate your family? You might be thinking, “Of course I don’t hate my family!” But that is a legitimate question in light of what Jesus said in this passage. There are many families who have love present, and others where love is obviously absent. But what did Jesus have in mind when He said that you cannot be His disciple if you do not hate your family?

To understand this Scripture, you must take it in context. Many people do not know how to read the Bible in context. There are several different levels of context. Each Scripture has a verse context, a general passage context (immediate verses before and after), a chapter context, a book context, and a whole Scripture context. The Bible is never in disagreement with itself. So, when you read a passage like this you have to take in the whole context of Scripture.

Jesus said that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill the law. Exodus 20:12 states, “Honor your father and your mother...” Jesus would not go against this statement of the law. Jesus did not want us to hate our families, but He did want us to have an unwavering love for Him in order to be His disciple. He wanted us to love

## Gifts From God

Him so much that our love for our families would look like hate in comparison.

A disciple must be totally devoted to Christ. If your family asks you to do something that goes against being obedient to Christ, then follow Christ. You can follow Him without being disrespectful to your family. If anyone asks you to stop reading God's Word, then obey Christ and continue in the Word. If they ask you to stop praying or walking in the Spirit, then respectfully continue to follow Christ.

The overall meaning for all believers is that we must lay down all the interests of this world for Christ's sake. 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You must be willing to part with everything in this world and love Christ more than any person, place, or thing. But if you do this, people will say you are too serious. You will be misunderstood. You may even be ridiculed because you look and sound so different from the majority. Which would you rather have, acceptance by the world, or acceptance from your loving LORD?

### Focus on Self

Self wants to be accepted by everyone. But you cannot be accepted by the world and Christ at the same time. To follow Christ you must be willing to give up your own interests, desires, and plans. His life is worth more than everything you will have to give up. His life brings the greatest love you could ever know. His life is full of freedom, abundance, and meaning. Why would you place people, places, and things first in your life? If you focus on Christ first, He will bring real meaning to the people, places, and things of this world.

May 1

### Our Precious Savior

*Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.*

1 Peter 2:7-8

### Focus on Christ

How precious is Christ to you? Many focus on their own life so much that they do not recognize the incredible treasure that they have in Christ. To know if Christ is really important in your life you must do some soul searching. One of the ways to do that is to examine what you did today. How did you start your day? Did you read God's Word, meditate on it, and adjust your life to it throughout the day? How often did Christ come to your mind today? When everything was happy and joyous, was He in your thoughts? When was the last time you thanked Christ for what He did for you in paying the penalty for your sin?



The plans and goals that you have in your life show how precious Christ is to you. If someone heard you talk about what you want to accomplish in life, or even during this next week, would they see your desire to become more like Christ? Or would they hear what movie you went to see or a special restaurant you wanted to visit? Would they hear about a sports event or a special hobby? The world does not honor Christ, but our lives should honor Him. Paul said, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Do you live as though Christ was first place in your finances and possessions, your family and friendships, your job, and other relationships?

How do you value Christ? You do not value food if you are not hungry. You do not value a place to sleep, unless you have no place to rest. You will never realize how cold it is outside, unless you go out in light clothing and realize you need a coat. You don't think about doctors, unless you are sick. And you will not see the value of Christ if you do not see your desperate condition. We are ungodly sinners who will perish without a Savior. We have a soul that is so loved by God that He gave His only Son to provide for our need. If you do not see the wickedness of your soul apart from Christ, you will never see your need for Him or understand His incredible value and worth to you. You might say that Christ is precious, but without the understanding of your need, those will be lifeless words.

Oh the depth of understanding that comes when you see not just your life as a sinner in need of a Savior, but now a sinner saved by Jesus Christ. You may have wonderful family and friends, but their gifts to you tend to be related to this world. Christ gave you an eternal gift by laying down His life for you. No one else has died for you in order to provide redemption for your soul. How precious is that?

To those who reject this precious Christ, they will stumble and fall in this world. They may find success on earth, but it will not go well for them in the judgment. To reject this precious Christ is to reject the Love of God. Sad to say, this rejection is fatal. There is no forgiveness available to those who reject Christ. There is no other way into eternal salvation but through Christ.

### **Focus on Self**

Self tends to go through life proud of its accomplishments. Self never sees the precious life of Christ as valuable. Why? Because self only values what makes it feel comfortable, unchallenged, unmoved, and unchanged. Christ wants every selfish person to see their need and turn to Him for salvation and a changed life perspective. Christ is only precious to those who believe, but He is a stumbling block to those who do not believe and trust in Him. If only self could take its eyes off of its ways and see Christ for His value, then self would quickly abandon its hopeless lifestyle. Do you see your need for Christ? Do you accept Him or reject Him? If you have not received Christ into your heart, then it is not too late. You can do that today!



# Gifts From God

May 2

## Poor in Spirit

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**Matthew 5:3**

### Focus on Christ

Are you poor in spirit, or poor and in high spirits? Are you poor and humble or poor and proud? While the world does not put humility at the top of the list of virtues, Christ puts it in first place. The religious leaders of Christ's day were more interested in the external than the internal. If they could have position, power, and authority, then they believed they would be valuable to society. Christ focused on the internal. He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man" (Mark 7:20). The poor in spirit are those people who recognize their need of God, and depend on Him completely for help. In order to do this you must humbly see your weaknesses, your sin, and your character as God sees them.

What do you have that you did not receive from God? This question helps you recognize whether you believe you are good in and of yourself, or if you recognize you are lacking what is needed for abundant life with God. If you do not see your needy condition, then you will not obey the commands of Christ and you will not be His disciple. If you have a high view of self, then you will have a low view of Christ and His place in your life. If you have a high view of Christ, then you will have a proper view of the limitations of self to know what to do in the crucible of life. If you have not come to the place to see your wickedness and the fact that your self conceit needs to be removed from your spirit, then you see no need of the Gospel.

But if you are poor in spirit, then you are blessed. How are you blessed? Only the humble of spirit will receive the kingdom of heaven. Many think of this as something that happens in the future. Look closely at this verse, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That means the kingdom is present, right now, and available without waiting. While the other beatitudes have a future blessing, there is a present blessing for the poor in spirit. For when you humble yourself to recognize your need of Christ, you experience His Power for all your needs in the present. You do not have to wait until you die, or wait until Christ returns for this kingdom, it is present now in the poor in spirit. Everything else in the list of beatitudes flows out of a humble spirit. If there is no humility, then there will be no dependence on Christ for what only His Spirit can provide. The poor in spirit will consistently, constantly, and unceasingly depend on God, not self.

It is a narrow door that leads to salvation and few find it. The ones who do find it are the poor in spirit. Matthew 11:29 gives us the model for the poor in spirit, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." If Jesus is lowly in heart, then you should be also.

**Focus on Self**

The world wants you to rely on self, have a high view of self, and be in control of self. Christ brings a deeper knowledge through a relationship with Him. In Christ you can move from self reliance to reliance on Christ; from self-admiration to exalting Christ, from self-control to self under the control of Christ. If you want to live the self life, you are not seeking Christianity. If you want to experience the Christ life now, recognize your need for a Savior.

**May 3**

**Those Who Mourn**

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

**Matthew 5:4**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it take to make you mourn? Does it take a tragedy or a sad event? What did Jesus mean when He said that we are blessed if we mourn? Was the type of mourning He spoke of different than what we think of when we are grieving?

Worldly mourning can be seen in many different circumstances. You can mourn because of a failure in life. You can mourn because you are suffering from an illness or from the loss of a loved one. You can also mourn because of the consequences of sin in your life. These types of mourning are not all sinful, but could be according to how you respond to them.

Godly mourning is a deep move of God. Many times this results in tearful emotions that come when you are overwhelmed with sin that has been in your life and has caused pain as a result. If you are poor in spirit, then you recognize your needy condition and turn to Christ in repentance. Mourning, or godly sorrow, over your sin comes because you are poor in spirit and recognize you need a Savior to save you from your sin.

Mourners who are blessed are those who are poor in spirit. To be poor in spirit and to mourn are not actions or behaviors. These represent a deep breaking of the spirit by God. The first beatitude is the intellectual or truth side of understanding your condition and the need you have of Jesus. The second beatitude seems to be the emotional side of turning from your sin to Jesus for the cleansing of your sin. To mourn over your sin brings tears to the eyes and a sadness to the heart for the condition of your sinful soul. Isaiah 6:5 states, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips..."

Christianity is not all intellectual and it is not all emotional. It is relational. This relationship between the believer and Christ moves us to a deeper walk in the Spirit. It is not a discipline that moves us, nor is it an emotion, it is a changed life by Christ Himself. What happens in us when we see our condition and are moved to change, is both intellectual and emotional. We need both.

## Gifts From God

We should feel wounded when we sin. We should be uncomfortable when we sin. We should mourn over our sinful condition. But we should also feel deep comfort when we have Jesus to give us victory over sin. He will comfort us as we repent and turn from our sin, but He will not comfort us in our sin. How are we comforted when we mourn over our sinful condition? When you are broken and understand what Jesus did for you, it is comfort. Shame comes when you focus on your sin, but not when you focus on Christ. God comforts you by providing a life to live in the present that is not like your old way of living. Old things are passed away. If God granted you a godly sorrow over anger or pride, that sorrow is eternal, and you experience former things passing away. Revelation 21:4, states, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." While former things will be passed away in heaven, mourning over sin and being comforted by God in the present also causes old lifestyles, thoughts, and attitudes to pass away. The result is great blessings.

### Focus on Self

To mourn over sin so that God will bless you is an act of the self. Self does not have true godly sorrow over sin. Self can act like it is humble, but cannot really be humble. You cannot cause God to bless you by your actions. God blesses the heart of a sincere and humble servant who has a true godly sorrow over sin. If you respect what God has done through the provision of sin by the life of His Son Jesus, He will give you a godly sorrow that leads to repentance and results in a comfortable life in Christ. This frees you from your old sinful life.

May 4

### Blessed Are The Meek

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

**Matthew 5:5**

### Focus on Christ

What is meekness? Meekness is a character trait in one who has been granted an attitude of a gentle and quiet spirit. This person is compassionate toward others and has a willingness to submit to the Will and Purpose of God. If you witness meekness in a person, then you will see the God-given ability to patiently endure whatever it takes to follow Him. If it requires moving, then there is no resistance. If it requires selling houses or land, then so be it. If it requires preparation for an assignment, then bring on the training and education.

Meekness affects the will of a person. When a person submits to the Ways of God, the human will's stubbornness gives in to the Will of God. A meek person does not struggle and fight with God. Rather, a meek person gives up the natural strong-willed personality, and willingly submits to the Lordship of Christ.

While this describes the meek person's relationship to God, how does it appear to other people? A meek person is extremely strong in their resolve to follow God's Way in the midst of opposition. They do not fuss and fight with people who oppose them. They simply keep their eyes on the Will of God and pursue Him with all their heart. It is rare that you can provoke, annoy, or anger them. They are not easily drawn into arguments or defenses of their position. They simply stay focused on God's Plan for their life whether others are willing to follow or not. A meek person is known more for what they stand for, than what they stand against. Their main goal is to, "... be imitators of God as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). Walking in the Spirit is their goal, fighting against those who are opposed to the Ways of God is not their distraction. Romans 12:21 states, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Meekness truly is strength under control and gentleness is the most powerful force against aggression.

When does this meekness become evident in the life of a believer? Only when you have experienced the life of one poor in spirit who has learned his or her needy condition, has mourned over this state, has turned to Christ in true repentance, and has been comforted by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

Then, and only then will the meek inherit the earth. This is not about inheriting a piece of land. Strong people with money and power can purchase land, but their life may not be filled with peace, joy, and love. The meek live a confident life following Christ. Their inheritance is like that stated in Psalm 37:11, "But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." For Israel that was inheriting the land of Canaan, a type of heaven on earth. Because their dependence is on God, the meek can live as though heaven is here on earth, a life of comfort and safety, and free of major stress.

### **Focus on Self**

If you focus on self for reliance, safety, peace, and love on earth, then you will fall short of what you seek. Meekness brings a strong sense of confidence in God, not in self. When your dependence is on the One who created the Universe, you can have confidence in living His Way of life as one who does not depend on temporal things for satisfaction. If you have developed a meek spirit through a deep relationship with God, then nothing will stop you from following God.

**May 5**

### **Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness**

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

**Matthew 5:6**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

What do you seek? What is it that draws you with an unbelievable yearning? Of course it could be thirst for a parched throat. Or if you need nutrition, it could be for food. You can also yearn for a relationship, a good family, or a successful career. These things are related to things in the world.

The beatitudes show the process of how a believer grows spiritually. The development begins with being poor in spirit, recognizing your need for God; to mourning your condition and becoming rightly related to God; to being meek so that you desire to follow God's Will with all your heart; and then to hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Though one follows another, neither can they be separated. Jesus said you will be filled if you hunger and thirst for a spiritual need of righteousness. But do you desire, long for, and crave it?

Have you ever eaten a great meal and then said, "I don't think I'll ever be hungry again?" But what happens? A few hours pass and you get hungry again. Why? Food is the nourishment that keeps a body functioning. Today's food will not fuel you for tomorrow. You would die physically if you did not eat. But you will die spiritually if you do not feast on the spiritual food that Christ provides. If you are walking with God, then you will crave His Fellowship, His Spirit, His Love, and His Word. You cannot develop spiritually without feeding and drinking in these spiritual qualities.

Where sin is, God is not. If you are not pursuing righteousness, or right living, then you are pursuing sin. If you want to be close to God, and be filled with spiritual satisfaction, then hunger after Him and His Ways. When you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you are pursuing life that is holy and pure. You will avoid evil and selfish ways. When you do, Christ will fill you with His purity. Are you truly sincere in pursuing the Ways of God? Do you desire His Ways over your own? A true hunger and thirst craves to follow God, study His Word, and walk in obedience. It is not difficult to look at your life and see whether this is your desire or not.

You can experience this right living on earth now, and ultimately you will experience it completely in heaven. This right living is not the result of good works. It is the result of an abiding relationship with Christ. As you abide in Him, He produces His righteousness in you. His work will cause you to yearn for, desire, and crave after His Way of life. You will know if you are abiding in Christ if you crave to hear from and spend time daily in His Word. This righteousness is the work of Christ not the work of your hands.

## Focus on Self

If you have ever tried to live a good life in your own strength, then you have found that you cannot stay consistent. Self wants to be loved by and look good for everyone. The desire that drives recognition for your good actions is selfishness, but to hunger and thirst after righteousness requires dying to self and receiving Christ and His Righteousness. His Spirit, then, becomes your spiritual food that fills you

with the ability to be satisfied with holy living. Only then do you realize that the diet of works will not sustain or satisfy you.

**May 6**

**Blessed are the Merciful**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*

**Matthew 5:7**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it mean to be merciful? People tend to confuse merciful acts with the attitude of mercy. Some think that mercy is the act of giving food to the hungry or running an errand for someone who needs help. Though each of these are kind and benevolent deeds, they are not what Jesus was talking about when He mentioned the merciful.

Doing good to others can be an outcome of a spirit of mercy, but even people who do not believe in God can perform kind and merciful deeds. A lost person can feed the hungry, care for the sick, and provide for the poor, but Jesus wants us to have a heart of mercy that motivates us to do good for others. Jesus wants mercy to come from merciful hearts. Mercy should result from who we are not what we do. When the heart is right, pure conduct will follow. But you can perform good acts without a right heart.

Many do not understand the gift of mercy. They believe that mercy does good things for people, but many who say they have the gift of mercy can never see themselves confronting wrong action with truth. They want to appear kind and sweet without talking to a person about correcting their action. This is not mercy. It would not be merciful to withhold truth that helps someone grow. It is selfishness to withhold correction simply so others would not think badly of you for sharing the truth.

How much mercy is Christ extending to you now? Unlimited amounts. While grace gives you something you do not deserve, mercy withholds from you what you truly do deserve. To be merciful is to be like God. Though you deserve death and hell, He provided salvation and withheld what you deserved. This same kind of mercy is what happens in you as you walk in His Spirit. God develops His Spirit of mercy in you so that your attitude and actions toward those in trouble provides help, not judgment. In fact, this mercy looks like forgiveness.

When you see the depth of the Mercy of God towards your life, your spirit gives mercy to those around you. You will share God's Love and Forgiveness with them. Your life will not be filled with hate and harshness toward others when you know, understand, and experience the Mercy of Christ.

How do you obtain mercy? By hungering and thirsting for righteousness. As you do, God develops and strengthens your spirit with

## Gifts From God

His Spirit. Only then will you be in a position to give mercy. The more you give, the more you receive. As you give mercy to others out of a pure heart, you will obtain more mercy from God.

### Focus on Self

Selfish mercy toward others looks terrible. Because it is performed so that others will see you as a benevolent person. Godly mercy will humble you and allow you to see that God has been so merciful to you, a sinner, by providing His Son for your need. Imitate God and show mercy. The more you show, the more you obtain. Remember, there will always be a time in your life when you will need to obtain mercy.

May 7

### Pure in Heart

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

**Matthew 5:8**

### Focus on Christ

How pure is your heart? How close are you in your relationship with Christ? Are you familiar with His Words and His Ways? Do feel like you have ever been face to face with Christ? How would you know if you had been?

To be pure in heart means to have desires and affections that are wholesome, holy, and absent of worldly passions. This purity comes not because the person is good but because the heart has been purified by Christ Himself. When He places His Holy Spirit in a person, that person's heart is continually purified as he or she lives in accordance to the commands of Christ. You cannot create a pure heart, but Christ will give you a pure heart as you draw closer to Him. The old nature fades away as the new nature becomes more consistent. The Holy Spirit purifies the works of the flesh and develops the fruit of the Spirit. This purifying is so powerful that it changes hate to love, anxiety to peace, selfishness to humility, and worldly passions to the desires of God.

If you want to see God while you are on this earth, then you should look for Him in each and every change He makes in your life. When you see the Power of God alive in your life, you and your family and friends will notice, how you have changed to be more like God. In this sense, you will come face to face with Christ. You will see His Desires, Wants, Ways, and Works as though Christ is physically present through that person's life.

“And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). If you want to see God, then you must walk with God. When you live for God, you will experience joy. If you disobey God, then your life as a believer will be challenged by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. You will not experience joy when you disobey the commands of Christ. “Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known



Him” (1 John 3:6). However, as you obey Him, your heart draws closer and closer to Him. Christ in turn draws close to you. You will see things that others are missing. According to Jesus, a pure heart gives you spiritual 20/20 vision.

### Focus on Self

Some people try as hard as they can to be godly. The problem is that the Christian life is not made up of human effort. Instead of trying, you must stop and yield yourself to God. When you are poor in spirit, mourning over your condition, focused on the Will of God, hungering after righteousness, and experiencing God’s Mercy, you will experience a pure heart. It is a process of Christian growth, not of human effort. Yield to God, draw near to Him, and He will draw near to you (see James 4:8).

**May 8**

### Peacemaker

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

**Matthew 5:9**

### Focus on Christ

What defines a peacemaker? According to the world, a peacemaker is a diplomat, a mediator, an umpire, or a negotiator. Most think of a peacemaker as a person who has the ability to talk to those who are in conflict with one another and bring them to a compromise.

Yet, Jesus did not have that in mind when He spoke of peacemakers. A peacemaker is not a person who settles quarrels. That is a substandard view of a peacemaker. According to Christ, a peacemaker is one who has become what all the other beatitudes describe. A peacemaker is a person who is poor in spirit and has a godly sorrow over his or her sin. They are strong in their resolve to follow God’s Way in the midst of opposition, pursues righteous living, and see the depth of God’s Mercy enough to give it to others. They have a pure heart with desires and affections that are holy. The primary role of peacemaker is to reconcile others to God. However, bringing peace to others will never happen if people are not personally making peace with God.

Though you should worship God, the ultimate expression of being like God is to love those around you. While you worship God in spirit, you express who you are in Christ by how you love others. This fleshing out of the Gospel brings you to be a true peacemaker. To serve others is the deepest expression of the Love of God, but you will never realize this relationship with Christ without becoming poor in spirit.

When you think of peace, you may automatically think of strife and war. It is easy to stir up arguments, contentions, debates, and

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strife, but is much harder to bring peace between two opposing views. In order to bring peace, both parties must be like-minded, full of God's Love, and striving toward unity. The world may call you many names; but, when you spread the news of how Christ brings peace between sinful people and a perfect God—God will call you His child. The Scripture makes it clear: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). Those who take life as seriously as a disciple will work to see people, both non-believers and believers, reconciled to God.

Remember, the Father is the God of Peace; the Son of God is the Prince of Peace; and the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of Peace. His role is not to bring peace between people but to receive His Peace when they are reconciled to Him. Only then will they experience true peace.

### Focus on Self

Self tends to want others to be at peace just so it will make things easier to deal with in those relationships. Peace is usually sought by trying to get people to act peaceful even if they don't feel peaceful. The wonderful news is that "...now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). That is ultimately what brings peace. When you have been changed by God, you become a peacemaker who will share this good news with enemies of God and seek to help them make peace with God.

May 9

### Persecuted for Righteousness

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

Matthew 5:10-11

### Focus on Christ

Has anyone ever spoken evil against you? Have you ever spoken evil against someone else? Did this happen because you were sharing Christ with this person? Or was it because you were following God with all your heart? Many Christians do not understand that to live for Christ is to be an enemy of the world.

If you try to bring peace to people by suggesting they make peace with God, then much of the world will not like you. How dare you charge them with a need to turn to God in repentance! This irritates and annoys many. Their response will not always be easy to receive. Many believers want a happy life with no consequences for serving Christ, but that is just not what happens. When you serve Christ, you will become a target for many others, even Christians.

Many Christians say, "I just want to be happy and have fun!" It's true that most people want that, but it is unrealistic to believe that happiness will always be in your life. Christ is your model and example. If

the world hated Him, it will also hate you. Decide now as a believer whether you would rather be loved by the world or loved by Christ. You cannot have both. Jesus prayed for you in John 17:14 saying, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." It is no surprise to Jesus what the response of the world will be to you.

Some people think that persecution occurs when others disagree with them about their goals and wants. Persecution and false accusations are only blessed when it is for the sake of Jesus Christ. Do not think you are being persecuted simply because others disagree with your thinking. If you live by Christ's standards, and practice walking in His Ways, then the world will not like your actions. Even when you do not speak but live according to a higher standard, it will be an open rebuke to the world and believers who avoid this higher lifestyle. You must always live up to the highest standard possible if you are to relate your life to Christ. The moment you take a step down from His Ways, you will be received a little more by the world. Be careful because when you do, your spirit and mind will take one step away from righteousness, and one step toward corruption.

You will discover that living a righteous lifestyle will not make you popular. All kinds of judgments will come your way when you try to live for Christ in front of family, friends, work associates, and believers. The world teaches that everyone should be able to think and say what they want and still be accepted. Christ does not teach that at all. Many will think you are too serious, fanatical, or intolerant when you stand for Christ. If you give in to their accusations, then you may be accepted by them but miss the blessings of Christ.

### Focus on Self

Which is worse, persecution for righteousness or suffering for sin? Selfish people do not want either one. They want the easiest road possible. Committed and abiding believers want to follow God with all their heart. When Christ is exalted in their life, they simply want to live for righteousness sake. If troubles come because of right living, then blessings will follow. This is the right and blessed way to live.

**May 10**

### Endurance and Faithfulness

*If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

**2 Timothy 2:12**

### Focus on Christ

What would it take for you to be promoted to royal status and reign in a country that is ruled by royalty? Obviously, royalty comes through a family lineage. Only those born into the royal family will ever have a chance to reign over a nation.

## Gifts From God

Yet, Christ has adopted us into the royal priesthood of believers. “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...” (1 Peter 2:9). “To redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:5). Though He has adopted us, there must be endurance if we are to be worthy of ruling with Him. “And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Romans 8:17). Endurance is the key to survival in suffering. If you do not endure, then your faithfulness is weak. Would you entrust a great responsibility to someone who is unfaithful during difficult times? No. It is easy to be faithful when things are easy. A real test of character comes when there is suffering, hardships, and heartbreaks. To watch a person go through these times and remain on target with the mission of God in their life reveals a person of endurance, leadership, tenacity, and courage.

If you endure with Christ through those times, then you will be found faithful and will reign with Him. Does that mean you will reign with Him only when you go to heaven? No. To represent Christ here on earth is just as important. “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’” (Matthew 25:21). If you are faithful, then you will rule over many things; if you are unfaithful, then you will not be given responsibility. True responsibility is withheld from a poor character. When Christ sees your willingness to abide in Him, walk in His Ways, and obey His commands, He will reward you with great responsibility.

If you deny Him, then He also will deny you. If you simply profess Christ as Savior but do not live by His precepts, then you are denying Him Lordship over your life; and He will deny you of sharing in leadership, glory, and blessings in this life and the next. You cannot call Jesus, Lord, not do what He says, and think He will know you.

How do you deny Him? It can be done simply by failing to do what He has asked you to do. If you call Him Lord but do not read His Word, pray, believe Him, walk with Him, or trust Him to guide you, then you are denying Him. It is a miserable, unfortunate position to be in when you deny Christ. Remember this, you can be unfaithful to Christ, but He will not be unfaithful to you. That means that He will not be unfaithful concerning His Promises or His Discipline. If you are truly born again and unfaithful to Him, then He will pursue you with all His Resources to turn your heart back toward Him. If you resist, then His Discipline may be very difficult to handle, although it will always be for redemption.

### Focus on Self

Self wants everyone to faithfully endure their tasks so as to make life comfortable. Selfish ways do not endure hardships or sufferings. But those who love God with all their heart, mind, and soul will endure sufferings, will not deny Him, and will faithfully follow His commands.

May 11

**Resist Sin by Walking with Christ**

*Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.*

**Romans 7:20**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you ever find yourself doing something that you know you really should not do? What compels you in those moments? Do you believe that this Scripture gives you a green light to sin?

Many have misunderstood and misused this passage. Their intent may not be to misinterpret the Scripture, but they do not see clearly what Paul was teaching. Many seem to believe that anytime they have difficulty with a sin problem, they can blame it on sin dwelling in them. After all, they may say, Paul had this problem. Then you hear them quote that even Paul wondered why he didn't do what he should and at other times he did what he shouldn't do. For some reason they believe that there is a valid reason for them to sin because even the Apostle Paul sinned. In other words, they find relief by saying that they must act upon their tendency to sin.

In context, that is not the meaning of this passage. Paul is not finding an excuse for his sin or blaming sin on his nature. Rather, he is explaining what happens when you do not depend on God for a Spirit-filled lifestyle. If you attempt to obey the law in your flesh, then you will fail. If you walk in the Ways of Jesus Christ, then you will be living according to the Spirit. This is the same Apostle Paul who said, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Romans 7:22). Then he said, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). His answer is, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:25). Jesus can deliver you from this old nature and lifestyle. When you start doing what you will not to do, it is because you are in the flesh and not in the Spirit. The answer to your sin problem is not to blame it on someone or something else, but to realize you do not have to live that way. True, you may fail sometimes and do the wrong thing, but Paul did not use his life to illustrate an example of always struggling with sin. This is made clear in Galatians 2:20 when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." He now lives in this old, fleshy body by faith in the Son of God. He further emphasized this lifestyle in Galatians 5:16 when he said, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

You do not have to constantly do things you shouldn't. The only time you do what you should not is when the sin that dwells in you

## Gifts From God

is more prevalent than your walk with God. Solve your lack of obedience to walking in the Spirit, and you will solve the issue of the desires of your flesh. Paul was not constantly dealing with sinning. What he illustrates here, is that any time in which you give in to doing the wrong thing, it is because of the sin nature living in you.

The more consistent you are at walking in the Spirit, the less you will give in to your sin. To walk in the Spirit dampens the desire to walk in the flesh. As you spend more time with Christ through His Word, you will experience the new creation He made you to become. This new nature will be more desirous of a daily lifestyle than your old sin nature.

### Focus on Self

Self looks for an excuse for a low standard of Christian living. If self can find something to blame, then it feels relieved about wrong actions. Jesus died on the cross to save you from your sin. He put His Spirit in you to keep you from sin and to teach you how to walk in the Ways of Christ. When you sin, you must repent of sin, turn from your wicked ways, and begin doing the right thing. Every time you repent, you become stronger and better able to resist wrong ways. Follow Christ, deny self, focus on Spirit-filled living, and delight in the law of God. This relationship will give you the power to resist the devil, turn from sin, and walk with Christ.

May 12

### Least or Great in the Kingdom?

*Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*

**Matthew 5:19-20**

### Focus on Christ

Are some sins greater than others? Maybe you know that all sin is against God and that all sin is wrong, but it still seems that some sins are worse to you than other sins.

In Jesus' day, the Pharisees had spent time measuring out the lesser commandments from the greater ones. They saw some commandments as less important than others. The Jews divided the law into three sections: moral, ceremonial, and judicial. In so doing, there were some laws that seemed less important than others. To break lesser laws seemed to also have a lesser penalty. Yet, Jesus made it very clear that to break even the least of these commandments, and thereby, teach others that it is acceptable, is to be called least in the kingdom.



Jesus made it clear that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. And if He came to fulfill the whole law, then breaking any of God's commandments would be a serious offense against God. In Matthew 18:6, Jesus made it very clear how unacceptable it is to lead someone away from the truth when He said, "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

You can minimize the teachings of God by trivializing or making light of sin. If you consider breaking any commandment of God as trivial, then you trivialize sin. If you have a problem with anger, then you may trivialize that behavior by not calling anger sin. You might say things like "Everybody gets angry!" or, "My anger is just fatigue!" or, "Didn't Jesus get angry!" or, "I know I got angry but I will not stay angry!" In such cases it is important to consider this verse: "...for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). If you live as though anger is acceptable even though it is not a fruit of the Spirit, then you will teach others to think this sin is a lesser sin. When you do, you are least in the kingdom of heaven.

You cannot use half-truths about Scripture and lead people into the greater things of the kingdom. Many major on the minor issues instead of majoring on the major teachings of Jesus. The first and last message on earth that Jesus shared was the message of repentance. How often do you hear that message today? Yet, it was Jesus' major message. You may hear things like "Well, God understands your problem and He will give you grace and mercy and peace." Not if it is sin. God will not call sin something less than it is to make you feel better. He sent His only Son to die and pay the penalty of your sin. Therefore, He will not make light of the message about how to deal with sin.

Are you a Christian yet don't live like one? If you are, then you are teaching others by how you live to diminish or minimize His commandments. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:3-4). When you commit your life to Christ, you commit to all of His teachings not just some of them. The Pharisees practiced the outward part of the law, but Jesus said your righteousness must exceed these basics. You must follow Christ by loving God with your whole heart, mind, and soul. This righteousness means Christ living in you to give you what you need to follow Him.

### **Focus on Self**

Self will tend to make its own rules and measure its own life by its own standards. When self does this, it makes life more comfortable. Christ will not allow you to get comfortable with sin. When a true believer breaks one of God's laws and God's Spirit convicts that person of sin, they cannot ignore it. This conviction is there for pro-



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tection. God wants His children to stay in right relationship with Him. When you follow His commands with integrity of heart, you will be considered great in the kingdom.

May 13

### Integrity Requires Commitment

*That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth.*

**Deuteronomy 23:23**

#### Focus on Christ

How important is it that people do what they say they will do? When someone says they will do something and do not follow through, how do you feel about them? It seems too common for people to break their promises. Here are some examples of promises people often break: "I will call you," "I will do this assignment," "I will pay you back," "I will be at church this Sunday," "Can I borrow this? I will bring it back." If a person does not follow through, then their lips reveal that what they said was really a lie.

Jesus said, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37). When you compare this Old Testament passage with this New Testament passage they reveal a life of integrity. If you say something, then follow through with it. If you do not follow through, your personal integrity is at risk. Doing what you say you will do represents a spirit that is willing to be faithful in the little things. If you do not follow through with little things, then you will not be given much responsibility. On the other hand, when you are faithful in the little things, you prove you can be trusted to handle much bigger things.

When you speak of something you will do or something you believe God has directed in your life, you must complete the task, or it brings doubt about other things you say. Be sure that what you say is directed from God. Philippians 1:6 says, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ..." Rest assured, if God started it, then He will complete it. When you state that God has started something, be certain because others are watching to see if you are committed to God. If you do not do what you say you will do, then it will harm your witness for Christ. Others will not see your speech as truthful if you do not follow through with what you expressed toward God. Promises are important between people and even more important between you and God.

God is looking for people whose hearts are right toward Him. "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). If you are loyal to God, then you will do what you promise Him. How often has it been said, "God, if You will get me

out of this trouble, I will serve You for the rest of my life.” Yet, when times are better, they go back to their old way of life. A loyal person will perform what they promise. God’s eyes can see the depth of your heart. He knows whether you are faithful, honest, consistent, loyal, or undependable, unreliable, or uncertain. When He sees a person whose heart is loyal towards Him, His favor will rest upon them.

**Focus on Self**

Self is concerned with fulfilling its own feelings and desires. Self wants others to fulfill their commitments but is not concerned about its own commitments. A loyal person will be trustworthy in his commitments and will readily, faithfully, and enthusiastically fulfill what he promises to God and to others. What kind of person are you? Do you keep your promises? Do you do what you say you will do? God is watching to see if you are a dependable person of integrity.

**May 14**

**Depths of Love**

*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

**Matthew 5:44-45**

**Focus on Christ**

How in the world can you love your enemies? What kind of love is required for that?

Jesus preached and taught a deeper level of love than the law could ever demonstrate. He came not to destroy the law but to give the law a deeper meaning, a fullness of life. Jesus came in the flesh to relate others to God. He wants us to understand the relationship God planned for us. Therefore, Jesus came in the flesh to relate to us face to face. He came to reconcile sinful people to a Holy and Loving God.

Jesus gave one illustration after another of how they had heard the teaching of the old law. But at each point of the law He said that He had a new depth of meaning. Do you know what that depth was? Love. His Love would give protection and correction to our lives for the purpose of keeping us holy. He started with the obvious for our simple minds. You have heard, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, or even to love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” Those sins are obvious and easy to observe. But Jesus helps us see that murder is the outcome of hate, adultery is the outcome of lust, and loving friends and hating enemies is the outcome of partiality.

When Jesus said to love your enemies, He was going beyond the law to the Love only He could bring. How could Christ love pitiful sinners like us who were the enemies of God? He had a love that was

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not of this world. It is a love that will not approve wrong conduct but can bestow mercy on those who don't deserve it. This love reconciles man to God. Christ is the Supreme Reconciler of Peace. Only when we are like Him will we be called sons of God, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

This is what distinguishes Christianity from religion. Christ gives us His Love that allows us to love our enemies. Religion tries to make people act loving toward people they hate.

### Focus on Self

Self has an inward desire for others to see how good it is. Self wants to feed someone who is hungry and let everyone know how generous it is. Self wants approval from the world. Christ wants you to develop to the point of feeding the hungry because His Love motivates you. The needs or the recognition should not be the motivation. "For the love of Christ compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14). Only His Love working through you will help you be a true peacemaker.

May 15

### God Knows Your Needs

*And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.*

*"Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.*

**Matthew 6:7-8**

### Focus on Christ

Would you address God like this: "Heavenly Father, I need to talk to You; and, God, I need You to hear me, God, because, God, you are so loving, God?" Saying God's name over and over does not give you extra credit in your prayers. Many people repeat the same things over and over again but do not get personal with God.

Repeating God's name without knowing Him is vain repetition. Appearing to communicate with God without knowing Him personally would be another form of vain repetition. Many whom Jesus was referring to were wanting to be heard by others more than they were wanting to be heard by God. They found prominent places to pray so that more people could see them. To desire to be seen by people for your fancy prayers instead of desiring only to be heard by God, is an abomination to God.

Jesus said that we are not to be like those who do not know God using made up prayers with repetitious phrases. These may be fancy words, but they are not meaningful words coming from a deep relationship with God. Don't ask God for something over and over in the same prayer time as though God didn't hear you the first time. Many people think that, if they know the right phrases to pray then others think they sound spiritual. Jesus was not looking for people who

sounded spiritual because of their many words, He was looking for spiritual people.

“Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.” If that is true, then you must be well acquainted with God. Since He knows what you need, find out what He wants for you and ask for that. Many ask, “How do we know God’s Will or what to pray?” God lines you up to His Will through prayer. Right after Jesus said what we should not do in prayer, He gave a model prayer for us to follow. We are to pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” That lines us up with His Will. In fact, if you pray a simple prayer like the model prayer from a sincere heart, then He will answer everything you need. Why? Because He knows what you need. If you quote the model prayer every day as a ritual, then the effect of communication through a relationship with God is lost. However, when you love God and ask Him these things from a sincere heart, you will see a life change. After all, prayer is simply adjusting your life to God. When your heart is sincere, God will place what to ask on your heart. He knows your needs and wants to provide everything you need to live as an obedient child of God.

### Focus on Self

Self prays for comfort and asks for things that make life more pleasurable. But God wants you to have what He knows will make your life the most fulfilling and meaningful experience possible. Since God knows your greatest needs, you simply must have a heart that is tender toward Him. He will help you know what to pray for and will give you what you need and not just what you want. It is incredible to serve a God Who knows you better than you know yourself. He is the One who knows the future. He knows what will happen in two days, two months, two years, and two decades. Follow Him daily, and you will always be on the right path and on the right timeline.

May 16

### A Loyal Heart and a Willing Mind

*As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.*

1 Chronicles 28:9

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever experienced a relationship where you felt totally safe? One in which you had no doubt that the other person deeply loved you, cared for you, and would do anything to serve you? Trust is a valuable quality in a relationship, but relationships need something

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more to be genuine and authentic. You must be willing to serve, love, and care for the other person with all your heart, soul, and mind. The first great commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and the second one is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself.

God alone knows your needs. Therefore, it is very important that you have a good connection with Him. God continually knows everything you are thinking and feeling. He knows when you are loyal, when you are pure in heart, when you are deceitful, or when you are not sincere. He alone knows when your mind is perfect toward Him. When you cannot discern your own intents of thoughts and motives, God can and does. In order to have a great relationship with someone, you must be genuine, sincere, vulnerable, and loving. You will only experience this with a person if you are experiencing it with God. God is looking for people who want this depth of relationship.

Your relationship with God requires more than a loyal heart: it requires a person who wants to serve Him with a loyal heart. A loyal heart is perfect and undivided in its allegiance toward someone. Faithfulness is a good word to describe a loyal heart. No matter what the trials, tests, difficulties, or barriers, a loyal heart will always stay true.

Your relationship with Christ also requires a willing mind. Willingness implies a person voluntarily giving what he has to serve the Lord. When you are willing to serve in a relationship, no one has to tell you to love be kind, nice, or faithful. Willingness is a representation of the Love of God working through your heart to seek Him and His Ways.

As God searches, seeks out, and understands the intents of your mind and heart, He knows if you are seeking Him from a pure heart. If you are, then He will reveal more of Himself to you. If you are not loyal or willing, then He will forsake you, and you will miss out on knowing Him. Purity in this relationship will cause you to seek and find. Hypocrisy will leave you forsaken and missing out.

### Focus on Self

Self is only loyal to self, not to God. Self is not willing to give without getting. God is looking for people who desire an intimate walk with Him. Those who willingly desire to serve God with a pure heart will seek and find Him. When they do, God will enlighten them to see great things about Him that the disloyal person will never see.

May 17

### Prayer Beyond Words

*Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

**Romans 8:26-27**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever had feelings that you wanted to express but just did not have the words to do so? There are times when you want to talk to God in prayer, but you just can't seem to find the right words to express the concerns on your heart and mind. When you cannot express deep emotions that are overwhelming your mind, the Holy Spirit knows how to help you. A sincere desire to talk to God about your needs, troubles, or requests can sometimes be summed up in a few words such as, "Oh, God! Help me!"

Many times it is obvious what and how to pray. You may pray about health, the salvation of a friend, the return of a wayward believer, or patience in a given situation. Other times, you simply don't know what or how to pray. When that happens, the Spirit can help in your weakness by coming to your aid to help and know what to pray and to help you in any weakness. When Christ searches your heart, He does so knowing the Spirit's Mind. The Spirit helps you pray about the things you cannot express.

The good news is that you have two intercessors: Christ making intercession for you in heaven at the right hand of the Heavenly Father (see Hebrews 7:25) and the Holy Spirit making intercession for you on earth. Jesus knows what the Spirit is working to accomplish in your life. He also knows what the Spirit is leading you to do, think, and pray. The Holy Spirit helps you to know the Will of God. Since the Holy Spirit knows God's Will, He helps you to know what you should pray. "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:10). It is critical that you walk in the Spirit. When the Spirit has a loyal heart and a willing mind to work with, the Will of God is easily accomplished.

Although you still have the capability of praying about wrong things in the wrong ways, you have a safety net. As long as you are yielding your mind and heart to God, the Holy Spirit will not lead you into error in your prayer life. In your weakness, the Spirit helps you. What a blessing that you can depend on the Holy Spirit to help you when you don't know what to do or how to say it!

**Focus on Self**

Self prays to get what it wants. If you were to examine the prayer life of a selfish person, then you would see many requests that do not represent the Will of God. When a person with a loyal heart and a willing mind prays, he allows his thinking to be adjusted by the Holy Spirit to always be in line with the Will of God. It is amazing how the Holy Spirit guides your prayer, how Jesus presents your prayer to God, and how the Heavenly Father answers your prayer.



# Gifts From God

May 18

## Prayer Begins with God

*In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.*

**Matthew 6:9**

### Focus on Christ

When you begin to pray, where do you start? Do you start with your needs, your families needs, future helps, or crisis? Usually one of these grabs your attention. Sometimes you think you must simply quote the model prayer, and God will give you what you want. But it does not work that way. Approaching the model prayer this way leaves the relationship with Christ out of the prayer. At the same time, many confuse this prayer with the prayer of Jesus in John 17. While the Lord's prayer is found in John 17, Matthew 6 gives the model prayer. Here, Jesus is teaching you how to pray, not praying a prayer for you.

Where should you begin in prayer? Prayer must not begin with you but with God! Instead of waking up every morning to pray, thinking you know exactly what needs to happen, call on God's Holy Name first. You must recognize God's Glory if you are to have a proper perspective on prayer. An accurate, true, and extensive view of God is what you must have as a basis of faithful prayer. The knowledge of God will determine your whole approach to life and thinking. If you do not recognize the Holiness of God, then your view of God will be low and lead to a low standard of living. This affects your prayer life tremendously.

His Name is Holy. "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:11). To have a respect for the God of the universe as a Holy God will affect you in your approach to prayer.

He is the One who actually knows what needs to happen in your life. Yet, many times, you are so prideful that you block His help by thinking you know better. But God is in heaven and knows all things. God knows His Way for your life. He desires to give every heavenly gift to help you, but pride gets in the way. Pride sees our thinking as equal to God's. When that happens, prayer becomes simply a monologue of our wants, and God will not listen nor respond.

Prayer is adjusting your life to God. When you are willing to adjust your ways to God's Ways, it is an indication that a person is poor in spirit, has a loyal heart, and a willing mind. This person is ready every day to worship the One True Holy God Who knows all things that are needed in your life.

Notice that when we pray, "Our Father in Heaven," we are addressing Him as children of God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). Children of God have an



intimate relationship with their Father in Heaven. He wants the best for His children. Only peacemakers who are interested in reconciling others to God, will be called sons of God. These sons of God will be blessed by the Heavenly Father as He provides everything He desires for them to have. Do you want what He wants for you? Your approach to prayer will reveal your answer.

**Focus on Self**

Self begins prayer saying, “God, I need or want this!” Children of God begin prayer saying, “God, You are Holy. What do You see that I need?” It is a vast difference between beginning with yourself or beginning with God. When you look upward toward heaven to address God, you get a proper perspective. You are on earth and are limited in your knowledge, skills, and oversight. God is in heaven and sees all things, knows all things, and has all things under His feet. What an awesome thought that God is waiting for His children to address Him properly and desire what He wants for practical everyday life!

**May 19**

**Heaven on Earth**

*Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

**Matthew 6:10**

**Focus on Christ**

Who’s will do you pray for? Do you want God to give you what you ask for? Or can you honestly say that you do not want your will but God’s Will? We have a will, and God has a Will. Jesus is helping you to see that you should ask for God’s Will to be done and that your will should submit to His Will.

When you begin a prayer saying, “God, You are Holy,” you are ready for His Will. Why? To address God first shows your priority of wanting to hear from Him. This makes the prayer so personal to have a child of God address the Heavenly Father. Jesus made prayer personal to His Father. He prayed, “Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done” (Matthew 26:42). “Your Will be done.” That is the key to the rest of the model prayer. How can you know how to pray for God’s Will?

What God promises is what you should pray for. “Your will be done” means obedience to His Word. To do God’s Will is to keep His Word. However, you cannot keep His Word if you don’t know what His Word says. God wants you to experience on earth what He has designed in heaven. You do not have to wait until you go to heaven to experience His kingdom. You can pray for His kingdom, His Ways, and His Will to be done now! Such a prayer is based on the promises of God in the Scriptures.

## Gifts From God

Here are a few of God's Promises:

**Answers to prayer:** "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14).

**Togetherness:** "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

**Victory:** "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Then Jesus stated, "As it is in heaven." We must Praise Him! In heaven the angels are obeying His Word and praising God. "Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word" (Psalm 103:20). You should be doing that on earth. When you see God's Will being done on earth, you should praise Him. To do God's Will on earth means to live in His Word regardless of circumstances.

You must get to the place where you can pray, "God, do what you want with me and everything I own. Help me not to do my will but Your Will to Your Glory!" When you pray like this, earth will become more like heaven, and you will see His Will accomplished.

### Focus on Self

If you are selfish in your prayers, then you will only get what you work for and can attain by human effort. Self is so destructive towards receiving the gifts that only God can provide. God does not grant your wishes. He provides according to His will so that you can enjoy the abundant life designed in heaven. Learn from God's Word. Study His Promises. When you do, you will know what He desires for you. Ask for what He wants to give you, and you will enjoy heaven on earth.

May 20

### Daily Dependence

*Give us this day our daily bread.*

**Matthew 6:11**

### Focus on Christ

What do you need to survive every day? Do you need money? Food and water? A house, car, or nice clothes? What is absolutely necessary for the day?

What did Christ want to teach us with this request for daily bread? This word *daily* occurs nowhere else in Greek literature, and means what is necessary for today. What is necessary for the day is what we should ask God to give to us.

"Give us." He taught us not to ask for the ability to provide or the money to purchase what we need but for us to ask God to give us this

days bread. This helps us see our total dependence on our relationship to the Heavenly Father. Lord, give us only what we need in the day so that we will always know that You are our Provider. Never allow us to believe that we are the ones providing for our needs. Ask God to daily “Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me...” (Proverbs 30:8). We must learn that our provisions is not our goal. Our goal is to learn to totally depend on God for all our needs.

Let us live, Lord, in the purity of Your Word always depending on You for everything in life. “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6). If you live by His Word, then you will be shielded from the half-truths of this world. You will learn to depend on Christ’s Words which always lead you to life and victory.

We don’t always like dependency, but it is the best thing for us. When we are dependent on God, it is then that He can work, teach, and move through us.

Remember, though, that we tend to want independence, but independence from God is dangerous. There are many times that we simply cannot take care of our own needs. If you get used to independence and a need arises that you have absolutely no way to solve, then you do not know how to turn to God in dependence. It has become a foreign concept for you. When that happens, your circumstance seems hopeless. On the other hand, when you ask God to give you daily what you need, you are happy with what He provides. You are not looking for tomorrow’s or next year’s needs, you are satisfied with today’s provisions.

Who really depends on God? The poor in spirit see their need. They have no problem depending on God for daily needs. In fact, they realize what a blessing it is to depend on God and to experience the kingdom of heaven.

### **Focus on Self**

Self is not satisfied with today’s provisions. Self works hard to store up provisions for the future. This lifestyle constantly worries about money and possessions. Depending on God for the future is much safer. He is the only One Who has what you need daily. Disaster can happen at any time, and you can lose money and possessions. Yet, the poor in spirit never lose out when they see their need and depend on God for daily provisions. Trusting God for the day is much more secure than trusting people, banks, stocks, and retirement funds. Each of these will pass away because they are temporary. God is eternal and always has eternal provisions.

# Gifts From God

May 21

## Forgive or Remain Unforgiven

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

**Matthew 6:12**

### Focus on Christ

Why is forgiveness such a difficult concept for people? Is it because they believe they have rights and anyone who steps on those rights does not deserve forgiveness? Or maybe it is because they think to forgive they must go and talk with the offended. Whatever a person's thoughts, Jesus made it clear, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

We tend to look to our own thinking of why forgiveness is difficult. When we look into the Scripture, it becomes clear. "Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath..." (Ephesians 2:3). Unforgiveness is the natural way of thinking and acting for humans, but forgiveness is a new nature. Forgiveness is God's Way, not our way. Forgiveness is only accomplished from a heart that realizes it is poor in spirit—a heart that understands that all sin is against God. This kind of new-natured person has a heart to reconcile others to God. If we battle with forgiveness, then we are battling because our will differs from God's Will. A forgiving person is one who honors the name of God and desires His Will on earth. Forgiveness is the Will of God. If you pray for His Will to be done, then you will follow through with forgiving.

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). Peter saw a limitation to forgiveness, but that is not the Way of Christ. While it is difficult to forgive those who sin against you, Christ is not like that. "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Colossians 3:13).

Would you be willing to forgive those who sinned against you? Christ said in the model prayer for you to pray to the Heavenly Father, "Father, would you forgive me "as" I am forgiving those who sinned against me." Can you do that? Can you forgive others the same way Christ is forgiving you? You cannot unless you humble yourself as Christ did. He forgives because He loves. The key to forgiving others is the Love of Christ abounding in your spirit. If you can't forgive, then repent of selfishness and ask Christ to fill you with His Spirit of incredible forgiveness. Remember, to forgive others does not excuse their sin or let them "off the hook," it sets your spirit free!

**Focus on Self**

Selfishness holds grudges, hard feelings, and resentment. Self may think it deserves not to forgive, but the result will be a hardened heart that will not grow in Christ. When you yield to your old nature and ask Christ to soften your heart, fill it with love and forgiveness, there is no limit to what He will do to make you become a peacemaker. You will never be more like Christ than when you forgive. Ask the Heavenly Father every day to search your heart and show you if it has become hard, heavy, or harsh. If your heart is hardened, and you do not repent, then expect Christ to refuse to forgive you of your. That is not living in freedom. Choose love and forgiveness!

**May 22**

**Deliver Us From Evil**

*And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

**Matthew 6:13**

**Focus on Christ**

In Matthew 6:12, Jesus helped us deal with past issues. He taught us to forgive others of sinful actions as we have been forgiven. In verse thirteen, He gives us instructions for the future. “Do not lead us...but deliver us from the evil one.” When we experience forgiveness of sin, it is a strong deterrent to future sin. However, forgiveness does not make future struggles disappear. Learning to walk in the Spirit is still necessary even though a person has received the new nature in Christ.

When the Holy Spirit led Christ into the wilderness, He knew Christ’s Heart. He lived according to the model prayer by having God at the forefront of His Mind. That is where Christ wants us to be—keeping God first. He would never lead us into a place where He is not with us. He gives us in the day of temptation what we need to be delivered from the evil one. “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1). The Holy Spirit not only led Him there but also delivered Him. Satan did the tempting, not God. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (James 1:13).

God does not tempt you to sin. You tempt yourself, or evil tempts you. Jesus went through a difficult time of temptation and desires to keep you from defeat in your life. Lord, do not lead us into trials, persecutions, or tests, especially if we are not equipped properly.

## Gifts From God

Temptation will not remain long with a person who is walking with God. However, if you let down your guard and begin to walk in your own selfish ways, then any kind of situation in life can become a temptation. The key is not to try and avoid temptation as much as have strength from God when it is around. When you walk in His Ways, God is always present and active to give you the strength needed to be delivered. If you are a soldier, then you will have battles. A prepared soldier knows how to face battles.

The model prayer begins and ends with God from, "Our Father in heaven" to, "Yours is the kingdom." The prayer begins with the recognition of a Holy God and ends with the power and glory of the Heavenly Father Who can provide all things. You are to give God glory and praise. He doesn't need your praise, but He does deserve your praise. You can never give enough praise and honor, to a person you deeply love. Similarly, if you truly love God, then you will never get tired of seeing and praising Him for Who He is. You are to give glory to Him forever! Amen means, "So be it!" Simply put, all previous prayer is summed up in this one word—amen.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus prayed for us, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). His desire is not to put you in difficult situations. But when you are in a difficult situation, your tendency to sin will be determined by the condition of your heart at the time.

The kingdom is God's. Therefore, He has control over all things. He has the power to accomplish whatever you ask that is in line with His Will. Focus on God and you will know what to pray.

### Focus on Self

Self thinks it is strong enough to resist everything evil and believes it is capable of always making right decisions. That is short-sighted. Because of pride, self doesn't always know when it is wrong. Only God can give you the power and authority to both resist the evil one and your own evil thinking.

May 23

### Trials and Joy

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...*

**James 1:2**

### Focus on Christ

How can you rejoice when trials come? It seems impossible to rejoice when a tragedy, health problem, spiritual attack, or other difficulties come. How do you face an important character-building trial in faith?

There is a prerequisite to facing trials: start every day with God. If you are not poor in spirit or are not recognizing your need of God, then you will miss out on what He is teaching you through each trial. Trials

are not to move you away from God but towards Him. When you begin your thoughts each day with, "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name," you begin your day correctly. When you acknowledge God's Will in every aspect of your life, the trials you endure will keep your eyes focused on Him. If you are focused on your circumstances, then you will fail to see the goodness of God.

Joy comes when you actively see Him in your life. James used the word *count* to state what you must do. To *count* means to lead, command (with official authority), consider, have the rule over, suppose, and think. You cannot count it all joy when you go through various trials if you do not see the Hand of God at work in the trial. Sometimes you must command yourself by the authority of Christ to do the right thing even when the trial makes you feel out of control. Christ's control of your mind and heart will always lead you right back to the Will of God. The security that keeps you from going the wrong way is a mindful account of the Ways and Will of God. No matter what trial you are going through, He will never leave you to yourself. Christ will walk with you through the trial if you are faithful to stay connected to Him through His Word.

Only God knows what you need to develop perseverance and patience. God will provide the trial that prepares you best for what is coming your way. Often, God deals with people or possessions that you love the most. They may or may not have distracted you from following Him, but He certainly gets your attention the quickest when He deals with something precious to you.

Count it all joy when you come to know God better than ever before. If it takes, sorrow and trials, then still count it all joy for producing a closer walk with Jesus. Remember that Jesus said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me" (Matthew 26:38). His sorrow did not last, because He followed through with the Will of God. A trial is not punishment. Count it joy that God would test you. For God to take you through various trials is a compliment to your faith, because He sees what you are becoming and what He wants you to become. He commends you by giving you opportunity to deepen your knowledge and relationship with Him by offering you a trial. God will not lead you to sin, but into opportunities to exercise your faith. You may be a disciple of Jesus, but testing shows you the need for growth and development. Don't fight the trial; rather, focus on God in the midst of the trial. It may be painful, but great joy is achieved when you have God on your side.

### **Focus on Self**

If you focus on self in the midst of a trial, then the trial will never seem to end. Selfish ways generate selfish emotions and struggles. When you focus on God instead of the trial, there is a joyful future in store. No one enjoys the actual struggle. However, the Spirit of Christ living in you can give you joy and peace in the midst of the struggle. Remember, trials do not usually allow you time to prepare. If you are walking with God, then you will walk through the trial with Him.



# Gifts From God

May 24

## Genuine Faith is Tested

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.*

**1 Peter 1:6-9**

### Focus on Christ

Are there different kinds of trials? What are their purposes? Why do we have to go through trials if we are already believers? Peter gives an incredible answer to each of these questions in this passage.

“In this you greatly rejoice” refers to the salvation experience. You rejoice because of the great gift you received by salvation that is referenced in verses 3-5.

“Grieved by various trials” means to become sad, be sorrowful, or even be distressed. Notice Peter states, “you have been grieved.” This is in the past, a reminder that sorrow from trials is limited in time and does not amount to much in comparison to eternity. Even so, it is stated that this was a necessary trial. God always gives you what you need. Trials are to strengthen a believer’s faith and walk with God.

In verse seven, Peter makes it clear that the purpose of the trial is to test the believer and show whether his faith is genuine and worthwhile. In fact, the way in which you come out of the trial should give a reason to praise, honor, and glory in the revelation of Jesus Christ. God tested Abraham, Job, and others in the Bible for that very purpose. If you are serious about your faith, then you also will be tested with trials to show the depth of your relationship with God and to draw you even closer to Him.

Why would God do this? Because your faith is more precious and valuable than the most precious material on earth—gold. This comparison of our faith with gold is incredible. Gold is purified by going through the fire. Gold will ultimately perish in fire, but fire under control purifies gold. Testing does not destroy the believer but purifies and strengthens genuine faith. A believer should know that any testing by God is for good. God does not work in the life of His children to destroy them, but He will work to test, try, and purify their walk with Him.

When Jesus is revealed by the testing of your faith, then you should praise, honor, and give glory to Him. Not until you experience Jesus walking with you through various trials will you recognize Him quickly and completely.

Peter continues by sharing that he had been with Jesus physically and had seen Him in action. Though the believers he is writing to have not physically seen Jesus, they love Jesus and His Ways. Even though you do not see Jesus physically, you can still believe and love Him. Christ puts His Spirit in those who believe, making the relationship real and personal. You can experience Christ in His fulness now! The result is inexpressible joy. This is the joy that will take you into the trial, through the trial, and out of the trial. If this joy is inexpressible, then you cannot express it in human terms. Others may not be able to understand your joy, but you will experience it in the midst of a struggle. This joy is full of glory. That means that the joy is heavenly, only available to those who walk with God.

When is this joy evident? It is evident when you go through sorrow, suffering, and trials. For it is when you recognize your need of salvation and then receive the gift of salvation that you truly rejoice with “joy inexpressible and full of glory.” Joy comes from God and is a gift to all who put their trust in Him.

**Focus on Self**

Self has no interest in discomfort. When something is uncomfortable, self will try to buy its way out of the struggle. Self sees no benefit in being tested. To refuse struggles means every little difficulty will throw you off course. If you never struggle, then you never get stronger. You never learn. You never develop. However, those who put their trust in God, find joy in sorrow and struggle. The outcome of a struggle is a genuine faith that will stand the tests and result in praise and honor for the Christ Who walked you through the fire.

**May 25**

**Seek God First**

*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

**Matthew 6:33**

**Focus on Christ**

What is first place in your life? Family? Finances? How about comfort, satisfaction, position, or approval of others? Of course, you will always need food and water. Without those last two things, you could not live.

Jesus knows you need the basics of life. He used a simple word to preface His next major statement, “But...” Jesus meant that even though you need the basics, there are more important things to consider. Set your mind on things above not on earthly necessities and comforts. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Romans 14:17 states, “...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” You are to seek a holy life. God must be at the center of all that you

## Gifts From God

think, feel, and act upon. When you seek things of God first, He will make sure you have everything else you need in the right way, with the proper focus, and in the right timing.

How do you seek first the kingdom? In prayer. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus gave us the model prayer. The prayer began with seeking God and asking, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." To seek His righteousness is to pursue the character that God has designed for you. This enables you to see and experience right living on earth.

Practically, this means to quit seeking to establish yourself in this world and seek to experience God's Ways. Spend more time preparing your soul for eternity rather than building your kingdom on earth. Most people look for ways to establish great houses and land here on earth. Jesus said to seek His righteousness, His Ways, and His kingdom and all of these earthly things will be trivial in comparison. Yet, most in our day are more concerned about what kind of house they live in, what brand of clothes they wear, and how much money they have stored away than in what their spiritual life looks like. Imagine if you were more concerned with how much love you had toward your family and friends, how much joy you expressed, how much peace ruled your heart and mind, or how much gentleness guided your life. How much better would the things that you receive in this world seem if your heart and mind was at peace with God?

The question is not, if you are at peace with your way of life but if God is pleased with your way of life? When you experience righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, you will experience the freedom of placing all the concerns of this world in second place to God Himself.

### Focus on Self

Self has no other desire than to make self first place. This destroys human relationships, bankrupts peace, and pushes others away because they do not live up to personal preferences. Self is not interested in God's righteousness, just self-righteousness. Only when you allow Christ to be preeminent in your life, will you experience the wonderful, abundant life. God's Ways are always a better choice than your ideas. Don't worry about tomorrow, focus on God's Will for today.

May 26

### The Mind Guides Your Lifestyle

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.*

Romans 8:5

### Focus on Christ

What do you look forward to the most every week? Some look forward to a major sporting event. Others can't wait for a special trip.

Many look forward to their paycheck that will enable them to have a fun weekend. What should gain the attention of the believer?

You will know whether you seek first the kingdom of God by focus of your mind. If you want to give in to the life of pleasure, then your mind will lead you to crave the things of the flesh. This mindset has no intention of thinking on godly things. Each action in such a person's life is to fulfill lusts and desires. Since God is not the focus, nothing seems to be able to remove selfish thinking. The more the mind thinks on pleasure, the more pleasure it desires. Everything this person works for, plans toward, or considers, is to fulfill human wants. God is simply not a part of this thinking. Paul stated, "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). The natural man lives according to his nature.

Believers should have a different mindset, though Paul also referenced believers who give in to fleshly or carnal thinking. He wrote, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:1). Even believers can give in to fleshly thinking, but they should not.

"But those who live according to the Spirit" are different. These believers are not focused on the flesh. They have learned to crucify the flesh daily (see Galatians 2:20). Now, they live with a mind renewed by the Holy Spirit. Every day the spiritual believer thinks on God, His Word, and His Ways. The Word of God is central in their thinking. This person does not let days go by without thinking on and reading Scripture. Their mind is renewed moment by moment as they reflect on what God has shared with them through His Word. The concerns of eternity dominate their minds rather than the simple pleasures of this world.

If you let your mind focus on carnal things all the time, then you will live in a carnal way. Proverbs 23:7 states, "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." If you think according to the flesh, then that is the way you will live. Anything that does not renew the mind toward God is carnal. A carnal mind will kill the soul. The spiritual mind that is focused on Christ will renew a person with refreshing, abundant thoughts that translate into holy living. This is the life Christ calls you to live.

### **Focus on Self**

Self is not concerned with God. That is a sad statement. Selfish people simply do not know what an awesome life they are missing out on when they leave God out of their thinking. In fact, many times the selfish person is so *I-focused* that they believe everything they think is right. The Scripture reveals that selfish thinkers are fleshly thinkers. The most refreshing thing that can happen to a believer is to meditate on God's Word.

# Gifts From God

May 27

## Disobedience Destroys Relationship

*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.*

1 Samuel 15:23

### Focus on Christ

How serious do you think disobedience is to God? Do you have the attitude of “What’s the big deal?” Do you think most people understand that disobedience is what makes them sinners?

King Saul disobeyed God. He did not realize how evil his disobedience was towards God. Believers tend to be the same way about their disobedience. You may realize when you do wrong, but do you realize the evil and rebellion behind the disobedience?

Christ died for wickedness, rebellion, and disobedience. God sees your disobedience as terrible as He sees witchcraft and idolatry. Until you see your sin as God does, you will not run from it and repent. Christ did not die for good people; He died for sinful people. If you are stubborn, then you think more of yourself than you do of God. You become your own idol.

Rejecting the Word of God is the greatest disobedience. King Saul decided to take matters into his own hands. There is great danger in high positions. Think about how arrogant it was for King Saul to disregard the command of God and decide to do things his way. When looking at Saul, it is easy to see where he went wrong. What about you? Have you ever disregarded the Word as if you knew better than God?

### Focus on Self

Self is rebellious against anything that makes life hard. In fact, self never believes that it is rebellious because it thinks its ways are always right. However, rebellion against God and His Word is judged harshly by God. Rebellion is as awful as stubbornness; and, when both are seen together, God says that they are as the sin of witchcraft and idolatry. Believers should recognize that God is always right and His Ways are always comforting. Do what is right in God’s eyes, and you will be accepted as an obedient child.

May 28

## Known By God

*And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.*

1 Corinthians 8:2-3

**Focus on Christ**

Of all the knowledge in the world, how much do you contain in your mind? We can all agree that we contain a small percentage of all the knowledge. Why do we, then, continue to strive to know more than others? Is it a competition? Paul said that if anyone thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing as he ought to know. “We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies” (1 Corinthians 8:1). If you are puffed up by knowledge, then you will not grow in Christ, only in your pride.

God’s Love edifies. This Love is a gift from God to those who walk in His Ways. Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). You will know if the Love of God reigns in your heart by whether or not you keep His commandments. While you can do God’s commands without your heart being involved, you cannot fool God. God knows your heart. God is not looking for the human emotion of love. He is looking for you to function by the Love of Christ that dwells in you. The Spirit of Love given by God is what gives you the power to love others as God loves you.

Love is much better than knowledge. Love requires a relationship with God. Knowledge requires simple learning. You can know things about God but not have a relationship with Him. James stated, “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). The demons have a knowledge of God but not a relationship with God. Knowledge without love will not esteem others better than itself. It will increase in self-confidence thinking less of others with no real concern to love others. If you learn many facts about life yet do not help others to promote their life with God, then the Love of God is absent.

Anyone who truly loves God will have a true knowledge of Him and will promote Christ as the only way to real peace and satisfaction in this world. If you truly love God, then all will know it. This holy living is evidenced as you become a true peacemaker, reconciling others to God. Since you cannot manufacture this kind of love, you must depend on God to grant it to you. God freely gives love to His children who obey Him.

What does it mean when Paul wrote “this one is known by Him?” It means that those who love God are approved and loved by Him. God shows His favor on those who love Him and obey Him. In this sense, God favors and entrusts more love and knowledge to understand, trust, and live righteously. What good is human knowledge without God’s Love? It may help a person keep a job, but knowledge alone will not keep a relationship with people or with God.

**Focus on Self**

Self uses its knowledge to promote itself. True knowledge from God is used to help others. Selfish knowledge comforts one’s own mind. What a sad life. To think that knowledge is the best you can

## Gifts From God

find in life is cold, hard, and boring. Relationships bring joy, and excitement to help you experience full meaning in life. Why would someone pursue a limited knowledge instead of exploring the deep Love of God that is inexpressible and limitless in its benefits?

May 29

### Wait on the Lord

*For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.*

**Isaiah 64:4**

### Focus on Christ

Throughout the history of the world, people have created idols with their own hands and called them gods. They spent incredible amounts of time and energy to develop a system of religion. Though they call inanimate objects a god, their god has no power to do anything for them.

Not so with the God of the Bible. There is no one like God. There never has been and there never will be. God has no rivals. He is the One True God Who can create, save, and perform anything He desires for those who wait on Him. What does it mean to wait on Him? To wait on God will allow you to witness the things in which you cannot currently see. Paul puts it this way, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Elijah said, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1). It did not rain for three years and six months. Can you imagine it not raining for that long? No one ever expected God could do something like that, but He did for those who loved Him. Jezebel (see 1 Kings 18) and all the kings people prayed to their many idols. They danced and chanted and did everything to get the attention of their god. Nothing they did worked. But Elijah, at God’s direction, prayed to the One True God, and He brought the rain. God did this in such a way that it was obvious Who did it, and that He did it in answer to the one who waited for, trusted in, and loved Him.

The world’s gods have no power. You can imagine what they can do because they are limited, short-sighted, and known to do only what a human can do. The Lord is God. He has proved Himself over and over again to those who call upon Him with a pure heart.

No one has ever seen nor heard all the wonderful things that God has provided and will deliver to those who love Him. No one has ever seen a God like our God. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to receive things that no one ever knew about until they saw what God did in and through you? God provided Christ to save us from our sins through His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead. No other god has ever done this.



When you see the Love of Christ toward you, you should be motivated to serve Him. You will serve the one you love. If you love God, then you will serve Him. How do you serve Him? Love. Your knowledge of others does not determine your true love for them. Your love and service to others is determined by your love of God and His Word. As you love God, His Love flows through you toward others. Love will guide you to serve God first and then to serve others.

God draws close to those who love Him. You can only get as close to God as He will allow. He determines this by how you obey Him and keep His commandments. Christ desires a real and intimate relationship with those who are His. His Spirit will give you everything you need to draw close to Him. If you want to see something that others have never seen, then simply learn to love God through spending time in His Word. You will see new insights every day.

**Focus on Self**

Self is its own god. That's pitiful. Can you imagine thinking you have unlimited power, knowledge, and wisdom to know how to be the greatest in the universe? God has all power, all knowledge, all wisdom, and all the love you will ever need. Isn't it wonderful that we serve the God who loves us and provides us with everything we need that pertains to life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:3)? When you spend time in His Word, you receive His insights into His Love and care. Want to draw closer to God? Spend more time in His Word!

**May 30**

**Love Produces Right Relationships**

*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

**Matthew 7:12**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you want others to do for you? Love you. We all desire love. We all desire faithfulness from others. Do we treat others this way? God's love equips you to keep walking in an honorable way that treats others properly. This verse is known as the golden rule. Manipulation is not the idea. It is not "I will if you will." Rather it is treating others correctly because the Love of Christ leads you. A natural person cannot practice this rule very well. It is governed by God's Love.

Only spiritually-minded people who are pursuing a love relationship with God by obeying His commandments will be able to consistently practice this rule. Righteousness is the real golden rule. Follow God, obey His commandments, draw close to Him, walk in His Spirit, and you will naturally love others. A person like this is refreshing because his life is a channel for God's Love.

If you do not live righteously, then God will not hear your prayers "When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are

## Gifts From God

full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes” (Isaiah 1:15-16). This is a challenge to every believer’s life. If your life is not right, then your communion with God will not be right. If your communion is not right, then you will not be empowered by God to do right toward others.

The Christian life is not just knowing about Christ and believing Him. If you truly know and believe but do not do, then your relationship is not founded on His Love. Christ’s Love will guide you to be to others what is needed to teach, guide, disciple, love, and even correct at times. After all, wouldn’t you want to know if you are in error? Many times God uses us to correct another. This correction will protect us from falling into greater dangers. A real friend will love and correct. Do to others what you want them to do to you. To do that you must be humble enough to see them as valuable as yourself. You must be willing to receive correction as well as give correction.

Some people try to separate the Old Testament from the New Testament. Christ did not. He made this law for everyone. No matter where you read in the Scripture, you will find this principle, enforced by the Law, the Prophets, and Jesus. It is a royal law of Christ. “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:14). “...But you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18).

If this law were put into consistent practice, then disunity would disappear. Families would function in a way that encourages, builds up, and grows their relationships with God. Churches would see an absence of gossip, strife, envy, and jealousy. Individuals would experience peace and be relieved from the stress of arguments and contentions with others. It is amazing how this short rule of Christ can correct difficulties in relationships with others. Yet, there is a cost. You must deny self, take up your cross of obedience daily, and follow Christ with all your heart, soul, and mind. When you do, love will rule your thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to be treated like royalty without returning the favor. Self love does not promote unity and love. The Love of God expressed through you will strengthen relationships. To have a strong relationship requires two people who love God with all their souls. Only then will they treat one another in righteousness and purity.

**May 31**

### Which Road? Difficult or Easy

*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.*

**Matthew 7:13-14**

**Focus on Christ**

Some people are not interested in following Christ on earth; they just want to go to heaven when they die. Should we enter the narrow gate because it leads to life? Or should we enter it because it does not end in destruction? Notice Jesus said, “Enter by the narrow gate... Because difficult is the way that leads to life.” Enter why? Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way. We ought to be Christian people precisely because there are difficulties, pains and sacrifices in following Christ. Jesus learned obedience by that which He suffered (see Hebrews 5:8).

To be a Christian entering the narrow gate is more difficult than to be a non-Christian. How do we enter? There is one way through Jesus—by repentance and walking in the teaching of Christ. Why does Christ use the word *Blessed* in the beatitudes to describe what the world calls struggles? Because the activity of God is in the heart of the one who recognizes they are poor in spirit, mourns over their sin, exhibits meekness, hungers for righteousness, shows mercy, lives pure in heart, and desires to make peace between God and people. To become a Christian you must be poor in spirit in order to see your need and have a sorrow or mourning over your sin. These are the narrow door posts to go through that lead to life. If that is all you can take through this gate, then you must leave some things behind. You must drop your pride, selfishness, personal righteousness, and self-satisfaction to enter this gate.

The wide gate is easy to enter. There are no boundaries. Just go wherever you want and enjoy the pleasures of this life. It is not only easy to enter but also easy to continue. However, the end of the wide path leads to a trap of destruction. All of the pleasures of this world lead to addictions, dependency, bad habits, and broken relationships.

The narrow road leads to life but only life in Christ. You cannot choose what you want to follow in Christianity. The way is narrow. You must focus on Christ and Him alone, if you are to follow this way. There is no room on this road to follow other interests. Christ alone is Whom you must concentrate your attentions, allegiances, and actions. If you stay on the narrow way, then there is safety. To veer, swerve, or change course from the one prescribed by Christ will take you out of fellowship with Him and begin to degrade your fulness of life.

The wide road gives you a wide range of options to approach life. You can pursue all kinds of distractions. Each distraction, though, will take you further from Christ and closer to destruction. Pursuit of possessions, power, and positions will give you a life-long goal but without Christ will simply lead to destruction. There are many people who pursued wealth to find satisfaction. Yet, it all comes to finding that what they pursued was not fulfilling. Then, it becomes difficult to choose what to follow next.

There are few on the narrow road. Many say they are believers but are busy pursuing the world more than Christ. They quote books and proverbs of this world and seldom speak of what God’s Word

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states. If asked what God taught them in the Scriptures they can rarely recall anything. Yet, they know the latest fad, craze, or rage. Those who are on the narrow road are focused on Christ even when they are in the minority. The few on the narrow road are more concerned that they are accepted by Christ than the world.

The difficult way is the best and safest way. Anything of value requires struggle and develops character. Ease of life tends to lead to pleasure that puts an end to developing character and produces destructive relationships.

Many are on the broad road. It is easy to take this road. People want so badly to be accepted by others so they choose to follow people instead of following Christ. Can you imagine putting all your trust for eternity into the hands of those who are seeking temporary things of this world?

### Focus on Self

Selfishness looks for the easy road. It does not pursue the things that matter the most. Listening to God's Word is not even an interest. However, if you are to follow Christ, then you will have to put away some things. Godly character must become what you pursue. When you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, you will not avoid life's difficult ways but Christ is worth more than all the troubles of this world. Pursue Him because you love Him not because you think it is the easy way of life. When you do, you will experience real eternal life now.

June 1

### Do What Christ Says

*Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.*

Matthew 7:24-25

### Focus on Christ

How strong is your relationship with God? Do you believe this relationship can withstand a storm? The answer to these questions are found in the answer to this simple question: Do you obey God's Word? There are many Christians who know Scripture. Jesus is not talking about knowing but about living.

The Scriptures have no effect or authority in our lives if we simply read them but do not obey. A Scripture often quoted is, "Be anxious for nothing" (Philippians 4:6-7). There are so many anxious Christians. If you lead them to this verse, then they say they know it. However, do they obey it? Obeying it requires prayer and supplication with thanksgiving in everything.

Jesus was making the obvious point that you cannot be on the narrow road and the broad road at the same time. You cannot be a good

tree and a bad tree at the same time. You cannot build a house on the sand and on a rock at the same time. It is impossible to try and live both lives. Jesus wants you to build on the right foundation, His Word!

Everyone who builds a house lays some kind of foundation. A house built on sand can look the same as a house built on the rock, but they have different foundations. Just because you look good when you attend church doesn't mean you feel right. The external can be much different than the internal. You can fool people, but people's opinions are not what matters. God is the One Who must approve you. Proverbs says all the issues of life come from the heart. "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Life proceeds from the very Words of Christ. Follow His Word and you will learn the ways of life that produce lasting effects. How do you build your life on His Word? A life of obedience to Christ is required. Simply do what He says.

A life of disobedience and selfishness ends in corruption and failure. "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (Galatians 6:8).

If you build your life on the Words of Christ, then you will be solid and firm in your decision making. Storms will not destroy you, but they will reveal the stability you have in Christ. People who build their life on ambition, friends, money, power, pleasure, every thought of man, and every deed they perform will come crashing down in the storm. Why? Because these are all things that are temporary and made by people, not by God.

### **Focus on Self**

Self looks for the cheapest and easiest way to approach life. These ways are thought up by man, not God. Yet, those who spend the time and effort to know and obey the Words of Christ will have a solid foundation for developing a healthy message and ministry and healthy relationships with family and friends. It is wise to hear and obey the Words of Christ.

## **June 2**

### **Love and Patience**

*Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.*

**2 Thessalonians 3:5**

*...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*

**James 1:3**

### **Focus on Christ**

Why would anyone desire patience? Why would patience be worth many trials? What is the value of patience? These are ques-

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tions most of us want answered. It is humorous that when it comes to patience, we want it now!

Trials are designed to test our faith. When your faith is tested, it will strengthen other spiritual qualities. Patience is the ultimate outcome of trials. The value of patience is that the Promises of God are for those who wait on Him. “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

Trials produce patience. Who are you most patient toward? Those you love. If you love someone, then you will wait on them. There is a direct connection between patience, love, and trials. By bringing you closer to God, trials produce patience; in turn your connection and love for Him grows and deepens.

“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5). Notice here that your heart is to be directed into the Love of God. That means this love is not speaking of God’s Love toward you but your love toward God. When you love God with all your heart, you will obey Him. This kind of obedience will be guided by patience. If God calls you to wait on Him, then you will be willing to wait on the One you love. As love permeates your heart toward God, patience will be available for any trial you face. When your love is deep and consistent toward God, your will merges with the Will of God.

Christ is a perfect example of patience and endurance. Patience in the New Testament has two sides. One is passive. In examining Christ’s life you see that when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. He did not open His mouth to defend Himself. This submissive attribute is the passive side of patience. There is also an active side of patience. Christ continued in boldness toward the cross no matter what the cost. He patiently pursued the Will of the Father. Both passive and active patience took Christ through the storms of life.

To love God more means to love the world less. God takes you through trials to burn out the world, make you more dependent on Him, and acquire the patience of Christ that will take you through other storms.

### Focus on Self

What would it take for self to be patient? Most selfish people have no patience toward people or events. Trials bring more turmoil to the selfish person because they have no love for God, just love for self. As the believer grows in his love for Christ, the patience of Christ directs him into a deeper love for God. This cycle of love submits to the Will of God and endures trials producing patience. What a way to learn patience—learn to love God!

June 3

### Learning Through Suffering

*...who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

**Hebrews 5:7-8**

#### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been in misery, anguish, distress, grief, or even agony? Strong cries and tears toward God is appropriate when thinking of the One Who is able to save you from death and provide so great a salvation. Tears are not disgraceful or shameful when they come from a heart of love for the One Who suffered for you. The actions of Christ can never make you hard-hearted but should lead you to more tender heartedness. Tears provide relief in times of suffering. Jesus wept in the garden and at the death of a friend. This is a natural response of love.

Though the Scripture does not state that these prayers were from the Gethsemane event, the deep cries and tears of Jesus seem to point to that moment. In Matthew 26:38, Jesus said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." Then we see, "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will'" (Matthew 26:39). In Luke 22:44 the Scripture reveals the anguish of Jesus when it states, "And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Jesus bled, and died, and suffered for you!

Jesus learned through suffering, but the suffering had a purpose in the Will of God. God's Spirit leads you into the Will of God. Jesus knew He was going to the cross. His Purpose was to save you from your sin. Your purpose now is the Great Commission. Acts 1:2 reveals, "...until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen..." What commandment? The Great commission. Suffering will be involved in carrying out that command.

Trials bring suffering. The trial is the action and suffering is the response. Persecutions bring suffering as well. Surprisingly, obedience also brings suffering.

Jesus was different from us in that He did not have to turn from disobedience to obedience. People struggle with disobedience. You have to repent of disobedience to learn obedience. Although Jesus did not have disobedience, He showed us the way of obedience through a close connection with God in prayer. His obedience to God came in the deepest moments of suffering. While He suffered, He learned as a



## Gifts From God

human how to obey God in the deepest and darkest moments. The life of Christ is a life of prayer.

While our call is to make disciples, God gives us power to accomplish our purpose and His Will. If you go through a trial and are led to His Purpose, then you can know that the trial is meant to deepen your love for God. If you didn't know the trial was part of God's Purpose, then you would not have the patience to see it through. The Love of God carries you through. The trial produces the patience to follow God's Purpose. Living in His Will is valuable. Christ's divineness was laid aside in His sorrow, but His sorrow was not sin. You need patience in suffering like Jesus' example shows. If you are suffering but don't endure, then you are failing the test. It will become sin.

Jacob suffered and worked for seven years to buy Rachel as his wife. Many would grow weary in this suffering. But the Scripture says, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Genesis 29:20). There is the answer to enduring suffering: love! God's Love will "... direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5). Wouldn't you rather suffer for a deeper walk with God than for your sin?

Jesus walked through life unaffected by everybody's opinions, even though many times their attitudes, speech, and opinions were meant to hurt Him. Obedience to God's Will took Him through every trial, test, or persecution that came upon Him. Do you want to be more like Jesus? Then, you will also learn obedience through that which you suffer.

### Focus on Self

Self has no interest in suffering and sees no purpose in suffering. But self also never seems to learn valuable life lessons. When you lay self aside and take on obedience to Christ, you begin to realize that suffering is worth the value you receive from deepening your relationship to Christ. While suffering is not easy, or fun, knowing God is worth the trials and tests suffering brings. If you focus on the One you love, then the trials do not seem so intense and are short lived.

June 4

### The Purposes of God

*"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again."*

John 12:27-28

### Focus on Christ

Are you willing to endure any trial? What kind of trouble do you like? Your normal human response to trouble is probably, "Lord, save me!" Sometimes it may be, "Lord, get me out of this trouble!" What

if the trouble is the exact event that needs to happen to fulfill God's Purpose and to glorify His name? The response of Jesus was "...not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus knew His Purpose and was willing to walk through the trouble with His Father in order to glorify His name. This did not come without pain and suffering. Often the pain is for a short time. You cannot cause pain and suffering to disappear, but you can walk through it with the Power of Christ in your life. Christ was willing to bear any trouble, discomfort, or pain, for one reason—Love. Love carries you through difficulty.

Are you willing to endure trouble for the glory of the Lord? That is a difficult question to answer. Yet, you know that suffering brings you closer to God. While you will not choose suffering, you learn how to depend on God even more through suffering. When you truly suffer for righteousness sake, you discover an incredible joy that could not be experienced any other way. In Christ, trouble is turned to joy when you know He is walking with you through the difficulty and will sustain you through the trouble.

Jesus asked, "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?" He approached this moment in His humanness. You ask questions when trouble arises. "God, will you take this away?" "God, why do I have to go through this?" "God, what are you trying to teach me?" By asking these questions, you find a way to think through the situation with God and by His Word. Only when you hear from God about your troubles will you set your mind to do the right thing—because you know the final outcome.

This brings childbirth to mind. Nine months of a baby growing in a woman's body ends in the painful birthing of the child. During childbirth women may yell, "It hurts!" or "Get it out of me!" But a mom, eager to meet her child, will endure the pain for the blessing of the baby.

Jesus endured the pain and agony of the cross for the blessing that was poured on every believer who places their life in Christ. What if Jesus decided not to obey? That is an extremely difficult thought to process. Christians disobey all the time with no real understanding of what that means not only for them but also for the entire church. Obedience during suffering results in all glory going to God. The glory is not toward the believer. When others see you respond in obedience to Christ in the midst of trouble, they will give glory to God for He is the only One Who could take you through the trouble.

### **Focus on Self**

Self does not believe in personal suffering but seeks to find a way out of suffering and troubles. When you obey Christ in the midst of suffering, you learn that God will grant you grace enough to go through the trial. You also learn that God will be honored by your endured sufferings. Whatever you do for His sake brings honor and glory to His Name. Believers live to honor God not to indulge selfishness.

# Gifts From God

June 5

## Respect Spiritual Leaders

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

**Galatians 6:7**

### Focus on Christ

How do you treat the one God sends to you? How would you know if you are deceived? Which is worse to be deceived or to cause deception? Each of these questions make you reflect on the issues at hand in the church at Galatia. Paul wrote to address these issues. The main issue was whether or not the church would take care of the members and primarily the ministers.

Paul realized that many thought they could treat God's leaders, the ministers or pastors any way they wanted. They did not respect the leaders and treated leaders as people who should follow their ungodly lifestyle. This can and does happen in the church today. Some people in churches think they are qualified to lead the church because they are successful in the world. Money, position, or power has never been the qualifications for spiritual leaders. Yet, many successful business people have let their successes in the world bring deep pride into their thinking. The result is that they think success qualifies them to lead God's people with worldly methods.

These people are being deceived by the evil one. Respect toward God's called ones leads to humility. Disrespecting God's leaders is the same as disrespecting God. If you sow disrespect, then you will reap disrespect. Often a godly leader gives advice when asked about a given situation. If such a leader gives advice to someone who does not know him well, then the advice is often respectfully considered. However, if the advice is to a friend or family member, then that person treats the information as though it is ridiculous and obviously wrong. Jesus said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4).

Why is this so? Pride! People do not want someone they know to be more informed than they are. You can just imagine people saying of Jesus, "Isn't that the carpenter's son?" They should have been saying, "When I heard Him speak, He spoke with such authority!" To refuse to hear the truth of God through a servant of God reveals that deception has captured a person's mind. Success gives a person a false sense of confidence. Fleshly things cannot improve spiritual growth. Do not be deceived. Worldly success is not the same as spiritual growth.

If a person does not respect a spiritual person, then they are not following God. People who knew you before you had a deep walk with Christ may seem unable to see God in your life today. Why? Because they are not seeing God in their lives. They just see things from a human perspective. That is simply pride.

It doesn't matter whether you are deceived or you are trying to deceive. Deception is still at work. What needs to happen is respect for one another as James stated in James 2:8, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well." When you do this, you will not disrespect godly leaders, but rather you will, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

### Focus on Self

Self is at the center of deception. Truth does not deceive. God does not deceive. Self deceives in order to relieve shame or to blame others for its problems. If you feel inadequate spiritually, then you may act better than others to relieve your feelings. This self-deception will lead a person to eternal damnation. Why? God is not mocked. You cannot sow deception and reap eternal life. Protect yourself. Yield your spirit to God. Follow the truth of the Word. Do not measure the truth by how you feel toward the person who is speaking. Measure truth by the Word of God! Spend time in the Word and you will rejoice in the truth.

## June 6

### Who Enters the Kingdom?

*Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world..."*

**Matthew 25:34**

### Focus on Christ

If you were a king, then would you give your kingdom away to the people who were under your rulership? How often does a king offer his kingdom to others? Many Christian leaders are afraid to let other people be a part of their ministries. Jesus was not; instead He invested in the ones God sent Him.

This verse is the only place where Jesus called Himself King. He was explaining to His disciples what would happen at the end of this world. He will separate the sheep (the righteous ones) and the goats (the wicked ones). Jesus is the only One Who can do this. He alone knows who has followed His teachings and who has not. Earlier in His teachings, He stated, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). The King alone has the right to say who is on His right side and will inherit His Kingdom.

The ones who enter the kingdom are the ones who take care of Christ and His own. In order to know whom God sends, you must know God well. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whom-ever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (John 13:20). Jesus knows who is interested in His Word and His Ways. He invests in those who are hungry for righteousness.

## Gifts From God

Those who want to appear righteous, He ignores. Oh the riches that He takes from His kingdom and gives to those who want to learn of Him. Jesus said, "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:14). Can you imagine that the King of Glory, Jesus Himself, will give His riches of wisdom, knowledge, and authority to those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn and are meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Many ignore the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is obvious when they do not recognize the ones Christ sent to them. God sends those who are able to teach and who want to learn to the churches, but they are not always recognized by the leaders. Many in church leadership do not recognize the activity of God. They simply need to pay attention to the ones God sends to their church. When a leader sees a church member hungry for the Word, they should give special attention to that person. Other times, God places a gifted spiritually-minded person in the body, but the church leaders are too intimidated to use that person. In these cases, the spiritual leaders need to wake up to the activity of God! Why be intimidated by a gift from Christ? After all, these are the ones that Christ says will inherit His kingdom.

None of us deserve to inherit His kingdom, but thanks be to God that He is willing to give you what you don't deserve and withhold from you what you truly do deserve. God does not play favorites. He is just and will give the benefits of His kingdom to those who follow His Son. He is also just to withhold the kingdom from those who will not follow His Ways. Who, therefore, enters the kingdom? Those who do the Will of the Father!

### Focus on Self

Self does not recognize God's activity. Therefore, self will not recognize when God sends someone to help or instruct. Self assumes everyone is on this earth for its own benefit. When you see God, you will see the ones He sends into your life. Look for the people whom God has given and who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Look for the ones God has entrusted a special gift of teaching. Spend your time with those people and you will realize where God invests His kingdom. He works through the ones He equips. Watch for those people, and you will experience the activity of God.

June 7

### Set Your Mind on the Things of God

*But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."*

**Mark 8:33**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you ever disagree with the Word of God? Have you ever said, “I just don’t believe what the Bible says in this passage”? Do you realize that is the same as rebuking Jesus?

In this passage, Jesus was sharing with the disciples what was going to take place. Peter began to rebuke Jesus. What could cause him to do this? His mind was on the things of man, not on the Will of God. Anything in the way of God’s Will is sin and is of the devil. Peter was attempting to save Jesus from suffering, but the Will of God is not void of suffering.

Jesus rebuked Peter because He loved him. Jesus hates sin but loves the sinner. He was attacking Satan and his influence. The goal of the Savior is to protect you. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent”(Revelation 3:19).

Peter rebuked Jesus for something that was the Will of God. Jesus was to die for our sins and be resurrected from the dead. For Jesus to simply live on earth would not meet the provision for victory over sin. Little did Peter know what was at stake if Jesus did not go to the cross. But this is the learning point for you. Don’t assume you know better than God what the next step should be in your life. God sees the complete picture, including the future. Since you are like Peter and cannot see the future, you must stay focused on obeying God one day at a time.

You can have good intentions and still be wrong. Peter surely loved Jesus and wanted to protect Him. But his human protection would interfere with the Will of God. Not only did misguided love direct him, but he also let his self confidence as a leader overpower the truth of the situation. Christ responded to Peter in front of the group. He could not let Peter’s private rebuke go unnoticed by the rest of the disciples. They all needed to know the seriousness of this issue. Jesus will not let you get away with mishandling truth either. Too many other lives are at stake when you go against the Will of God. Christ will rebuke you to protect you and those around you. When you mind the things of man over the Will of God, you risk hindering yourself and others in obedience to God.

Jesus was addressing the source of the problem—Satan, the same one who tempted Him in the wilderness. “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). Peter had let his mind be influenced by the things on earth. Jesus reminds us in the model prayer that you should ask, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). When you set your mind on God, you will be like Jesus.

**Focus on Self**

It is an awful sin to consider the ways of the world over the things of God. This is the act of self-will. Self cannot see how God’s Ways are better than man’s ways. God’s Ways do not make sense to a person who does not know God. When you are rightly related to God, you will either follow His Ways or be rebuked by God when you go the



## Gifts From God

wrong way. Rebuke is for correcting and teaching not for alienating you from Christ. When you are rebuked for worldly thinking it is to draw you closer to the Ways of Christ.

June 8

### A Precious Possession

*And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.*

Luke 24:45

#### Focus on Christ

Imagine for a moment that you inherit a precious possession. You receive a phone call that you are the heir to this possession. You accept it and keep it locked.

Who would you trust with this object? The Word of God is a precious possession. Jesus Christ is the most precious Person that ever lived on earth. Why should God trust just anyone with His Son? As Jesus walked on the earth, God gave twelve men to Him. These men followed Him in His ministry. One of them betrayed Him in the end. Jesus shared deeper truths with these men. They were the ones who the Lord trusted with the truth of His Son. Why? Because these men believed. After His resurrection, He again revealed Himself to them. As He revealed Himself, the Scripture says, "He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."

Many read God's Word, but few have understanding as the disciples did. Why? The decision is God's. The only way in which you will understand the Scriptures is by pleading with the Lord to open your understanding. His Spirit is the only One capable of helping you see His Truth. God does not trust all truth with all people. He is looking for a humble heart, one who will believe and have faith in Him, one who will obey Him. Do you have a hard time understanding Scripture? This has nothing to do with your ability, and everything to do with your heart toward God.

Jesus' teaching is not like our teaching. His teaching by His Spirit provides instruction in understanding God's Word as well as inspiration to obey the Truth. He entrusts the ability to receive the Truth to a genuine sincere heart. Jesus reveals truth based on your obedience to His teaching. He will not open your understanding for deeper truths if you do not obey the basic teachings. Many wonder why they are not growing in their faith. It may be that they are not obeying the last thing God told them to do. Want to comprehend more truth? Obey the last truth you learned!

#### Focus on Self

Self wants to be seen as more intelligent than others. A disciple wants to know what the Lord is teaching and understand how to apply it to his life. Wisdom is a gift from God. "If any of you lacks wisdom,



let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Just because you can quote a Bible verse (knowledge) does not mean you have Wisdom to apply it. Be humble, obey what Jesus is teaching, and He will anoint your mind with understanding and Wisdom.

**June 9**

### **Righteous Prayer**

*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

**James 5:16**

#### **Focus on Christ**

Would it be correct to say that not many are qualified to pray? Often, even those who do not have a personal relationship with Christ say they are praying for someone. Just what does that mean? Are they just hoping for and wishing the best for someone?

The original words here for *effective* and *fervent* render the idea of the energetic prayer guided by or ingrained, initiated, and implanted by the Spirit of God. In order for this to happen, prayer must come by the spirit of a righteous person. Many times people look down upon a person when that person is called righteous. They are looking at it from a humanistic perspective. They are probably thinking of a self-righteous person. That is not the idea in this passage.

In order to be righteous, there are several requirements. First, you must be a born again believer in Jesus Christ. Second, you must have the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Third, you must repent of any known sin so that there is no roadblock to God when praying. If you remove sin, then the effectiveness of your prayer is greatly increased. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

“The effective prayer of a righteous person” simply means that a person must be up to date with God, living in His Word, and depending on the Spirit of God to direct the prayer. When you abide in God’s Word and His Word abides in you, God will direct your prayer life. Many are not well grounded in the Word. They do not know what or how to pray because they do not know the Word.

Yet, there is something amazing about prayer: you are always with God. He knows what is going on in your life and what He wants to do in it. If you are walking in righteousness, you will recognize His Presence and know what to do. Jesus said that His sheep hear His Voice and know what to do. While you are limited in your ability to be available to all people, the Spirit of God is not! God’s Spirit is everywhere at all times. When you walk with Him, He is always present, active, and providing guidance.

Prayer is not about how righteous you are, for there is no righteousness in you apart from God’s Spirit. Prayer is about you adjust-

## Gifts From God

ing to the righteousness of God. While you are to seek to live a righteous life, you must yield to the Spirit. It is Christ's righteousness that avails much. Never think because you do not sin often that God has to answer your prayer the way you want. He seeks His Will on earth to be as it is in heaven. But He works through those who turn from their sins, humble themselves, and pray.

### Focus on Self

Self righteousness will not avail much. Nothing is moved by God because of a self righteous prayer. The Scripture says, "[The] eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). If you are loyal to God, then He will be loyal to you. When you are loyal, God will greatly enhance your prayer life. What makes your prayer effective? God!

June 10

### Christ—The Head of All Things

*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*

Colossians 2:9-10

### Focus on Christ

What is there to fear when Jesus the Savior is the head of all principality and power? Do you need to know how to pray about a given situation or person? Don't worry or fear about what you should pray. Simply connect to the One Who has all the fullness of knowledge and wisdom because He knows exactly what is needed.

Many want to deny the divine nature of Christ. The original words for *Godhead* and *bodily* occur nowhere else in the New Testament. Colossians 1:15 states, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." That means that everything about God is wrapped up, realized, and understood in the bodily person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know God, then you must develop a personal relationship with His Son.

To be complete in Him means that you need no other information than what God reveals to know the Will of God. While you may not know what Christ is saying to you all of the time, He knows what is needed at all times. When you abide in Christ, you have every blessing from the heavenly place available. Jesus is the Head of all principality and power.

When you receive Christ: "And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Every fruit of the Spirit and every grace enabled by God is available in an abiding relationship with Christ.

There are no principalities and powers on earth that are equal to Jesus Christ. He is the Head of all principality and power. You need

no mediator, priest, or ambassador. You have access to all power in Jesus as you abide in His Love. Jesus is the Supreme Ruler of all. He cares more about you and those around you than you ever will. Jesus protects you from evil and all its leaders. Everything over your head is under the Lordship of Christ. "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). The only fear the believer should have is the disciplining Hand of God. Spend time in the counsel of God, and His Son Jesus will give you clear and perfect direction by His Spirit.

### Focus on Self

Self has confidence in things that are incomplete. Self believes in its own knowledge and abilities to make decisions, but that knowledge is limited. Jesus has unlimited knowledge and wisdom. There is no power greater than His. This should give you a reason to praise and thank God for unlimited guidance and direction. All you have to do is walk with Him and ask for His help.

June 11

### Our Privilege

*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

2 Corinthians 5:20

### Focus on Christ

Did you know that, as a Christian, heaven is your home? Did you know that while on earth you are living in a foreign land? Just as any foreign ambassador would represent their country in a foreign land you are to represent Christ. All believers are representatives of Christ. What kind of ambassador are you? You must live the truth of the kingdom of Heaven in a foreign land (earth) to represent Christ. This requires resources that are out of this world.

Imagine that God stepped down from heaven in the form of Jesus to plead through you that others would come to Christ. Though you were once opposing God, He now prays for you to represent His Son and to reconcile others to Him. How much is required to cause the Creator to want His own creation to love Him? This requires an infinite love. Only an unlimited, unending, and boundless love could love rebellious and disobedient people.

Not only did Christ seek and save you, but He also made you His ambassador. You are His representative on earth as though God pleads through you to reach others so that they might be reconciled to their Creator. What incredible humility it took for the Creator to stoop to your level and plead through you to bring others to this relationship. This humility should stir you to serve faithfully as His representatives.

## Gifts From God

Christ wept over the condition of Jerusalem. He died for you. He wants you reconciled to Himself. He weeps over your condition. He invites you into an abiding relationship. He loves you deeply. With this same attitude you must implore others to be reconciled to God.

God is pleading with people through a heart of love. He has so many blessings for them but they cannot receive them until they are reconciled to Him.

How do people look into the face of Love and say, "I refuse to receive You!" Sin is the answer. That is the reason for Christ dying on the cross. No one can be reconciled to God except through the sacrifice of His own Son. Yet, many go down the broad path to destruction. They simply refuse in total rejection. Many are satisfied with their life, and refuse Christ by simply not accepting God's plea. No matter whether it is rejecting, ignoring, or quietly living with indecision, it is all from the condition of a corrupt soul.

Thanks be to God that He pursued us with so great a Love. "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled" (Colossians 1:21).

### Focus on Self

Can you imagine a person refusing God's Love? The only way that happens is by loving self more than any person, place, or thing. When you receive Christ as Lord and Savior of your life, you no longer want to represent yourself. Your life is then consumed by the desire to be an ambassador for His Way of life. God can plead through you to bring others to this incredible relationship!

June 12

### God's Discipline Is For His Children

*For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

1 Corinthians 11:30-32

### Focus on Christ

Does God bring physical illness and difficulties to His people? Many in our day do not make the connection between physical problems, natural disasters, or unusual deaths to the judgment or the discipline of God. Would you?

Paul said, "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." He was referring to the fact that the people in the Corinthian church were abusing the Lord's Supper. They were partaking of the elements of communion without giving any attention to the condition of their own soul. He taught them that if they did not subject themselves to self-examination prior to participating, then the result would be that, "...he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats

and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). People may argue the point that God would not do this, but they are ignoring this passage. The Apostle Paul goes on to say that many are weak and sick, and have died because of this neglect.

How can you prevent this from happening? Paul said to "judge ourselves and we will not be judged." That means that if you subject yourself to looking in the mirror of God's Word and asking God to examine your heart, then you can repent of what He shows you and then take of the Lord's Table properly, without judgment. This passage shows that they were not going through a thorough self-examination and therefore they were being chased, disciplined by God. Since Jesus died on the cross for your sin, God does not judge those who receive Him, but He does discipline them. When you repent of your sin, you experience the joy of repentance which is forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, and empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

God only chases and disciplines those who are His children. He does not bring a wrathful and vindictive action toward His children, but He will not ignore sin. Be thankful that God cares enough for you to discipline you. Never forget, discipline requires love. Since God is Love, He cannot discipline without it! If you are not chastened by the disciplining Hand of God when you sin, then you will be condemned with the rest of the world who has never received Christ. Remember, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Many think they are going to heaven, but Jesus says He does not know them. If you do know Him and are disciplined when you sin, then you must repent. If you do not repent, then God may use sickness and difficulty, to try and draw you back to Him. His Love will never let His child live in opposition to His Son Jesus.

### Focus on Self

Self does not care what God or others think of its actions. When self is in control, sin is rampant and dominant. Self-examination is important, but must use the Word of God as the tool for discerning the problem. When this happens, a believer will see the truth and return to God. But, when a believer rebels, the disciplining Hand of God will go into effect. Often the results are not pleasant but they have one purpose, to restore a love relationship between God the Father and His child.

**June 13**

### Teach With Meekness

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.*

**James 3:13**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Have you ever noticed that authorities tend to demand perfection from others while they may not practice what they preach? It is easier to look and act like a wise person than to be a wise person.

James provided instruction on God's Standard of the heavy requirements of a teacher. "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). Many believe that a teacher simply must have more knowledge than the student in order to be effective. That is not the case with teaching about spiritual things.

Notice that James states you must be wise and understanding, not wise and knowledgeable. In other words, you must understand what you are teaching to be effective. To understand the concept presented you must practice it personally.

Therefore, the power and authority in your teaching will come from putting that teaching into practice. Your life must show that you personally know, understand, and experience the truth you teach. Further, your life must be consistent with that truth.

Do not quickly place someone in a teaching position, especially in the church, until you see their life matches the message of the Scripture. To do so is to take lightly the importance of a godly person rightly dividing the Word!

Meekness is strength under control. If one is to teach with meekness of wisdom, then a gentle spirit is required. If a person is attempting to show through arrogance how much he knows, then he has become disqualified from showing meekness. A meek spirit can teach firmly without wavering from the truth. A self-serving person cannot teach without pride and arrogance. A godly confidence comes from a gentle spirit that is walking in the Ways of God with a firm foundation on the Word of God. A godly teacher must have a godly lifestyle. A calm but confident spirit is the result of a person who walks in a deep relationship with Christ.

## Focus on Self

Self wants everyone to know how smart it is. It receives pleasure from the amount of knowledge it has accumulated. Teaching in the meekness of wisdom is more concerned with the listener being rightly related to God. This gentle, calm teacher is blessed when the student sees new insights in God's Word. Who is wise and understanding? The one who practices before teaching.

**June 14**

## Power for Kingdom Work

*But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.*

**1 Corinthians 4:19-20**

**Focus on Christ**

What is your standard for determining to begin something new? Is it a current event, a fascinating charismatic speaker, or God's Word?

While many Christians would say God's Word has the greatest influence, the proof is in what they do. Often when you ask Christians what Scripture they read that day, they can't remember. Or if you ask what truth do they remember from their weekly reading, then you only hear silence.

When God gives direction, you can count on it! How do you know it is God's Will? Understanding the Will of God is clarified by His Word and by the depth of your relationship with Christ. James 4:15 states, "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"

The evil one does not want us to know the truth. Paul said you will know the truth if a person's life backs up what they say. He called this power. When God speaks through one of His servants, there is power and authority. If the evil one wants to discredit the truth, then he will try to discredit the person presenting the truth, for he has already tried unsuccessfully to discredit Jesus.

It is fairly simple for a person walking in the Spirit to discern whether someone is boasting or representing God's Truth. A boaster is focused on personal accomplishments, not kingdom results. Boasting, bragging, and self-praise give no power to truth. Rather, they reveal a deceptive person.

The power needed to do kingdom work, as Paul expressed to the Ephesian church, is "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power (Ephesians 1:19). What is this power? The same power that raised Jesus from the grave! It is not your power but the very power of God. If you can explain what you are doing with your ingenuity, then you are not using the power of God.

**Focus on Self**

Self loves to boast. But, when this boasting is in the presence of a Spirit-filled person, that person sees right through the boasting. You can boast if you want, but boasting is not the power of God. Depend on the power of God as you obey Him and be an ambassador of Christ, not of self.

**June 15**

**Love Endures and is Kind**

*Love suffers long and is kind.*

**1 Corinthians 13:4**

**Focus on Christ**

Are you patient? Maybe you are patient sometimes. When you are patient, does your patience endure? Some people say they are patient but their patience doesn't last long. That is not the enduring



## Gifts From God

Love of God. Paul shares in this chapter the attributes of the Love of God in our lives, not human attributes of love. Comparing the two helps us know if we are walking with God or walking away from Him. God's Love is His Grace. The power that God's Love expresses is beyond what we can comprehend.

While this chapter is about God's Love, Paul taught that His Love may be expressed through our lives. We know that God's Love is enduring and patient and kind, but how does it work through our lives? This same Love of God is available to every child of God. As you walk in obedience to His Word and in His Spirit, you experience an exchange of the works of the flesh for the attributes of God's Love. In order for others to receive an accurate picture of His Love, it is not enough to know the wonderful grace of God's Love, you must also express it in your human relationships. If you do not live by the Love of God, then you will never experience His Will being done on earth.

How may we experience and live out Love? We must first experience the enduring, patient, and kind Love of God. There were many difficulties happening between individuals in the early church. If those difficulties went unchecked by the teaching of the Word, then each succeeding generation would be in a worse state. There was strife, arguments, unkind words, and different focuses being pursued. Only the enduring and patient Love of God can bring those destructive actions in check.

This Love will endure all kinds of difficulties. When you are opposed, this Love gives you the grace to endure without an ungodly reaction. The kindness that Love produces will be gentle, tenderhearted, and affectionate. When attacked, this kind and gentle spirit has no sense of responding with any form of harshness. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). If you truly love someone, then you will be patient and kind toward them. This Love makes it natural for you to respond as Christ responds to you.

### Focus on Self

Self will be kind if kindness helps self. Self will be patient if patience achieves results for self. God's Love will give a pure kindness and a patient endurance that will help whether it benefits self or not. How great would our relationships, families, and churches be with this kind of Love?

**June 16**

### Love Does Not Envy

*Love does not envy.*

**1 Corinthians 13:4**

### Focus on Christ

Do you know any envious people? They may not realize that envy is the opposite of love. Since love does not envy, where does envy begin? Envy begins with hatred. This envious hatred will destroy a

person from the inside out. Proverbs 14:30 states, “A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.” Envy stirs up the heart and the soul. It makes you sick inside.

Envy is really a child of pride. Envy in your mind will produce a thought that makes you believe you deserve something more than others. It wants what someone else possesses. Envy distorts your mind so that you start feeling sad when good things happen to others and satisfied in the presence of other’s failures. If an envious heart does not get what it wants, then the envious person becomes depressed and discontent. Envy comes from the sinful nature, not from God.

God chooses what He desires to do with His servants. The Love of God encourages those who have been chosen by Him to fulfill the work He has for them. To envy someone else is to disregard the idea of your own place in the kingdom. God alone decides your place in the kingdom. When envy arises, it is evident that the mind is focused on self and not God. Self always believes it knows better than God. This is very dangerous.

Envy opposes the creative work of God. It becomes your way of saying, “If you will not gift me and use me in the way that I want God...then I will make my own way.” But Love that does not envy only comes from God. Love is God. God does not envy. He has no reason to envy, for He owns everything. This Love of God is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. If you are walking in obedience to Christ, then you will experience a Love that does not envy. This Love actually rejoices in the good that others experience. There is no acting with this Love. You do not have to act like you are happy about the success of others, you will be genuinely happy for them. In fact, a Love that does not envy is exactly what Paul stated in the first part of the verse, it suffers long and is kind.

Cain brought death to Able (Genesis 4). Joseph was envied by all of his brothers and it brought problems for many years in the family. King Saul, the first king of Israel, envied David and all the people who followed him. It literally drove Saul insane and he did not finish well. You do not usually envy someone for something you believe you can never have. Envy comes in the commonality of life. It is those up close relationships that you have in the family, in the church, in the workplace where envy tends to show up.

How do you fight the human tendency to envy others? Love! When you love the Lord God with all your heart, mind, and soul, you will obey Him. When you obey Him, He will enable you to experience His Love. This Love of God manifested in you will have no likeness, form, or similarity of envy.

### **Focus on Self**

Self wants others to do without, so that it can have what it desires. Not only does self want everything, it does not want others to have the pleasure of those possessions. There is no Love in this attitude. God places His Love in your life so you can experience a kind spirit that can truly rejoice in the happiness of others. Do you envy others

## Gifts From God

in your relationships? If so, ask God to search your heart and help you repent of the sin of envy, and restore your heart with a spirit of Love.

June 17

### Love Does Not Boast

*Love does not parade itself.*

1 Corinthians 13:4

#### Focus on Christ

Think about going to a parade. What is the purpose? A parade is a public display of people or things that impress and gain attention. When Christ rode into Jerusalem for what is called the triumphal entry (see Matthew 21:1-11), people were celebrating. Yet, Christ was weeping over the people's condition. He did not parade Himself. He focused on loving people.

God's Love is a fruit of the Spirit. This fruit is not produced by the branch, but by the Vine. Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The Vine supplies the fruit. Without Jesus, God's Love would not be present in the heart of a Christian. Why would you boast of something that you did not produce? When you are rightly related to Christ you know, "that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells..." (Romans 7:18). "Do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you" (Romans 11:18). When you are abiding in Christ, your goal is to exalt Christ and deny self. The mindset of God's Love frees those who are gripped in sin. This Love holds no place for selfish gain. If you find yourself parading yourself, then you have disconnected from the Vine.

This word *parade*, or *boasting* only occurs one time in the New Testament. It is not difficult to identify its meaning. This kind of boasting does not boast about one's godly character or about the mighty works and character of God. This boasting refers to calling attention to someone or something to the exclusion of God. That is not love. That is flattery for the purpose of positioning oneself to be seen publicly by others. There are religious leaders who have wanted to be paraded around as one of God's elect. The only problem is that when attention is brought upon self for religious purposes, it reveals sinfulness not servanthood.

To act as though one is superior to others reveals arrogance, pride, and conceit, not love. Instead of thinking you are a gift from God to others, Love teaches you to see that others are a gift from God to you. The more a person boasts, the less ministry that person tends to do for others. But those with a heart of love will give of themselves to do ministry that helps those around them. The only thing a boaster seems to accomplish is boasting. A servant has no time for boasting, for he or she is busy about kingdom work for the Lord.

**Focus on Self**

The image and personification of self is arrogance, pride, and boasting. Who wants to be around that kind of person? Rest in an abiding Love relationship with Christ, and you will have the freedom to help others without worrying about your own recognition. People enjoy being with these kinds of people. Their testimony is attractive to others because it is full of the Love of God.

**June 18**

**Love Is Not Puffed Up**

*Love...is not puffed up.*

**1 Corinthians 13:4**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever been puffed up? Just what does that mean? Paul wrote about how knowledge has inflated the ego of some believers. Some believe that because they have knowledge they have arrived spiritually. When you are inflated with pride, that pride will take you off course.

How does boasting differ from being puffed up? Boasting means to express one's feelings of pride and arrogance. To be puffed up means that you believe you are the greatest, but you do not need to express it to others. The feeling of superiority is enough.

According to Scripture, what puffs us up? "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Does that mean that knowledge is bad? Absolutely not! What is bad is knowledge without love. God's Love is not meant to make you believe you are better than someone else. God's Love is provided to make you more like Christ.

Only God Himself can give this kind of Love. The danger lies in two scenarios:

1. Obtaining knowledge without relationship
2. Obtaining relationship without knowledge

Christians need both. "And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him" (1 Corinthians 8:2-3). You cannot love God without loving the knowledge of His Word. Pride takes knowledge and inflates self. Humility takes knowledge and loves God and others.

The Love of God destroys the feeling of pride (being puffed up) and the expression of pride (boasting). Love always reveals the truth. Pride will lead one to lies and deception. When you see the incredible Love of God, why would you want to do anything but care for others? Love reveals that others have incredible value to God. If you do not love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, then you will be a product of lies and deception. What an awful way to live!

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self does not understand any love except self-love. It exists to promote its own knowledge, pride, and survival. This is a lonely way to live. God brought His Love to you through His Son Jesus Christ to give you a new way of living. Love gives you the ability to care, love, pray, and help others. It moves you from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Love is what gives you the full, abundant, and meaningful life that is beyond human experience. How will you recognize a person who is full of the Love of God? Humility.

June 19

## Love is Not Rude

*Love...does not behave rudely.*

1 Corinthians 13:5

## Focus on Christ

Have you ever wanted to tell someone how wrong they were? Why? Would it make you feel better? Would it help that person? It might, if it was from a heart of love. However, to set them straight because it would make you feel better is just rude.

Rude behavior is harsh and obvious. Here are a few examples: vulgar talking, cursing, gossiping, disregarding value in others, and acting ungodly. Christians can do these while proclaiming Christ has changed their lives.

Rude behavior doesn't have to be intentional. You can be rude by missing the activity of God. Have you ever been talking with someone at church and another person walked up and interrupted your conversation? It may have been at a time when the person really needed your help. If you became distracted and stopped your conversation to talk to the other person, then you unintentionally displayed a rude spirit. When God sends someone to you for help, recognize it and devote yourself to sharing the truth with them. Don't get easily distracted when God is working in one direction. Take the time for that activity of God before moving on to another.

A common approach to helping someone with a problem is behavior management. The world has completely softened the seriousness of sinful behavior. The world says, "Sin is because of a disease, an addiction, or just a mistake." According to Scripture, rude behavior is sin. It is rude to let a person think their sin is acceptable. A heart of love is willing to speak the truth. How can a heart full of God's Love behave rudely? The truth is, that it cannot. Rude behavior stems from sinful thoughts not from God's Love. The Love of God produces holy behavior. Stopping a behavior will not draw a person closer to God. The work of God in a person's heart will. You first need to know your condition before God corrects your wrong behavior. When the Love of God pierces a person's heart, the responder will not be practicing rude behavior, but will be living out a gentle and kind spirit.

**Focus on Self**

Rudeness is self-centered. You cannot be a rude person while walking in the Spirit. Rude behavior is a condition of a heart that is centered on its own desires. When you take up the cross of Christ, obey Him daily, and deny self, you will experience the deep Love of God that treats all people with proper respect, conduct, and grace.

**June 20**

**Love Does Not Seek Its Own**

*Love...Does not seek its own.*

**1 Corinthians 13:5**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you look out for yourself more than for others? Is it your tendency to consider the well-being of everyone in your path of life, or just your close friends? Would you give your life for your best friend? Maybe. Would you consider giving your life for those who disagree, argue, and harm you? Jesus did. "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (1 Corinthians 10:24).

There is no greater picture or physical display of God's Love than the life of Christ. The entire purpose of Jesus' life was to do His Father's Will. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). Christ's entire life on earth was a sacrifice for all. He was not only willing to give His life for His closest friends, but was also willing to die for all sinners. "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Jesus did not come to earth to seek His own will but to follow the Will of God all the way to the cross. Why? The Love of God. God's Love in you seeks not your own will, but the Will of the Father. The same Love in Christ is available to every born again believer. This Love is not purposed for selfishness but for the well being of others.

It is true that you must provide for yourself and your family and live a healthy life, but doing so at the expense of others is not living with the Love of Christ. This Love that sent God's only Son is not selfish, but all encompassing. Can you imagine what would happen if every Christian did not seek his own will? There would be no lack of funds to spread the message of Christ or shortage of Christians for the work of ministry.

**Focus on Self**

Self searches, pursues, and strives for its own benefit. Love always pursues and obeys God. When you focus on self you may gain worldly possessions but will miss out on love, godly relationships, faith, and hope. How sad not to pursue eternal things. Pursue the Love of God, and you will find everything you have been missing.

# Gifts From God

June 21

## Love is Not Provoked

*Love...is not provoked.*

1 Corinthians 13:5

### Focus on Christ

What does it mean to be provoked? It means to be annoyed, wronged, irritated, or harmed. When was the last time you were provoked? Who provokes you the most? What is your typical first response to being provoked?

People tend to say, "If they would stop acting that way, then I would not have responded the way that I did." They believe that their response is caused by the behavior of the other person. If they had just treated you right, then you would respond in a better way. But that is not true. Jesus said in Mark 7:20, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man." An improper reaction to being provoked is a condition of your heart, not the result of someone else forcing you to be that way.

God's Love provides a mindset that holds no place for offense and only comes from walking in the Spirit. If you do not walk in the Ways of God, then you will not be filled with the Love of God. Jesus said that if you love Him, you will do what He says. A mindset of Love is based on consistent, practical obedience.

When you view a person through God's Love, your concern is not how they treat you but how you treat them. Understanding what God did for everyone through His Son provides a different perspective on the gravity of your sinful condition. When you view people from this perspective the thought of self fades away.

God's Love guards your heart from being provoked. How else could Jesus be beaten, spit on, and hung on a cross, without an angry response? His very nature was and is God's Love. Provoking is deliberate. It's done on purpose to get a reaction out of someone. If the other person is able to provoke you, then you lost your witness. It is important to understand that God's Love only comes from an abiding relationship with Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self is easily provoked. You are provoked when someone challenges a value or belief you hold. You cannot see it through the lens of God's Love when you are trying to defend what is valuable to you. The same Love that sustained Christ through His trials is the same Love that can protect you from being provoked. An encounter with a person is but a temporal moment that is fleeting, but a heart that is headed for an eternity apart from Christ is forever. It is far more important for you to be right with Christ than to be concerned about personal injustices.



June 22

**Love Thinks No Evil**

*Love...thinks no evil.*

**1 Corinthians 13:5**

**Focus on Christ**

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8).

How would you know if your thoughts were evil? How would you know if you were experiencing the Love of God? What do you think on? Do you even know? It is not difficult to allow your mind to run free on random thoughts. It is very easy for the mind to move from pure thoughts to ungodly thoughts. But the Love of God is not like that. God’s Love does not think on sinful things. It is not God’s nature to think on those things or to do anything to entice you to think on evil. His Wisdom is pure and holy, but you have a nature that when left to its own accord thinks according to the sinful flesh. You must train your mind in the truth of God’s Word. The mind of the flesh does not know the Mind of Christ without reading the Word of God.

Many believe that bad behavior can be excused because of a difficult background. This kind of thinking is wrong. People frequently say, “You have no idea what that person has been through.” With that line of thinking, people accept a lie. Other people or events do not make you who you are; they reveal who you are. Isn’t it more comforting to think that God can make you holy? People are not the judge of sin—God is. In order to think no evil, you must line up your thinking with God’s Word.

According to Scripture you need to “set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). What does it mean to set your mind on things above? It means to think on heavenly eternal things, not things of this world.

If the Love of God permeates your heart, then you will not easily find fault in others or judge motives of others when there is no obvious work of the flesh. A person of love does not think evil of others just because others disagree or say something that is irritating. At the same time, they do not dismiss evil when it is obvious. You should think the best of the people you love. Love does not quickly charge a person with evil. If, after examining what they have done, you see that it is unquestionably wrong, then instead of accusing them of evil, you should seek to restore them to a right relationship with God.

**Focus on Self**

Self does not focus on God. To have your thoughts focused on purity, you must have love. Love will look for the things that are good, wholesome, and holy. When God’s Love saturates your mind, you will be protected from evil thinking.

# Gifts From God

June 23

## Love Does Not Rejoice in Iniquity

*Love...does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.*

1 Corinthians 13:6

### Focus on Christ

When your child behaves badly, do you rejoice? If he or she was suspended from school, would you reward them? Would you rejoice if a friend was found guilty of a crime? Hopefully the answer to all of these questions is no. Then, why would a Christian rejoice when a brother or sister in Christ is found living in sin? Do you truly understand the penalty that was paid by your Lord? The penalty of sin is death.

Iniquity is the nature of our sinful being. Sin is the action of your nature. Love doesn't celebrate the fact that you are born into and have a nature to sin. Love grieves, disciplines, judges, teaches, talks, prays, and pursues. Sin condemns where love seeks redemption. God will not rejoice when His child is caught in a sin that hung His Son to the cross. The Love of God simply does not rejoice in an enemy or a friend being caught in sin. Love simply cannot rejoice in any harm that sin brings to anyone. Rather, love brings a deep compassion, tenderness, and concern for a wounded sinful soul.

Love rejoices in the truth, no matter where it is found. When sin is found, truth responds, "for He [Jesus] will save His people from their sins" (see Matthew 1:21). Truth offers pardon and redemption from sin through repentance. Believers tend to resist repentance even though God offers full restoration. When one sees that Jesus can change any person from sinful living to holy living, the natural response should be joy.

### Focus on Self

Self loves to see enemies caught, tried, and convicted. Are we not all guilty of sending Christ to the cross? You really do reap what you sow. If you rejoice in harm brought on by sin, then that is what you will reap. The Love of God does not rejoice in iniquity but does rejoice in truth. Sow truth and you will reap truth, justice, mercy, and pardon.

June 24

## Love Bears All Things

*Love...bears all things.*

1 Corinthians 13:7

### Focus on Christ

When do you conceal a fault in others and when do you reveal it? God's Love conceals a private matter concerning the sin of others. It should never be brought to public if the offense is private. Love does

not look for an opportunity to share the sins of others in a public forum. When thinking of personal sin, confession of sin should only be as public as the sin is. If you sin where two other people observe it, then you must make it right with God first and then with the two who observed the sin. This principle should be used with love to cover a sin and keep it from being revealed to those who do not need to know.

When the Spirit of God takes up residence in your heart, what else do you need? The filling of Christ's Love in you is the fulfillment of the law. That does not mean there will be no troubles in life. There will be many around you who are struggling. When you are strong in God's Love, you are called to help carry the burden of others. When you desire God's Will, things do not always turn out the way you might hope they would. During difficult times, God's Love will help you to bear waiting on Him. As you bear, He will carry you.

If you had a heavy load to ship, then you would utilize machinery to carry it. It is too large and heavy for one person to carry. God has never asked you to bear burdens on your own. He, through His Spirit, bears the load for you. With God's Love in your heart, all the weight that is being carried is upon Him.

Love carries, supports, and bears up under everything that comes your way. As long as it is something that is not illegal or immoral to cover, love will protect. If it is something that must be revealed, then love will find the best way to do so. "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Peter 4:8).

### Focus on Self

Self wants to cover its own faults and expose the faults of others. It does not play fair. You would be wrong to think a self-centered person is honest, fair, and just. But when God's Love works through a Spirit-filled believer, that person will be honest, fair, and just. Find two people who are walking with God, and you will find like-mindedness that is so strong, their relationship can and will bear all things.

**June 25**

### Love Believes All Things

*Love...believes all things.*

**1 Corinthians 13:7**

### Focus on Christ

What are you willing to believe? Who are you willing to believe? Do you believe all things from God? Do you believe all things from the truth of God's Word? God's Love should lead you to believe everything that is truth. This does not mean a person should be as inclined to think a false thought is as true as an accurate thought.

## Gifts From God

“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10). It is God’s Love that helps us to believe the truth of His Word. Truth is in all that is seen and unseen. His Love provides you the ability to trust Him and take Him at His Word.

“Unless one is born again, He cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). You tend to trust the person you know. If you know God well, then you will quickly know His Truth. If you don’t know God well, then you will not quickly believe His Truth. Those who are born again have a spiritual relationship with Christ. This relationship helps them to know the Truth Who will set them free. When Jesus teaches them something, they know it as truth and believe it without doubt.

There are many Christian books written on the subject of marriage. Not all of those books are written from the basis of Scripture. Some of them are written from the minds of authors who are believers simply giving their best opinions on the subject. When you do not start with the Scripture, you may not finish with the full truth. The thinking of the world seeps into all of our thinking. If you do not use the Word of God as the standard for truth, then you can easily get off track. You must learn to weigh what you read with the Word of God. Love believes all things God has said and recognizes all things He didn’t say. Belief has nothing to do with your mind but everything to do with God’s Truth. By nature, God is Love and Truth. These cannot be separated. Since all truth is God’s Truth, learning the truth comes from the depth of your relationship with Him. If you truly Love Him, then you will believe all things He has said.

### Focus on Self

Self believes in its wants. It is so deceived because it believes anything that makes life comfortable. Love believes everything that is taught through the Word of God, and everything else is suspect. When reading any book other than the Bible, you should place that book on trial, not the Scriptures. Love believes in those who follow God’s Word.

**June 26**

### Love Hopes All Things

*Love...hopes all things.*

**1 Corinthians 13:7**

### Focus on Christ

What do you hope for? Do you hope everything will turn out alright? Do you wish for the best for others? Hope is not based on something you want to happen. “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Hope comes from the Scriptures and is inspired by the Love of God. Hope expects the truth to prevail, and love helps you to confide and trust in the truth. When you walk in the Counsel of God, the future is as bright as your hope in God is. When you learn from the Word of God, your hope grows believing the power of God can bring to pass anything He wants in your life. Many believers have no hope because they do not know God as revealed in the Scriptures. They do not spend time learning the Scriptures. They know what is playing at the local movie theater, what the weather will be like for the next few days, and the best deals at their favorite shopping places; but, many times they don't even know what the Scriptures say about love, hope, joy, and peace.

Hope does not come because you have a good perspective on life, plenty of money in the bank, or insights into a new business opportunity. Hope comes because the Love of God is present and active in your life as you walk in the Spirit. "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). The Christian life is so simple regarding how to live. Just learn to love God in a daily, moment-by-moment relationship. Christ knows what you are facing today, what you faced in the past, and what you will face in the future. If you learn to love Him with all your heart, then He will direct you in all that you will face. Hope comes as you learn to trust in the One Who knows the beginning and the end.

Hope believes all things taught by God. It is absolutely critical that you know His Word to experience a hopeful love.

### **Focus on Self**

Self hopes everything will turn out alright but worries when it doesn't have control of a situation. Self does not hope in God because it does not know how to love and trust in God. But, when the Holy Spirit lives within you, all the attributes of Christ are available. Need hope? Love God. Need trust? Confide in His Word. You will never have more hope than when you believe and trust in God and His Word.

**June 27**

### **Love Endures All Things**

*Love...endures all things.*

**1 Corinthians 13:7**

### **Focus on Christ**

How is your spiritual endurance? How do you hold up to the trials of life? The question is not only how long you endure but also what kind of spirit do you have when enduring?

Some people believe they have endurance, but they murmur and complain during the waiting. When love is involved there is a unique

## Gifts From God

God-given ability to bear and sustain the burden. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). When your work is for the glory of God, your motivation is love. This love makes you steadfast and immovable until the task is accomplished.

Love never gives up. It pursues the best for all involved. When you love someone you pursue them, provide for them, and protect them. This love, motivation, impulse, and inspiration gives you the endurance needed. This love is kind and pleasant, not annoyed and impatient.

Love will also give you the perseverance to remain steady, unwavering, and consistent in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. It is easy to love during easy and pleasant experiences. God loved you even though your sin was the reason for the death of His Son. This is the accurate picture of perfect and enduring love. Just as “...the word of the LORD endures forever...” (1 Peter 1:25) so does His Love! “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12). The Love of God flowing through you will reveal your walk with God.

### Focus on Self

Self endures only for a reward. If self is the focus, then impatience will be the result in a relationship. It is not your concern whether the one you show God’s Love to recognizes it or not. You are to love and leave the results to God.

**June 28**

### Love Never Fails

*Love never fails.*

**1 Corinthians 13:8**

### Focus on Christ

Are you dealing with a difficult marriage? Or maybe a difficult child? Or even a difficult friend? If so, how is the condition of your heart? One thing is clear: human anger will never carry you through these difficulties, but the Love of God will never fail you. It will never disappoint. God’s Love will always see you through. How valuable is it to have a love that never fails? What would you be willing to do to attain this kind of love?

There are many Christians who have yet to be trained in the school of God’s Love. Human nature is impatient and self-seeking. God’s nature provides patience and endurance. When you approach the throne room of grace with a heart full of anger, God will not hear your prayers. However, when you approach with a repentant heart and turn over your sins for Christ’s Love, blessings flow from heaven. There are requirements for attaining this kind of love. It cannot be earned.

It cannot be bought. It cannot even be learned by taking a course. It can only be learned by developing a deep walk with God. Paul wrote, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13). As the Holy Spirit teaches, He empowers you with spiritual gifts from God. These are gifts to believers who walk in the Spirit.

How does God's Love never fail? We tend to confuse human qualities of love with God's Love. His Love is never ending, always fulfilling, never unjust, and always seeking the best for you. When God empowers you with His Love, there is nothing you cannot endure. While people may disappoint, the Love of God never disappoints. There is no other way to experience His Love than to believe, trust, and obey His Word. The longer you are consistent in living in His Word, the more you will experience and understand a love that never fails. When two people become angry with one another, human love will fail. But God's Love between two people never fails. You might think that is impossible. With God nothing is impossible. Jesus said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

### Focus on Self

Self is looking for human love, not God's Love. This human love will fail. Others will not love a selfish person, but God loves everyone. His Love transcends weaknesses, sinfulness, and wickedness. Surrender your heart to Him. You will not be disappointed. Once you experience the Love of God practically between you and a friend or a family member, you will never be satisfied with human love.

June 29

### The Greatest is Love

*And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

1 Corinthians 13:13

### Focus on Christ

Why is love the greatest of these three virtues? When Jesus was asked, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:36-37).

The love that Jesus teaches about is *agape* love. This love only comes from God and remains forever. As you give your heart to God, He fills it with His Love. This love provides a deep abiding in Christ, which in turn produces faith and hope. Without love you would not have faith or hope in the One True God. When you receive God's Love, it will produce faith and hope that will carry you through the troubles and difficulties of life.



## Gifts From God

The only response that reveals the love that you have for God is faith and hope in Him. Faith is what pleases the Lord and shows your desire to obey Him. Without love for God, you will not have faith in Him or His Word. This process begins with Him revealing Himself to you. As the relationship develops, your love for God will grow. As this grows, your faith and hope in Him will grow. Many desire a faith like Abraham, but many are not interested in a relationship with God that is required to have faith like Abraham. Abraham trusted God with Isaac. Trust did not happen overnight, but developed over many years of God revealing Himself to Abraham.

Why is love greater than faith and hope? Faith helps you relate to and believe in God. Faith is something that originates with you but is fulfilled by the Love of God. When God sees true faith, He places His Love within that person in order to function completely with a spiritual faith and confidence in Him. Hope is founded on the promises of God. When you walk in His Love, you believe what He says in His Word and trust that what He says will come to pass. His Love for you is what makes this hope complete. All three are from the grace of God and will last forever while prophecies, knowledge, and other abilities will fade away. Love is the greatest among faith and hope because it is what keeps the relationship between God and believers intimate and real. Faith and hope are an outcome of a love relationship with God. There could be no faith or hope without love. Love is what provided the plan and the purpose of salvation. Faith and hope come only because of what Love planned and provided.

### Focus on Self

To focus on self produces an inability to experience the Love of God. When you choose faith in self instead of faith in God, you will be stunted in your relationship with Him. But thanks to God's gracious Love you can live in an abiding Love that takes you through times of difficulty and despair. When someone shows love to you in troubled times, it soothes your soul. God always provides this kind of love.

June 30

### Love in Deed and in Truth

*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

1 John 3:18

### Focus on Christ

How do you love? Do you say what others want to hear, or do you say the truth? Jesus said: "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man" (Matthew 15:18). The truth of God's Word is not popular. To speak it requires a willingness to risk a possible loss of relationship. If a person was on fire, would you tell them that they were on fire, or would you put

the fire out? Spiritually, everyone who is not walking with God is in danger of eternal fire. The only thing that will give people a chance of eternal life is the truth of God's Word—Jesus Christ. As a believer, you must first begin to live out the truth of His Word by lining up your heart to what God says. In other words, put your own fire out before attempting to help someone else. Many speak God's Word, but their heart is interested in their own personal gain. Deception is so common. Until you are honest with your own heart you will be trapped in a lie.

The Spirit of God will not allow a child of God to comfortably walk in darkness. God will use His people to share His truth with those in darkness. But God is looking for a heart that is willing to deny selfish gain and to put on His Love. Are you willing to do that? Many say they are willing, but the actions that follow do not line up with their speech. Jesus spoke about this. "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9). Many desire to please people but have no desire to please God. The danger is that when you speak as though you follow God but actually follow people, you deceive yourself and believe you are walking with God. This is the hardest person to lead into the Ways of God.

Ezekiel was God's representative. He spoke to the people who were in exile in Babylon. They saw him as a prophet and often wanted to hear something from God. But rarely did they want to obey what they heard. "So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain" (Ezekiel 33:31). Just like in James 1:22-23, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror..." If you speak the Word, without doing the Word, then you are demonstrating to Jesus that you do not love Him.

When your life lines up with God's Word, your love is seen as a labor of love. How does God see your life? When you have a labor of love, God and others know the sincerity of your heart.

### **Focus on Self**

Selfish people want to be seen as good whether they are or not. They will say anything to convince others they are right and good. Of course, this urge to always be right proves that they will lie and deceive. God is looking for a people who will do what He says. This obedience is a proof of real love for Him and His Ways.

# Gifts From God

July 1

## The Truth is a Person

*Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."*

**John 18:37**

### Focus on Christ

How do you know if you are of the truth? Christians are called to love in deed and in truth (see 1 John 3:18). How do you know the truth? How can you love someone in truth if you don't know the truth? The answer is that you cannot. Jesus said, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Do you hear the Voice of Christ? If you are to love as Christ loves, then you must be able to answer yes to these questions. Jesus did not come to force us to believe Him. He came to bear witness to the truth. If you live under this truth, then you will see your need for the truth.

The world's idea of love is wrong. The world understands love not as love but as lust. The world cannot know the Voice of God because the world is not of the truth. Jesus came into the world to save you from sin, but you first must believe that He is the Son of God. Without receiving Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will not know or hear the truth. The Holy Spirit is a witness to all things in heaven and on earth. In order to receive the truth, you must have the Holy Spirit residing in you. Many are walking around in deception, believing that they are following God. But there is only one way to God, through the Truth: the person of Jesus Christ. If you hear someone claiming to be a Christian yet supporting a cause that is completely against God's Word, then you know that person is living with deception.

To be a Christian, one must completely surrender to the truth of God's Word. Why? Because there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus Christ—the Word of God. God's Word holds all you need for life and godliness. Your response to His Word will be the deciding factor as to whether or not you love God and His people. Your flesh relies on self, but God's Spirit completely relies on God. Make no mistake, you cannot follow God apart from His Word.

### Focus on Self

Self has a hard time hearing anything that is not in agreement with its own thinking. Jesus came to witness to the truth. He does not make special provisions for those who do not want to listen to the truth. Jesus will not make selfish people believe. He will only present the truth and give them an opportunity to respond. What did God say to you through His Word today?

**July 2**

**Confidence Toward God**

*For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.*

**1 John 3:20-21**

**Focus on Christd**

Picture a courtroom. You see a judge, lawyers, a jury, a defendant, and a room of witnesses. The trial begins and the prosecution and defense are each allowed a turn to present their cases. As you listen to the case, you obtain information from both sides and clearly see that no one knows what took place except the people who were present during the crime. In order to conclude the trial, you must gather the information and make the best informed decision possible. The problem lies in the fact that you must trust the people providing the information. There is no exact way to know if a person is telling the truth.

The human heart is flawed because of its sinful nature. The tendency of a human heart is to either condemn or justify based on its best thinking. The good news is that God is greater than your heart and He knows all things. The bad news is that often our heart desires to trust itself rather than God. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:17-18). The only thing that will provide confidence in God is the belief in His Son Whom He sent to save His people from their sin. You are not allowed to judge yourself. You must give your heart to the Lord and allow Him to reveal the flaws. When you allow God to cleanse you, you approach Him not as condemned but as redeemed.

Think of the ways you justify or deny sin. You may not know your own motives, but God knows all your motives and sins. He knows your heart better than you do.

God sees all your sin:

- Sins which you do not recognize
- Sins that make you feel guilty
- Sins you have forgotten
- Sins that you try to rationalize
- Sins you have never repented of
- Sins repented of that the evil one tries to condemn again

Your confidence is not in your actions or personal holiness but in God Who responds to an honest heart, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from

## Gifts From God

all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Do not trust in your own ability to judge your heart. You do not see what God sees. Your judgment will be incomplete and flawed. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” The answer inferred is that only God can know it. If you judge your heart, then you may be wrong. But, as you walk in the Spirit, God will show you clearly the condition of your heart. You will then know what He sees and how to respond to Him. God graciously shows your condition for two purposes: first, to redeem you and, second, to bring glory to Him as He redeems you.

### Focus on Self

Self sees the best in itself and is not just or fair but biased. Believers must deny self so they can see their hearts from God’s perspective. When this happens, confidence is strengthened in God’s Love. The believer knows that God loves with perfect love. As you grow in the Love of God, your confidence and trust in God will grow.

July 3

### Build Yourselves Up

*But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

**Jude 1:20-21**

### Focus on Christ

Why would a Christian need to build self up in faith? In order to answer this question there must be an understanding of the strong pull of sin on every human life. At the heart of the sinful flesh is a strong desire to be known, to be in power, and to be in position. This is clearly recorded throughout Scripture:

- Envy put Joseph in a pit (Genesis 37).
- Envy put Daniel in the lion’s den (Daniel 6).
- Envy put Jesus on the cross (Matthew 26).

Position and power are two forces that can drive a human heart toward destruction. Joseph’s brothers wanted Joseph’s position. The governors and satraps wanted Daniel’s position. The Pharisees wanted Jesus’ position. These three men (Joseph, Daniel, and Jesus) were falsely accused. Their desires were to follow God. The power of God delivered all these men from their adversaries. Why? Because these men built themselves up on their most holy faith. They prayed in the Holy Spirit. They kept themselves in the Love of God. They lived their life in God’s kingdom according to God’s direction. Make no mistake, there will be adversaries as you follow God in this world. You must decide whom to follow. There is a real danger in your heart to follow evil. Without heeding the instructions from Jude 1:20-21, the protection provided by God may not be present when you need it most. The

kingdom of God is not about power and position, but about a love relationship with the One Who died for you. Set your priority on your relationship with Jesus.

The Scripture shares four things necessary for growing in Christ: building, praying, keeping, and looking. First, you must build on the foundation of a correct faith, the faith that led you to Christ. Second, you must pray without ceasing to the only One Who can help. Third, you must keep yourself in His Love by obeying His commandments. Lastly, you must look earnestly and patiently, for the Lord's coming keeps you focused on His kingdom. In all this, you will be built up in Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to build itself up but not by following the Ways of Christ. Self follows it's own rules and only builds up pride, arrogance, and selfishness. To follow Christ means to deny self, love God, and become an instrument of righteousness in His Hands.

July 4

### Authority from Heaven

*"Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?"*

**Luke 20:2**

### Focus on Christ

"You are not the boss of me!" Have you ever heard this saying? Chances are that if you are in a relationship in which you provided unwanted direction, then you have heard this statement. People who make this statement are not interested in the truth or even help. They are interested in going their own way.

This was the case for the Pharisees when they questioned Jesus' authority. The Pharisees had an agenda in regard to keeping people under their power. Jesus was a threat to their agenda. They had no real desire for the actual answer to this question. Instead, they had a desire to trick Jesus. Jesus was well aware of the fact that they were not interested in the real answer to the question. His response was a question: "I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?" (Luke 20:3-4). The Scripture says: "And they reasoned among themselves" (Luke 20:5). Their agenda was to get their way and to do it in such a way that they did not look bad in front of the people. Their response was that they did not know (see Luke 20:7). Therefore, Jesus decided not to give them an answer: "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Luke 20:8).

While it is easy to read this and make a judgment on the Pharisees, it is true that every human focused on his own agenda will not be interested in God's agenda. Sin is an ugly disease that blinds you from seeing the truth that is right in front of you. The moment that the truth

## Gifts From God

of God enters into your life you will be challenged. Why? Because God's Ways are not your ways (see Isaiah 55:8). The truth of God's Word requires surrendering your way to His Way. The Pharisees were not interested in that because they desired to be in power. Whether you accept truth or not, it is still truth. Jesus' Authority came from heaven. Whether they believed it or not, this was true. If you deny that Jesus is the Christ, then that doesn't change the fact that He still is the Truth. The truth can be standing right in front of you, and you can miss it.

At the core of a sinful heart is the desire to hold power over your own life. When this power is challenged, a battle begins. It is a sad day when a person chooses his own way over God's Way. The Love of God in your heart provides all that you need for life and godliness. Why would you desire to hold on to your anger or unforgiveness? The answer to this question is the same answer to why the Pharisees would not accept Jesus' Authority. You desire to go your own way.

### Focus on Self

Self loves to go it's own way. Christ desires for you to follow His Way. It is amazing that people think they know more than Jesus. They will read every book, go through any program, and follow new popular personalities in search of truth. But the Truth, Jesus, is right in front of them through His Word. They often fail to read the Bible. Turn to the real Authority and read His Word!

July 5

### Restricted by Affections

*You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections.*

2 Corinthians 6:12

### Focus on Christ

Does the Word of God seem restricting to you? Do the commands of God seem binding and heavy? If the answer to these questions is yes, then your problem is that your affections do not lie with God. The Lord says: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). If you love sin more than God, then God's commandments threaten to keep you away from what you love. Is the one speaking the truth of God's Word the one who is restricting you? Is it God restricting you? Absolutely not.

The Bible states that the truth will set you free (see John 8:32). Are you aware that what you love the most could be restricting you from the life that God has for you? This may be a relationship with another person. This may be drugs. This may be accomplishments. This may be money. Take a moment and ask the Lord if there is something in your life that holds a higher place than He does. Is there something or someone in your life who has your affection more than God?

The Apostle Paul had such a deep love for the people of Corinth, but he believed that their love for him was not what it should be. His



affection toward them was not restrained, but their affection was restrained. This happens many times in relationships. One person in the relationship tends to be more giving than the other. This also happens in your relationship to God. He loves you far more than you will ever love Him, but you are to pursue His deep love. As you do, your affection toward Him grows, and He draws nearer to you. The people closest to you are those with whom you are like-minded. For the believer, like-mindedness is not about politics, personalities, sports, or the kind of food you like. When you and your friend are like-minded about the Lord Jesus Christ, your affections toward God and one another will be at their strongest. Pursue the Truth and you will find that your affections toward Christ will grow stronger than any other affection in this world.

**Focus on Self**

Self has no restrictions on pleasing itself. God's commands do not restrict you from good things. He restricts you from sinful and worldly things. Christ said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Follow Him and set your affections on Him.

**July 6**

**God's Way**

*And the way of peace they have not known.*

**Romans 3:17**

**Focus On Christ**

What is the way of peace? How would you know if peace has saturated your life? Would you have to be well, have your bills paid, and be free of difficulties in relationships in order to experience peace? Do circumstances determine your peace of mind?

According to Paul, those who do not know the Lord live according to their own evil ways, including not understanding Christ's peace. The way of true peace is righteousness, and that righteousness is Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). There is no one who will know God's Peace without knowing His Way. His Way only comes through faith in His Son. While there is faith unto salvation, faith is also the way to righteousness. "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness..." (Romans 4:5). Why then would they not know the way of peace? Because of unbelief. Reconciliation to God does not take place apart from a relationship with His Son. Do you know the Prince of Peace? Do you know His Ways?

Scripture states: "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel" (Psalm 103:7). In order for Moses to know the Ways of God, God had to reveal them. God decides with whom He will reveal His Ways. There are two types of people who do not know

## Gifts From God

the Ways of God: the person who has not received Jesus as Savior and Lord, and the believer who is not living in obedience to Christ.

It is a curious thing when a believer is living a life of complete anxiety. Could it be because they do not know the way of peace? Why would the Author of peace take up residence in a person and not provide peace? The answer lies in the way in which the person chooses to live. Living in the way of righteousness provides peace to a believer. However, living in the way of unrighteousness provides anxiety. Which way would you like to live?

God taught His Ways to Moses, but the Israelites knew only the Acts of God. Only those who walk in the Spirit will learn the Ways of God. Those who only go to church, give, pray, and rarely read God's Word may see the acts of God but will not learn the deep Ways of God. "For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). If you don't live in obedience to Christ and walk in His Spirit, then you will not understand how God works.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to be seen as a good person, but God is looking for those who have experienced the way of real, active, and vibrant peace. When you live out the Spirit-filled life, others will see that you live by the Ways of Christ. This will either bring respect or discomfort to you. If they are not living a Spirit-filled life, then they will be uncomfortable by your life. In order to experience the way of peace, they will need to make a personal adjustment to an obedient lifestyle.

July 7

### Avoid Disputes

*But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.*

2 Timothy 2:23

### Focus on Christ

Do you have a Facebook account? If you do, then how many times have you threatened to delete your account? How many times have you gone on a Facebook fast? Why? Social media is rampant. If you have a Facebook account, then you know the amount of arguing and disputing that takes place in that arena. While reading through such posts, you can clearly see that some disputes are based completely upon false information. Many Christians take a stand in regard to sinful political issues. The major issue with some of these is that often Christians are just as argumentative as everyone else. It is important to understand that to be a servant of the Lord means more than just knowing the truth. It requires the Spirit of Truth residing in your heart. While a Christian

can speak truth, the application and wisdom to know how to use truth is only provided through a relationship with God.

Is there ever an instance in Scripture in which you see Jesus arguing? Jesus was placed in many circumstances in which He was challenged in regard to His identity, but He responded in a gentle way. Jesus' Spirit did not give in to argumentation or disputes. It is important to understand that it not only matters that spoken words be true, but it also matters that the intent be pure. It seems this is a big issue in the life of many Christians. Those who know the truth of God's Word yet do not have a close relationship with God, tend to use the Word of God to protect and promote self or to win an argument. Maybe the goal is to look more intelligent, but the purpose of the truth should be to edify and build up another person in the hope of helping them become more like Christ. As you read the Scriptures, you will see a few occasions in which the Pharisees worked at tricking Jesus using the law. Take a moment and think about the purpose of God's law. Do you believe that God intended for the law to trick and catch His Son in wrongdoing?

While God's spoken Word can break through a person's heart to produce holiness, generating strife works against this. Striving will only create conflict in your relationship with God. It will not help you grow in your development as a Christian. Many times in the church, you will find strife among men and women who use the Word of God in such a way that is not the intended purpose. Winning an argument will not provide help and support to the opposing side. In fact, truth used incorrectly does the opposite. It pushes a person away from God.

For these reasons avoid foolish and ignorant disputes. They are emotion-based, not truth-oriented. The evil one uses argumentation to cause strife between individuals and God. God uses truth to build unity between individuals and Himself.

**Focus on Self**

Self always wants to win. If you let it, then self will convince you that being better than others is a worthy goal. God convinces you that to esteem others better than yourself is strong character. When you love someone, you want the best for them. Wanting the best for them is not concerned with winning an argument. Love is concerned with doing good toward them and praying for them with a sincere heart. If you have generated strife with someone, then you have weakened your prayer life. Don't let anything hinder your relationship with others and with God. Arguments are not worth the results they bring.

# Gifts From God

July 8

## Spiritual Weapons

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...*

**2 Corinthians 10:4-5**

### Focus on Christ

What are carnal weapons? While it is extremely important to understand and grow in the knowledge and use of our spiritual weapons, it seems beneficial to grasp and understand carnal weapons. The reason is that carnal weapons are the natural defense of humans. Carnal weapons are the sinful nature responding to a battle in a physical way. Carnal weapons do not need to be taught, for they are instinctual. When someone offends you, lashes out at you, or wrongs you in any way, your response reflects your heart. Without any spiritual influence your response is carnal. While everyone's instinctual tendencies may look a little differently, the goal is the same—protect and defend self against danger. The human mind believes that the battle is a physical flesh-and-blood fight. You need no training to instinctually defend yourself. Take for instance an animal. Is it necessary to teach a mama bear to protect her baby? In the same way your human instinct kicks in when someone harms you or your family.

Paul taught that the battle fought by spiritual Christians is not of the physical flesh. Rather, the battle is by the Spirit in the spiritual realm. These weapons are supplied by God and must be learned in the Spirit. Developing and growing spiritually requires an understanding of spiritual battles and an understanding of the weapons that God has provided for believers. Much like a soldier learning how to use a gun, spiritual Christians must learn how to use God-issued weapons to fight off the true enemy.

Our weapons are mighty in God. They are not of the things of this world. If you can determine that the weapons being used are human, then these weapons are not mighty in God. When they are from God, you will not go into battle in the power of your own strength but in the wisdom, truth, and the teachings of God's Word. These weapons will not fail for they are empowered by God Himself. Notice, Paul states, "...casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God." When your weapons are of God, they are of His knowledge not of physical might. He fights lies, deception, and half-truths with the power of His Word. Whatever your lie, His Truth will set you free. The untruths of this world have captured the minds of many and will only be defeated by Truth—Jesus Christ Himself. Want to defeat arguments that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God? You cannot do it by your clever thinking. There are many systems devised by humans to provide the right way to live,

but those ways are not God's Ways. Therefore, they must be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ by those who live by the Word. You will never be able to use these mighty weapons of God unless you are walking in His Ways. Obedience defeats disobedience.

### Focus On Self

Self wants to be served. Self is not interested in a battle, just in others bowing to its needs. The war is not your war but God's war. He brought Truth into the world through His Son Jesus to confront all the false teachings of religion. Take up His weapon that is mighty and authoritative against the strongholds of this world. You will experience victory when you are obedient to Christ in your mind, emotions, speech, and behavior.

July 9

### Boast in God

*Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

2 Corinthians 12:9

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever disagreed with something God revealed to you through His Word? Have you argued with Him rather than submit to His Way? Have you ever been angry with God?

As Paul shared his testimony in regard to the grace of the Lord, he shared how a thorn in his flesh was given to him as a messenger of Satan, lest he be exalted above measure (see 2 Corinthians 12:7). Paul says: "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

How would you respond if God allowed a thorn in your flesh? In 2 Timothy, Paul taught Timothy the way to live as a servant of God: "And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition..." (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Paul taught Timothy from a life of relationship with the Lord.

Speaking to another believer about truth sometimes brings up an argument. Engaging in this argument places you in an argument with God. If you knew that every time you argued with God you would lose some type of physical strength, would you stop arguing? What if every time you argued with someone, you would lose a little of your fellowship with God? Paul may not have been thrilled with a thorn in his side, but God knew what would keep him in close fellowship. In submitting to the Ways of God, you may be seen as weak to the world. The reality is that when you submit to God, the power of

## Gifts From God

Christ rests upon you. Which is stronger your flesh or God's Spirit? It is a problem of the flesh when you have a deep desire for someone to agree with you or when you feel weak in the eyes of man. Paul was a strong soldier of Christ even when he had a thorn in his side.

If you have ever experienced the grace of God in your life, then you desire to hold onto that grace. Is arguing worth losing the connection that you have with your Lord and Savior? A servant of the Lord is not known as a person given to an argumentative spirit. To be given to argumentation will cost you a great deal in your walk with God and in your relationship with others. Is it worth it?

### Focus on Self

Self boasts in its strengths and will hide its weaknesses. A true believer walking in the Spirit is interested in the power of Christ resting on his life. Who cares who wins an argument or is seen as a strong person? You should be interested in whether others see the power of Christ in your life. If you boast, boast only in the power of Christ.

July 10

### Struggling with God

*Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"*

Genesis 32:24-26

### Focus on Christ

Do you ever wrestle with God? Maybe He has asked you to obey Him, and you are resisting. That will get you nowhere. But if you are wrestling with God because you are pursuing Him and want to be different, then a new life is about to happen. How long does the Lord pursue you and strive with you to get you to do His Will?

Jacob wrestled with God's messenger. That is the same as wrestling with God. At first we see that the "Man" wrestles with Jacob and does not prevail. Then, Jacob strived with him and does prevail. But what does it mean to prevail against God?

Just one touch from God lamed him. What would happen if God grabbed and squeezed instead of just touched Jacob? He would not have survived. This shows that Jacob was not strong enough to keep the messenger from getting away. The messenger could have left at any time. When God knows we are pursuing Him, He will stay until our lives are yielded and adjusted to Him.

Jacob had trusted in his ability to use deceit to get what he wanted. He was a master of using words to confuse others. Jacob had to give up his deceit and conniving in order to have a new name and a new

way of life. Physical wrestling will never make God do anything. Jacob could choose to disobey God, but there would be consequences.

God brings about His Purpose when you yield to pursuing Him with all your heart. When you hold on until God blesses, you receive new character, identity, and purpose. Self-will must be broken in order to have victory in Christ. If you grab ahold of God and do not let go, then you will be transformed from your human way of life to a supernatural walking in His Spirit.

Jacob strived with God and prevailed. Of course the angel had the power to go anytime he wanted. But, when God pursues you, He will stay as long as you want to hold on to Him. If you draw near to God, then He will draw near to you (see James 4:8). Jesus taught us to be persistent in prayer. Persistence does not overpower God but simply keeps you with Him long enough to yield to His Ways. When you lose self, you gain Christ. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Jacob pursued God in a deeper way. His life changed from praying for God's protection from his own wicked ways to praying for God's Ways of holiness and righteousness. For only a transformed father could be the kind of man to lead a nation and influence his son Joseph. You will never receive the full blessing of God until you are empty of self, broken from self-will, and ready to be more like Christ.

### **Focus on Self**

Self is very strong. God will not overpower your will. But, if He knows you really want to change, then He will continue to work with you to bring you to a full yielding of your life to His. If you continue to resist Him, then He may weaken you physically to get your attention and show you who really is in charge. Pursue Him, and He will bring you to be victorious in Christ.

**July 11**

### **The Promise of God**

*He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God.*

**Romans 4:20**

### **Focus on Christ**

Do you believe what God says? God told Abraham that he would bear a son with his wife Sarah. At the time that God revealed this, Abraham was one hundred years old! Imagine having a child at that age! As you read the Scriptures, you will quickly realize that God's Ways are not man's ways. God does not begin something that He does not complete. God cannot be anything other than His Nature. His Nature does not lie or break promises. To consider Abraham's age is to focus on what makes sense to our human understanding.



## Gifts From God

The truth is that it does sound ridiculous for a man who is one hundred years old to have a child. It also sounds ridiculous for a virgin woman to have a Son. What is impossible to man reveals the glory of the Lord. With God all things are possible (see Matthew 19:26).

Do you waver or hesitate when God speaks to you through His Word? Do you waver about the promise of the Holy Spirit? “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—The Spirit of Truth...” (John 14:16-17). This promise of Jesus has a condition: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). The condition is obedience through love. The covenant that God made with Abraham also required obedience. “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised...” (Genesis 17:10). Abraham obeyed God and received the promise of Isaac. Do you obey God? Do you love God?

It is possible to obey without love, but that is just rule following. Jesus is not speaking of rule following but of a personal relationship. Abraham had a personal relationship with God and believed what God said to him. His belief was accounted to him for righteousness. Do you believe what God says to you? Do you have a relationship with Jesus or do you just follow rules?

Many who attend church do not believe in the Promises of God or in the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Chances are if you are not experiencing God in your life, then you do not believe in Him. Jesus would say, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31). God does not speak things that are not true. He promised His Spirit through the resurrection of Jesus. His Spirit is alive and active in the life of the one who believes. Do you believe?

### Focus on Self

Self believes in what it can see. Self believes in money, a job, good health, and other possessions, but all of those things can be taken away. If they are taken away, then self is left with hopelessness. Your hope comes through your faith and belief in the promises of God. If you believe in God, then you believe in something that never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you want real confidence in the future, then remember that the future is as bright as the Promises of God.

**July 12**

### A Merciful and Faithful High Priest

*Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*

**Hebrews 2:17-18**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you feel alone? Do you feel as though no one understands what you are going through? Maybe you have lost a loved one to death or have lost a job or position. Maybe, you are overwhelmed in sorrow. Maybe, you have lost all your money, or you cannot see a way out of a difficult situation. In this world you can find yourself struggling and feeling as though no one cares or understands.

The good news is that your Lord and Savior not only cares but also understands. According to the Scripture, "He had to be made like His brethren." God provided a High Priest Who is merciful and faithful not only because that is His Nature but also because He experienced sorrow in this world. He had to leave His Place in heaven and come down to earth to be a sacrifice for sin. He didn't lose His Position, but He chose to leave it for you and came down to a sinful world to be the Savior for your sins and to free you from the bondage of worry...from the bondage of death...from the bondage of fear...from the bondage of sin. Jesus understands loss and sorrow. He knew how to show pity, compassion, tenderness, and love. He knew His purpose was to die for your sin. He even knew it while He walked on the earth. He pleaded for God to take the cup from Him. But ultimately He obeyed the Will of God.

This life is temporary. Temporary pain...temporary loss...temporary suffering. While pain feels eternal in the moment, it is not. Eternity is forever. Thinking of being with Christ in heaven for eternity, how long is 6 months? How long is 5 years? "But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). The kingdom of heaven is eternal.

Jesus was a faithful high priest Who had the ultimate and most difficult purpose. If He did not remain faithful, then there would be no hope for you. Thanks be to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Jesus fulfilled His Purpose, lived like you do, understood your difficulties, and was victorious over death and hell. Only Jesus could enter into the presence of God as Aaron entered into the Holy of Holies. Only Jesus could stand between you and God and bring about reconciliation. Your Savior suffered for a moment in order for you to be with Him one day in heaven...forever. He did this for you to be with Him not only one day in heaven but also while you suffer and struggle now. What Jesus endured was unmistakably agonizing pain. His sacrifice brings peace, joy, and love to you. Do you know Jesus? Maybe you feel alone because you do not know the One Who understands you fully. Maybe you feel a longing for something that is missing. If you do not know Him, then consider receiving Him today.

**Focus on Self**

Self believes that it can be good enough to one day stand in God's presence and gain entrance into heaven, but God will not grant entrance by this reasoning. Only trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior will gain anyone entrance into an eternity in heaven. How could any-

## Gifts From God

one believe that they are good enough when Jesus left heaven to live a perfect life in the face of unjust actions to die for your sin? Truly, He is a merciful and faithful High Priest.

July 13

### Disputes and Unity

*Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest.*

Luke 9:46

#### Focus on Christ

Why do people argue? Is it because they want to win? Is it because they want to be seen as better than someone else? Or could it be that two people argue because there is a mixture of truth and error? If a dispute arises, then either one or both parties must not know the full truth.

Jesus' disciples disputed among themselves. This disputing over positions and power came from an argumentative spirit. Even those closest to Jesus strived and argued over situations that were spiritual in nature. They could agree because their hearts were out of sorts with Christ. They could not see the truth. But if they were walking in consistency with the life of Christ, then they would have been in unity instead of in strife over their words.

Can you think of a time when you disputed with a friend about a particular Scripture? When this happens, one of the following is true:

1. A half-truth is in the discussion in one of either party.
2. One has the truth and the other is misinformed.
3. Both parties have a half truth.
4. One or both have the truth, but their hearts are out of fellowship with God.

While there may be other situations that can describe a dispute, you must remember this, a dispute can happen with little or no conversation. Once a negative attitude develops toward the other person, disunity has begun whether you continue to discuss the matter or not. If one person is convicted by the conversation, then the whole atmosphere of the conversation changes. The convicted may become defensive, angry, or even aggressive. A dispute arises when two people are not looking to come to the same conclusion. Jesus looked for His disciples to esteem others better than themselves and recognize how that would bring unity. When you see others as better than yourself, what are you going to dispute? Love holds no record of wrongs, always hopes, always perseveres, and looks for the best. Think of the last time that you were in an argument or a dispute. Do those characteristics of love describe how you felt in that moment?

**Focus on Self**

Self never tries to be friends with or help someone who disagrees with it. Self wants everyone to adjust their thinking to what it thinks. But, when you love others with the Love of God, you seek to help and not destroy them. Being right is not the goal. Rather, the goal is living with truth in a spirit of love.

**July 14**

**Be Strong In The Lord**

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

**Ephesians 6:10**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it mean to be strong in the Lord? What is required to have a heart that allows the power of God to shine? You must ask yourself if you are willing to surrender the control of your life to God. You will never be strong enough to stand against the wicked one in your own strength. Only the power of God is sufficient.

To be strong in the Lord is to be fearless and bold in working toward His Purposes for the kingdom. To rely on Him for your strength is to be strong in Him. Your strength does not come from acquired Bible knowledge or from how many years you have been a Christian. Your strength comes from His Spirit as you learn to walk in obedience to His commands. To rely on His promises allows you to be strong in Him. Strength comes from knowing Him and His Ways, not from mimicking what others think you should do to be spiritual. Spiritual battles should only be fought using God's Ways.

To be in the power of His might means that His strength flowing through you enables you to stand against the attacks of the evil one. The fruit that is produced from God's Spirit cannot be produced by people. The evil one can deceive you to believe you are living by God's Spirit when you are actually functioning by your own strength. For example, you can act happy but not experience the joy of the Lord. You can act peaceful, when you are really in turmoil. Human might will not suffice in a spiritual battle; you must have the power of His Might.

**Focus on Self**

Self does not know how to rely on the power of God's Might. Self only knows how to do things in its own strength. That means self is very limited. If you want to be strong in the Lord, then you must learn the Ways of God and begin systematically practicing those ways. Be thankful that God does not send His children into battle without first teaching them how to be strong in and rely on His power and might.

# Gifts From God

July 15

## Spiritual Armor

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*

**Ephesians 6:11**

### Focus on Christ

How much time does it take you to get dressed in the morning? Have you ever considered not getting dressed and just leaving the house? That is what you do when you do not spend time with God. You leave the house without getting dressed spiritually. Your relationship with God is what will spiritually clothe you.

To put on something requires intentionality. If you are going to put on the whole armor of God, then this question must be asked, "Is there anything in your life that would not unite with God's armor?" To put on God's whole armor requires you to take off some of your unrighteousness. If you do not, then you will try to fight spiritual battles in your own strength and will be overpowered quickly.

God provides His armor for you because He knows in advance how you will be attacked. God knows that your human abilities will never be able to sustain you in a spiritual battle. The problem is that many people try to fight temptations, trials, and tests from the evil one with their own abilities. You may think that you have put on God's whole armor simply because you read your Bible and prayed in the morning. While those are important actions, they do not cause you to be what you need to be. You need a thorough examination of your heart by God's Word to prepare your heart and mind for spiritual battles.

Putting on the whole armor of God is not an activity but a relationship. After Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, even He needed angels to minister to Him. Though Jesus was ministered to, no one can battle the evil one like Jesus. If you are going to battle the evil one, then you must have a strong relationship with Christ.

The armor gives you the strength to stand when you are being attacked, to withstand through the attack, and to be standing when the attack is over. God did not give you His whole armor in order for you to be defeated. He wanted to protect you. Through a relationship with His Son, He taught you to deny self, be equipped with His armor, and then follow in obedience.

### Focus on Self

Self believes that it is strong and can do anything. It doesn't need anyone to assist it in fighting battles. When a personal tragedy comes like the loss of a close loved one or a serious health challenge, self realizes it has no power. Just because you do not recognize that you are weak does not mean you are strong. God knew that you would live in evil days. He provided a way to protect you and impart His strength on you. Why would you not utilize what God has provided for you?

July 16

### Prayer and Warfare

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

**Ephesians 6:12**

#### Focus on Christ

Is there someone in your life with whom you are always wrestling? Are you struggling with your spouse, child, mom, or dad? Maybe you are wrestling with God. To struggle with a friend or family member brings heartache. When you struggle for their souls, it is a real battle physically, emotionally, mentally, but most of all—spiritually. How do you wrestle with something you cannot see? Prayer.

The primary reason for spiritual weakness is a weak prayer life. Jesus often spent time with His Father. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). Making prayer a priority in your life is absolutely essential if you are going to be involved in spiritual conflict.

Make sure that you know whether you are facing spiritual warfare or whether God is providing spiritual discipline. What if God is disciplining you? “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons” (Hebrews 12:7-8). If you are dealing with personal sin, then God will discipline you. If you are dealing with the sins of others, then you must be prepared to pray.

In military strategy, the failure to properly estimate the strength and capabilities of an enemy is a tragic mistake. In the Christian confrontation, you are warned both of the nature of the conflict and of the character of the enemy. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood.” The battle is not against a physical person but is against the fleshly lifestyle in your life or in the lives of others or against spiritual wickedness. This battle is like a violent hand-to-hand encounter that amounts to wrestling. Just as physical wrestling fatigues you, so also does spiritual wrestling.

*Principalities, powers, rulers, and spiritual wickedness* are terms used of the hierarchy of invisible powers in rebellion against God. There are four different classes of demonic beings.

- *Principalities*—refers to demons rank and rule.
- *Powers*—suggests their investment with authority.
- *Rulers of darkness*—points to their control over a world in revolt against its Creator.
- *Spiritual wickedness* in high places—an army of wicked

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spirits inhabiting, or at least bringing their combat to the heavenly sphere.

Wrestling with these will spiritually fatigue you. You cannot do this in your own strength. You need the power of God at work in your life. What power? The same power that raised Christ from the dead. You do not wrestle without the power of the Holy Spirit at work in your life. You are engaged in a life-and-death struggle, not against a frail human enemy but against the supernatural forces of evil.

You do not begin with spiritual warfare, you start with spiritual preparation. You must be prepared by making adjustments in your mind and heart through prayer. If you are not connected to Christ like a branch to a vine, then you can do nothing in spiritual warfare. But, in close fellowship with the Lord, you can do whatever you need to do. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Why? "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us..." (Ephesians 3:20).

What is the biblical response to spiritual wrestling? Prayer. When wrestling on behalf of others, ask God to do something to their physical flesh that will make them pay attention to their spirit. Then watch God work in response to prayer.

### Focus on Self

Self avoids conflict. Self has no interest in preparing for battle. For the child of God, prayer is absolutely essential for spiritual warfare. Take the time to prepare in prayer. Spend time daily in God's Word. Don't forget that the strength which you have is not your own but God's. Empty self, for that is when you will be most full of God. Your weakness puts you in a strong position with God. Seek first the kingdom and ask for God's Will to be done as you prepare for your next battle.

July 17

### Truth and Righteousness

*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness...*

**Ephesians 6:14**

### Focus on Christ

Are you currently experiencing a battle? Maybe with your spouse? Or with your child? Or maybe it's with someone at work? Scripture is clear that our battles are not with flesh and blood. There are only two entities in the spiritual realm that you can follow: the enemy or God. When you do not follow God, you will be defeated by the enemy and, before you know it, will be following your flesh. To follow God you must follow His Way. You must put on His armor.



The first piece of armor is the belt of truth. Truth comes from the Word of God and is in fact Jesus. The Romans believed that the seat of emotions resided in the stomach area. Paul taught that you must overcome emotional decisions with truth. If you do not get the truth straight, then you will fail in everything else. This belt for a Roman soldier held everything else in place. When you are true to your faith in Christ and hold on to that truth, you will master your emotions. If you are not spending time with Jesus daily and receiving truth, then your emotions will sway your decisions and cause you to believe the darts that come from the enemy. Truth that God revealed yesterday will not guard you today. This is a daily putting on.

The second piece of armor is the breastplate of righteousness. This protects your heart from sin. You put it on by asking God to search your heart, confess the sin revealed, and claim Christ's righteousness over your unrighteousness. The Lord imparts righteousness to the one who has faith in His Son. Your heart will not be protected from sin without faith in Jesus. In fact, an arrow from the evil one can defeat you if you try to fight with your own goodness. Continual growth in Christ is required to be protected by His righteousness. "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10). Stunted growth takes place when you harbor a sin in your heart or choose to disobey God. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18). This will disconnect you from the source of your righteousness, Jesus. You must allow God to continually make you more like Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self tends to follow its emotions, not truth. It seeks what it wants, not what it needs. The very thing that self desires is the very thing that the enemy will use to lure it away from the truth. Self righteousness is the only way self thinks. Self doesn't care what others think is right; it only cares what it thinks is right. This will not provide protection in the midst of a spiritual battle. In order to stand, you must live by His Truth and His Righteousness alone.

**July 18**

### Peace and the Spiritual Armor

*...and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace...*

**Ephesians 6:15**

### Focus on Christ

Are you ready to share the Gospel? If you had a surprise opportunity to share the Gospel today, would you be ready? Most people would think they are prepared because they know what Gospel presentation they would use to share with an unbeliever. But it is more critical that your heart be prepared in order to share the Gospel of

## Gifts From God

peace. Though you do need a way to share the Gospel story, the effect of sharing it from a pure heart brings renewed authority.

How would you know if you are prepared? Knowing the Gospel of peace is different than experiencing a reconciled relationship with God. When you tell a story to someone else, they can then share the story with another. The same is true for the Gospel. You can hear the Gospel and share it with another even though your heart may not be effected by the power that the Gospel holds. A born again believer can share the Gospel even though they are not walking in the Spirit. But the impact of sharing from a heart that is not made right toward God will not have its full effect. The power and authority of sharing comes as you are walking in the Ways of God.

The shoes of a soldier in Paul's day had spikes on the bottom that enabled him to walk through difficult areas. Tradition tells us that these soldiers were more effective because they could move quicker than opposing armies expected. The closer you are to God, the quicker you can gain ground in a battle. Wisdom comes from above. The more you know God, the better you are able to hear Him and know what and how to share His Truth.

### Focus on Self

Self may want to share the Gospel just so others will think it is holy. Self is not necessarily interested in the salvation of others but in the glory that it can gain by doing something good. The believer is interested in obeying Christ by sharing His good news with a lost and hurting world. When you share the Gospel of peace, the very reason why Jesus came is made available—that is, to save His people from their sins.

July 19

### Shield of Faith

*...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*

**Ephesians 6:16**

### Focus on Christ

What is faith? How strong is your faith? When you are driving your car do you trust that when you put your foot on the brake pedal that the car will stop? Of course you do! Why do you trust that it will stop? Because its function is to stop the car, and you have used it many times before. How familiar are you with the Ways of God? The more often you practice the Ways of God, the stronger your trust in Him will grow. Faith in God protects your spirit. The shield of a soldier protects him from the fiery arrows of the enemy. Faith in Christ can protect you also. The depth and strength of your faith depends on how much you use it. If you haven't trusted God much, then your faith will be small.

Spiritual armor is provided by God for attacks from the evil one, not from flesh and blood. These attacks from the enemy come suddenly.

Like an arrow from a bow, you may not see it coming, but you will feel the impact. An enemy doesn't shoot from plain sight, but from an ambush. If you don't have your shield of faith in place, then the attacks will pierce you. The fiery darts from the enemy sets your sinful flesh in motion. If the enemy shoots a dart at you that says, "You are not qualified," then you can be stalled in your ministry because you have given in to your doubt instead of standing in your faith.

A spiritual battle takes place when you are pursuing the cause for Christ not when you are living for self. Don't confuse a spiritual battle with a physical battle. Most of the battles Christians are involved in are the wrong ones, the tendency being against other Christians and not the real enemy.

When doubts come your way, how quickly do the promises of God settle your mind? If you are up to date with God, then your spirit will be settled quickly. However, if you haven't been spending much time with Him in a relationship, then you need to make the relationship right before your mind can be settled. If you have to take time to get back in right relationship with God, then you won't be much use during the spiritual attack.

### Focus on Self

Self has faith in self more than in God. Self cannot fight off spiritual attacks. Your faith is dependent on how much you trust what God has revealed to you. The darts that the enemy is sending your way will be aimed at the weaknesses of your flesh. If your faith is in self and not in God, then you will be wounded by the darts. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Christ is your shield of faith!

July 20

### Sword of the Spirit

*...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...*

**Ephesians 6:17**

### Focus on Christ

What is the greatest spiritual weapon that you use when you are in a spiritual battle? Do you rely upon your experience, past knowledge, or recommendations from others as your guide to how you will battle that spiritual attack? God gives you the proper tools to approach a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:17 helps you pay attention to the key element needed to fight off the evil one: "...the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

The sword of the Spirit is not your sword. Therefore, it is not your decision how it should be used. The sword is owned by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit, and used by the Spirit. Remember that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Some people say, "Well I just share

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the strong Word of the Scripture with people, and let the chips fall where they may.” But the Spirit doesn’t use the Word of God in that way. The Spirit knows all things and is equipped to use the Word of God appropriately. How do you know if you are letting God direct you appropriately in the use of His Word for a spiritual battle? Isaiah 50:4 says, “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.” The way you know how to use the Word of God will be determined by the amount and quality of time you spend with Him to learn the Word. If you have never applied a Scripture to your life, then it is unlikely that you will know how to apply it to a specific battle.

The works of the flesh can misuse Scripture for its own benefit. A wrong motivation toward any given situation can create a desire to be right in the flesh. To use the Word of God to try to defeat a person is against the nature of God. The sword of the Spirit is to defeat the enemy and redeem the person. The Word of God is not to be used to condemn or criticize others, but for: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17). These four ways provided by Scripture are for redemption, and not destruction. The sword of the Spirit is to destroy the real enemy.

To be properly armed for the battle you need an offensive weapon. The Spirit provides the perfect offensive weapon, the Word of God.

### Focus of Self

Self uses offensive weapons to protect its own safety. It is not interested in making sure others are protected. The Spirit of God is concerned for both the lost and the saved. The Word convinces, convicts, and reveals what is needed to change the heart of any individual. “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

July 21

### Helmet of Salvation

*And take the helmet of salvation...*

**Ephesians 6:17**

### Focus on Christ

Do you have confidence that God has saved you? Do you know that you are His child? “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5:13). If you are confident that you have eternal life provided by Jesus Christ, then you will have stamina for the battle.

If you were going to war and were offered a helmet, would you accept it? What does a helmet do for you? It protects your mind. This protection does not stop the attacks, but it protects you from the attacks. The impact on the helmet may create pressure, but the impact on your mind without the helmet would cause defeat.

“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Your mind is a crucial piece of your spirit that drives your emotions and your behaviors. If your mind is thinking on the wrong thoughts, then you may feel defeated, depressed, or angry. These emotions left unnoticed can create the inability to function and will remove you from the battle. To stay in the battle with God requires your mind to stay fixed on Him. When you are thinking on God, you are not thinking on anything else. One thought of doubt not taken into the obedience of Christ can cost you the battle and affect your entire life. Remember, your enemy is stronger than you, and your mind left on its own will leave you completely open to the thoughts that lead to sin.

### Focus on Self

Self has no confidence in God. Self is limited to its own understanding and cannot know the Ways of God. You cannot fight off the evil one without the thoughts of God in your mind. Christlikeness results from having your mind under the submission of His Will, His Ways, and His Word. It’s easier to go through the battle when your mind and heart are at peace with God. “You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3).

July 22

### Prayer in the Battle

*...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit...*

**Ephesians 6:18**

### Focus on Christ

When a war breaks out, would the military send out only one soldier to fight? While it is crucial for you to spend time in prayer alone, interceding and praying all types of prayer in the Spirit, it is also important to enlist other Saints to join you in the battle. The Scripture states, “with all prayer.” There are many different types of prayer.

What does it mean for you to pray at all times and on every occasion? Does it mean at all hours of the day? Or does it mean for all kinds of situations? Paul referred to the need to pray for all kinds of situations. Sometimes you think you should just pray for the big things, for the crucial events, or for the unusual happenings. Yet, prayer is needed at all times. This keeps you focused on the fact that a battle can occur at any moment.

We all go through seasons of life. There are times to reap, times to sow, and times of preparation. Prayer needs to be your response

## Gifts From God

regardless of the season. When you pray, whatever the time, the occasion, or the season, it must be directed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit knows what you need to pray even when you don't and can lead you to pray for the Will of God.

The darts of the enemy are designed to stop you from praying and focusing on God. If you stop praying, then you will stop fighting. When this happens, you will lose the battle. At our weakest, we are strongest on our knees. When you don't know what to do in battle, get on your knees and ask God for direction. He will then send His Spirit to work in your heart to give you direction and confidence to know what, when, and how to pray.

### Focus on Self

Self has little interest in praying for others. Self focuses on its own needs. But a heart tender toward God wants to battle in prayer on behalf of other's needs. Do not look for a battle. Simply ask the Spirit what to do. The Spirit will lead you into the right battle for the right person.

July 23

### Pleasing God

*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*

Galatians 1:10

### Focus on Christ

Who do you try to please the most? Do you want to be seen more in the eyes of your spouse, parents, teachers, friends, children, or some other person? Could you say that you really would rather please God more than any or all of these people? That is the point that Paul made to distinguish between his present life in Christ and his former life of trying to convince and please people.

Do you have a desire to gain the esteem of others or of God? Human desire wants to be seen as good to all people at the cost of obedience and submission to God. When your purpose is to please God completely, you have no desire to satisfy or please people.

Many tend to confuse loving people with pleasing people. Loving people requires seeking the best for them according to God's standard. If the person's desire is to go their own way, then they will desire for you to give them what they want, not what they need. "For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:18). What makes you acceptable to God? Not your background, not your religion, not that you were raised in church, but rather that you are approved by God.

According to Scripture, you are to love God with all your heart and love others as you love yourself. Do you love God with all your heart? Chances are that if you find yourself in the middle of busy ac-

tivity obeying the desires of all of the people in your life, then you are not loving God but pleasing man. Loving God with all your heart produces righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This Spirit will love people but not please them. You must ask yourself, "Am I a bondservant of man or of God?" It is not about if you are pleasing to others or to God but if He is pleased with you.

**Focus on Self**

Self is interested in being accepted by others. Self rarely thinks of what God thinks of it and often thinks of what others think of it. The Christian life is a life of self-denial, a life that doesn't seek its own. A Christian should desire to be pleasing in the sight of God. Don't confuse pleasing people with loving them. Deny self and esteem others better than yourself. Love God with all your heart and serve Him, and you will find that you are more interested in what He thinks than in what man thinks.

**July 24**

**Sowing and Reaping**

*For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*

**Galatians 6:8**

**Focus on Christ**

What happens when a farmer sows a seed in the ground? Over the course of time with proper watering and care, a plant will appear. Farmers are completely dependent on weather and soil quality. Fear does not keep a farmer from sowing.

The same is true with sowing in the Spirit. Sowing in the Spirit requires complete trust in God and His Word. When you sow to the Spirit you will still experience difficulties and battles because a spiritual war is raging. In the Spirit, what you sow will reap everlasting life in Christ. This is worth the difficulties.

Sowing in the flesh can be pleasurable to a sinful heart because it throws all care to the wind and gives into the flesh. Sowing in the flesh is not a battle but simply gives the wicked heart what it wants. Many people sow without giving a thought as to what might happen in the future because of present actions. While they may be very attentive to financial and educational investments, they tend to forget that wrong sinful actions produce devastating results for years to come. One divorce in a family can produce hundreds of relationship struggles in the future. However, people who divorce seldom consider this. Rather, they are concerned for relief. When the time of harvest or reaping comes, they reap complete destruction and loss.



# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self loves the way of the flesh and takes pleasure living in sin. Self does not think of others or the reaping that will take place at the fulfillment of sowing to the flesh. But the mind set on Christ cares about and loves the Ways of God. While living in this world, sowing in the Spirit is difficult but doesn't compare to the joy and peace one reaps as he continues to grow and walk in righteousness. You must decide what you want: to sow in the flesh or to sow in the Spirit. Always keep in mind that one leads to destruction and one leads to life.

July 25

## The Secret Things

*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

**Deuteronomy 29:29**

## Focus on Christ

Do you think that gaining more knowledge leads to being loved? Respected? Qualified? Knowledge alone will not provide these needs. Applying knowledge is necessary for gaining some of these traits. Is it possible that what you know about God is what He wants you to know right now? When He wants you to know more, He will share more when you seek Him.

Human nature desires to know things that God has not revealed. Many tend to focus on what they do not know instead of learning and developing in what God has allowed them to know. Such desire is found in the garden of Eden. The serpent tempted Adam and Eve. Satan's trap was by convincing them that they would be able to know what God knows. Has it ever crossed your mind that God keeps certain things secret for your protection? There is knowledge that you cannot handle and would, in fact, harm you. Adam and Eve's desire for knowing what God kept secret opened up the door for sin and separation from God.

Pride wants to know more than anyone else, even God. While God has left us with a large amount of revealed knowledge, we are not satisfied and desire more. The desire is to know all that He knows. When a small child is taken from life to death, we question why. No one really has the answer to this except God. Because God does not want us to know, perhaps we are wrong in questioning. We tend to think that if we knew, we could move forward. If God thought that you should know, then He would reveal it to you. All that you know about God has been revealed to you and you can know nothing of Him without His showing you. Do you trust that He knows what you need to know and what you do not need to know?

“Who has put wisdom in the mind? Or who has given understanding in the heart?” (Job 38:36)? It is a dangerous mindset to desire to

know the things that God keeps hidden. This same mindset invited the greatest disease into the human heart—sin. It is important to be content with what God has chosen to share with you. He has provided all the wisdom and understanding you need to walk with Him. When you move into a prideful desire to know all that God knows, you risk cutting off the wisdom and understanding that He has already provided.

**Focus on Self**

Self is interested in knowing all things that pertain to its own security and preservation, but this does not mean that it is interested in the things of God. For those who are interested, the Holy Spirit reveals what they are ready to receive. Since the Holy Spirit is the Teacher, you do not know what you need to know. Jesus taught His disciples what they needed when they needed it. His Spirit does that for you. What He reveals is what you need. Stay on the Spirit's schedule, and you will be right on God's timing!

**July 26**

**Spiritual Parenting**

*For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me.*

**1 Corinthians 4:15-16**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you remember an important teacher in your life? Maybe a school teacher or a Sunday school teacher? This person may have played a large role in helping you to develop in knowledge of the world around you. While this teaching role is important, it is not the same as the parenting role. Spiritual teachers are important, but spiritual parents are the ones who impart wisdom, guidance, and direction to help you develop in your relationship with Christ.

There are two types of fathers, physical and spiritual. If someone were to ask you who your spiritual father was, whose name would come to mind? Why would that person's name come to your mind?

The responsibility of a physical father to his family is to provide food, shelter, clothing, and security. Some people have and some people have not had this type of model for a father. No matter what your experience, God is a perfect picture of how a father should treat his children.

God assigned Paul as a spiritual father to the people in the church at Corinth and particularly to Timothy. A spiritual father teaches and models the Ways of God. Keep in mind that this passage is not discussing a specific man, but a role that God assigns. The role of a spiritual parent is one entrusted and assigned by God. The qualification is to walk and live in His Ways.

## Gifts From God

Have you walked with God long enough and consistently enough that He would entrust a Timothy to you? If not, start the process of your own personal spiritual growth. Everyone should be able to be a spiritual parent to someone else.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to be nurtured by others. It is not really interested in giving to the life of others. It always wants to receive. Yet, a spiritual parent is not interested in what the child can do for them. Rather, he wants to fulfill the assignment God has given him to nurture a spiritual child. A spiritual child is not necessarily a person with little or no knowledge or understanding of the Ways of God but simply a person who needs a God-given parent to nurture him spiritually.

July 27

### His Mercies are Great

*And David said to God, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."*

2 Samuel 24:14

### Focus on Christ

What brings great distress to your life? Is it a fear of failure? Do you fear someone may not accept you? Do you have a fear of someone's judgment on your life? Would you rather be in distress for doing something right or doing something wrong?

David was at a point of decision in his life. He had sinned against God, and God had offered him three choices:

1. Seven years of famine,
2. Flee three months before your enemies, or
3. Have three days of plague.

David was at a crossroad of decision making. Would he rather come under the Hand of God or the hand of man? What choice would you have made? Do you think it would be easier to be judged by man or God? David really didn't consider what the punishment would be but concerned himself with who would administer the punishment. He chose his Lord because he knew the great Mercy of God. David shared his thoughts of what needed to be done when he said, "Great are your tender mercies, O Lord; revive me according to your judgments" (Psalm 119:156).

David trusted his Lord and knew that whatever his Lord would choose would be best for him. It might not be without pain, but it would restore him. Do you know and trust your Lord that way?

### Focus on Self

David's pride caused him to move in the wrong direction. Self does not care about the desires of the Lord but about its desire. When David

was convicted in his heart, he immediately turned and confessed his sin to God. This did not come without consequence. Yet, because of David's relationship with God, he knew God would impart the judgment that was best for him.

**July 28**

### **Eyes Fixed on God**

*“O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”*

**2 Chronicles 20:12**

#### **Focus on Christ**

Have you ever heard someone say, “Keep your eyes on Jesus?” What does that mean to you? To fix your eyes on God is an intentional act of obedience. These acts of obedience result in gaining humility, respect, wisdom, and faith. These attributes from God's Spirit provide a trusting heart that is totally dependent on Him.

In 2 Chronicles, Jehoshaphat faced a battle against an enemy that outnumbered him. Have you ever felt outnumbered in your life? Jehoshaphat responded by seeking God. He realized that he had no power, and he did not know what to do. Have you ever felt powerless? Maybe you have a friend that suddenly decided to go against you. You may have thought he was a loyal friend, but, when you began to follow Christ with all your heart, he didn't want to go in that direction. Then, a battle began. You had no power to change your friend and didn't know what to say to him, but God knew the answer. What do you say to a friend who won't listen to God's Word? Maybe you have said everything you know to say, but nothing is changing. That's the perfect time to put your eyes upon God.

Your relationship with God depends on your time spent in His Word and in prayer. You need to seek Him and line your heart up with His Plan and Purpose. Without seeking God, you will go your own way. Human tendency is to make your friend feel better in sin which is not loving. Only God's Word and Spirit are able to provide you with the heart you need to sustain in a situation like this. To fix your eyes upon God means to seek Him in His Word, listen to Him in prayer, and obey the truth that He reveals to you.

#### **Focus on Self**

Fixing your eyes upon self will lead you to take on the battle as though it is yours to fight. According to 2 Chronicles 20:15, “the battle is not yours, but God's.” Self does not have the power needed to fight spiritual battles. “His divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness... (2 Peter 1:3)”

# Gifts From God

July 29

## The Rock

*From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*

**Psalm 61:2**

### Focus on Christ

When is it easiest for you to turn to God for help? When you are at the end of your rope? When you don't know what to do? What about right after you have experienced God answering your prayers? As you grow in your relationship with God, your tendency to turn to Him first will increase. When you are most desperate, no matter where you are on earth, God will hear your cry.

How much does God protect and care for those who love Him? He keeps them close to Him, speaks to them through His Word, enlightens their minds when they obey Him, and provides shelter in the midst of a storm. He cares for you, in all these ways, particularly in the times when your heart is overwhelmed.

God's children are the apple of His eye: "For thus says the LORD of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8). God cares deeply for you and can take you to a place where you cannot go on your own. He provides His Wisdom, His Direction, and His Peace that is beyond human understanding. He reveals truth to you that you cannot see without seeing life through His eyes.

When your heart is overwhelmed with trouble God leads you to the Rock that is higher than you. His comfort moves your heart to be overwhelmed with joy. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

### Focus on Self

Self won't look for something that is greater than its own merits. It will press on without even giving God a thought. Humility drives a godly person to cry out to a Rock that is higher than self. Only God can deliver you from an overwhelmed heart. Who will you turn to in your time of need?

July 30

## Jesus Prays

*I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.*

**John 17:15**

**Focus on Christ**

How often do you pray for other believers? It seems as though Christians can fall into a trap of praying only for the lost. Jesus prayed for His disciples as well as future believers: "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word..." (John 17:20).

If the goal is for a believer to continue to develop in Christlikeness, then we need to follow Christ's example. Clearly, though we are believers, we can still be attacked by the evil one. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Jesus is the Victor over the evil one, but He continued to pray that the Father would keep those entrusted to Him from the evil one. John 17:9 says, "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours."

Many Christians want all the pressures from this world removed from them. Though they may not admit it, they have a concept in their minds that knowing Christ removes all difficulties. You may even hear them say, "I just want to have fun, not struggles." But Jesus didn't want to take us out of the difficulties of this world. He modeled for us how to live in this world. If our faith does not carry us through struggles, then our faith is not the same as Christ's. He wanted us to be guarded from following the ways of the evil one. What makes this possible?

"Is the Spirit of the LORD restricted? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good To him who walks uprightly?" (Micah 2:7). When you walk with Jesus, you have endurance. Are you aware that, as a believer, Jesus prays for you? He was praying for you when He uttered this prayer in John 17:15. Your Lord thought it necessary to pray for the battles that you will face. This realization should cause you to cling to your Savior.

**Focus on Self**

The prayers of self are not concerned with the protection and comfort of others. Self desires pleasure over protection. Your sinful desires are the exact temptations that are used by the evil one. To not focus on Christ is to be open to all the fiery darts of the evil one. Your only hope in enduring is to be hidden in Christ's protection. Model Jesus by praying for believers to endure and stay strong for the cause of Christ.

**July 31**

**The Crown of Life**

*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*

**James 1:12**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Do you feel prepared to face temptation? How do you protect yourself from falling into a trap? The end of this verse gives the solution and explains how to be blessed and endure temptation. Love for God is the key to experiencing endurance.

Do you love God? If you do not love God, then you will not receive the promise of blessings, endurance, approval, and the crown of life. Every believer faces temptation, but not all believers resist it.

The crown of life is eternal life itself and begins now. Jesus said, "...for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). The abundant meaningful life promised by God is now but will not be experienced now if you continuously fall into temptation. The crown of life becomes complete in heaven, but those who love God can experience some benefits of the crown of life now. If you don't love God and are not spending time in His Word, then you will not have the strength to endure temptation. Far too often people try to resist temptation with human strength. Seldom does this work. The power that comes into your life through a love relationship with Christ can face all trials, tests, and temptations. The key is not to focus on temptation but to focus on your love for God. "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

## Focus on Self

Self is not concerned about resisting temptations. It wants to yield to pleasure. To live that kind of lifestyle reveals that you do not love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. In order to reap the benefit of blessings, endurance, approval by God, and abundant life, you need to sow love for God. Jesus said to deny self and follow Him in obedience in order to understand the incredible benefits of the crown of life.

August 1

## Wait on God

*Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation.*

**Psalm 62:1**

## Focus on Christ

What is troubling you today? Is there something on your mind that you cannot stop thinking about? Are you a born again believer? If so, take a moment to remember when you first realized you were a sinner in need of a Savior and invited the Lord into your heart. Is it possible that the God Who saved you from sin is the same God Who can save you from the troubling thought that is on your mind? When you are lost you don't know that you are lost. Even before you realized that you needed salvation, God already had formed a plan to save you.

While you initially receive eternal salvation from God, He desires for you to receive daily salvation for daily snares. Do you trust Him? It is interesting how you can trust Him for eternal salvation, but not



daily salvation. The response of a heart that trusts God is to wait on Him knowing that whatever you are facing, He knows the way out.

Are you distressed when you are waiting for an answer from God? If so, then your focus is probably on your circumstance and not on God. You silently wait on God when you trust Him. Such trust leads to ease. Why do you feel at ease in the Presence of God? “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved” (Psalm 62:2). God is your Strength and your Safety. He brings peace to your soul in the midst of a troubled time. He alone is the One Who can bring salvation. Take shelter and rest in the One Who not only saves you but loves you more than you could possibly know.

### Focus on Self

A self-centered heart is an anxious heart. What is required for self to feel safe? Self needs affirmation from others, money in the bank, and a healthy body. Rarely will all of these happen in a day. But one thing should happen every day. You should take time to sit in the presence of God and remember that He is the only One Who provides safety and security to your soul.

## August 2

### The Food of the Father

*Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.”*

**John 4:34**

### Focus on Christ

How much do you enjoy eating your favorite foods? How do you feel when you sit down to an incredible meal? Does it bring comfort? Does food satisfy your physical body?

Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me.” Often, Jesus is recorded having meals with His disciples. Food is a necessity, a comfort, and a pleasure in this physical world. However, the food Jesus is talking about here is not physical but spiritual. While physical food can satisfy in the moment, it is only a matter of time before you will need to eat again. Spiritual food is eternal and gives long-lasting satisfaction.

After you finish a good physical meal, the desire for food diminishes. When you desire to do the will of the Heavenly Father nothing can satisfy that desire except to serve Him. This desire from God becomes the key focus for everything in your life. Nothing else sounds as exciting as having the opportunity to do what God has called you to do. You can never overeat on spiritual food. The fullness that comes from doing the Will of the Father leaves you always wanting more.

It is important to understand that you are limited in your physical body. There is only so much you can handle before your mind and

## Gifts From God

body must rest. But this does not mean that you must desire God's Will any less. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

Stay focused on God's calling, and you will find your greatest joy and endurance to press on toward the completion of His work.

### Focus on Self

The food desired by the flesh does not satisfy, but leaves you hungry and unfulfilled. This type of food creates a life that is constantly searching but never filling the deep need that can only be filled by God. People seem to always be looking for deeper meaning in life. The reason they seem to never find it is that they are not looking toward God for meaning, but toward self. If you really want to be fulfilled in life as a believer, then do the Will of Christ Who gave Himself for you and promised eternal abundant life.

August 3

### Signs and Wonders

*Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."*

**John 4:48**

### Focus on Christ

What does it take for you to believe? Do you need to see something happen before you will believe? Many base belief on sight, sound, and emotional feelings. People look to movies or books to affirm their belief in Jesus. Why don't they just believe His Word?

Faith based on signs is not biblical faith. Why isn't God's Word enough for believers? In life you have different types of relationships. You are not close to every person you know. A close relationship requires likemindedness, time spent together, and sharing from the heart. You will not trust your heart to every person in your life. More important than knowing what people you trust your heart to is knowing if you trust your heart to God.

Jesus knew that these people couldn't put their trust in Him and that they thought they had to have a sign before they could believe in Him. He knew that their faith was not based on the Scripture. They were not interested in being with Him, rather they wanted to know what He could do for them. That is not genuine faith. According to Scripture, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). People believe they have to feel something before it can be true, but faith sees facts that the senses cannot see.

Our world is enamored with signs more than with faith. Imagine driving to New York City and arriving to see the sign that states, "Welcome to New York City." Would you just stop your car and spend your time observing the sign and say, "We have arrived"? Of course not.

To experience New York City, you have to go into the city and experience what it has to offer. Jesus doesn't want us to just observe the simple facts about Him but to experience a relationship with Him.

**Focus on Self**

Self wants to feel good and not necessarily get to know Jesus. The activity of God can create an emotional high. As long as the relationship with God is strong, the emotion will move to faith. If the relationship with God is not strong, then, once all activity has stopped, self is left empty. Activity and emotions will not provide peace. The only way to peace is an intimate relationship with Jesus. You shouldn't need a movie, a fad, or a new book to motivate you to have faith in God. When you walk closely with Jesus, you do not need a sign to have faith in Him. You will have faith in Him because you know Him and believe Him at His Word.

**August 4**

**The Power of the Word**

*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

**Hebrews 11:3**

**Focus on Christ**

Can you see God? Can you see heaven? Although you cannot see these things, you can have faith that they exist. That faith will lead you to act as though God and heaven are real even though you cannot see them.

This same faith can be utilized in your personal life. Do you have faith that a God who framed the world by His Word can put a relationship back together? Can He provide you all you need in your life? When you look at your current circumstances, it may not seem these things are true. But, if you have faith that God is Who He says He is, then you do not need to see the outcome before you begin to believe. Having faith in God is having confidence in what He says. If you are confident that the Word of God is truth, then you will believe things He said that you do not yet see.

Every day, every believer has to make a choice whether they will follow the Word of God or the world. What does the Word of God mean to you? Do you believe that the Word of God is reality? You will not follow God and His Ways until you have confidence that what He says is true.

What makes you have confidence in a friend? If there is distrust from either side of a friendship, then neither person will have confidence in the other. While you tend to think of faith as directed from you to God, your relationship with God will be weak if He cannot trust you. For faith to really work, there has to be confidence and

## Gifts From God

trust from both sides. God is always faithful and true. He always does what He says. Do you?

### Focus on Self

When you look at creation do you give God a thought? Self does not. Self desires to take credit for everything. When you have faith in self, you are trusting in your own abilities, intelligence, and possessions. God owns everything and knows everything. You won't believe it until you spend enough time in His Word and get to know Him in a personal relationship. If you know God, then you will trust God.

August 5

### God Knows the Heart

*So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

Acts 15:8-9

### Focus on Christ

Is it possible that the God who created you knows something about you that you do not know? Maybe you have a secret that you have held for a long time. Or maybe you are jealous of a friend and embarrassed that you feel that way. God knows everything on your heart, even things you do not know. Why would you not bring these things to God and ask for His help? Considering that He already knows, it seems futile that you would attempt to hold it from Him.

In this passage, Peter told the men that God had decided to include the Gentiles into hearing the Word of God. Can you imagine being acknowledged by God? Think about that for a minute. The Gentiles were not a part of God's chosen people until God decided that they were. He acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit. He grafted them in by the Spirit and not by the law.

Though many people resist the law, it is still easier to live by the law than by faith. When you are living by the law, you know exactly what is expected of you and how to follow the rules. Living by faith requires building a relationship with Christ. While many people know how to follow a rule, they don't know how to build a relationship. Christ made it easy for you to know how to live by faith when He said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Living by faith simply means that you trust in, believe in, and are convinced that what Jesus says is true. If you believe this, then you know what to do next. Simply follow what He says.

Aren't you glad that God has acknowledged you by giving you His Holy Spirit? His Spirit will guide you to follow everything Jesus says. He is looking for a willing heart that will submit to His Ways. You will never regret submitting to God. He knows your heart and has everything that you need for life and godliness.

**Focus on Self**

Self tends to be like the Jews in this passage. Self thinks it is the most important and even the only one that counts. God loves all His people and makes no distinction among them. God won't grant His Holy Spirit to a person who refuses Jesus as Lord. The gift is available, but you must choose to receive it.

**August 6**

**A Spiritual House**

*...you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

**1 Peter 2:5**

**Focus on Christ**

How important is your house to you? What does it do for you? In the event of a major storm would you desire a house that is secure or poorly built? How did you acquire your house? Did you buy it, build it, or was it given to you? How do living stones build a spiritual house? What is a spiritual house?

Jesus knew that we needed a firm foundation and a spiritual network of believers in order to function as strong ambassadors in this world. Jesus set Himself as the first Living Stone to begin this firm foundation. His Holy Spirit then invited others to become true believers who would trust and obey Him to be the Lord of their lives. This new network became a spiritual house made up of spiritual believers who can do the work of the kingdom in this world. We are now a holy priesthood.

Believers are priests who make up the kingdom. If we are not a kingdom with a priest but rather a kingdom of priests, then Jesus is the only Mediator needed to reach God directly. Jesus is your direct access to God. This spiritual house is built up of holy priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices. As a believer, you are a living stone and a living sacrifice. This is the only life acceptable to God. Romans 12:1 states, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

What an honor it is for your life to be represented like Christ's life, a living stone! This kind of spiritual house can only be built by Christ Himself. No person, amount of money, or architectural skills can build a spiritual house. When Christ came into your life, He changed your hard heart into a tender heart of flesh and provided His Mind as your Guide. The spiritual house built of living stones is a gift provided by the ultimate sacrifice of the Living Stone.

**Focus on Self**

Self works hard at building its own kingdom. While self may have many abilities, it will never have the ability to build a spiritual

## Gifts From God

kingdom. Only Christ is able to build a house of living stones. While in this world your physical house may be beautiful, there is no comparison to the beauty of a spiritual house built by Christ.

August 7

### God Tests the Heart

*I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness.*

1 Chronicles 29:17

#### Focus on Christ

Do you have children? If so, take a moment and think about when your child pleases you most. Is it when they are obeying or when they are disobeying? If you do not have children, then think about your parents. When were you most pleasing to your parents? When you were obeying or when you were disobeying?

It is human nature that strives to please the ones you love. But do you strive to please God? Because God loves you more than anything, you should desire to please Him. According to this Scripture, the Lord takes pleasure in uprightness. How does one move from disobeying God to obeying God? The Scripture answers that this is done by God testing the heart. When the Lord tests your heart, it is to lead you to uprightness allowing for a closer relationship with a God Who is Holy.

What does it mean when God tests your heart? Testing has different purposes. God sometimes tests you to strengthen your faith in Him. Sometimes He tests you to reveal to you what is actually going on in your heart. God reveals whether you want to obey Him or are tempted to go in a different direction. In this passage, God tests the heart to give you the opportunity to show your love for Him. This testing of the heart is not mainly to reveal your weakness but to portray your love for Him. A person who loves God loves purity. This purity is what gives pleasure to God. Holiness is not dependent on your ability to act right but on an obedient heart.

When God tests the heart and finds a person who truly loves Him, He is pleased. What a concept! It is amazing that God takes pleasure in one who loves Him with all sincerity and uprightness.

#### Focus on Self

Self is not interested in what pleases God but only in its own pleasures. The desire of self is to make everyone in its presence feel good regardless of the cost. A heart that loves God desires to help others move away from selfishness and toward holiness. A life that pleases God is a full and abundant life. Allow Him to test your heart and lead you to life everlasting.

**August 8**

**The Gospel in Power**

*For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.*

**1 Thessalonians 1:5**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you think of when you think of power? Do you think of how strong a person is? Or maybe how much horse power a motor produces? Do you think of a powerful position that can enact great change through a company or a government? Maybe you think of wealth?

All of these kinds of power do not represent the power of the Gospel. The messenger of the Gospel cannot produce change by his own words. Rather, Christ produces change in one who receives Him into one's heart. The power of the Gospel is what changes the heart, because the power is Christ Himself.

Christ's Holy Spirit is the One who brings the Gospel in full power. The Holy Spirit convicts and convinces a person of sin and draws them to see his need for a Savior. The Holy Spirit brings assurance to the hearer because the message of the Gospel is spoken louder than words. When the power of the Gospel comes into the heart of the hearer, this message can never be unheard. The question becomes, "Will a person accept or reject this incredible gift?" Paul was the kind of man whom God could trust to deliver the Gospel to the hearer with clarity and conviction. Are you that kind of person?

**Focus on Self**

Self wants to talk in order to be heard, not to share the Gospel message. There are many in our day who are more interested in building their own kingdoms than in sharing the message of God's kingdom. There is no power in self. The only power available is the power that comes through Jesus Christ. Apart from Him, self can do nothing. While there is power in this world, it does not compare to the power of God.

**August 9**

**Don't Just Do Something, Stand Still!**

*You will not need to fight in this battle. Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the LORD, who is with you, O Judah and Jerusalem! Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, for the LORD is with you.*

**2 Chronicles 20:17**



# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

When do you hear the statement, “Don’t just stand there, do something”? Usually it is when others are upset that you are not doing anything. They sometimes say, “Do something, even if it is wrong!” Then, if you start doing something they say, “Don’t do that!” Have you ever made a choice you regretted?

God is not interested in your opinions. He is interested in you *and* His Will. He wants to connect you with His Will. However, if you just do something without consulting God, then your decision may hurt you and everyone around you.

God is looking for people who don’t know what to do but will stand there and listen to what He wants them to do. Jesus is interested in what He can do through you. Once you stand and know what God wants, you can then do something. There are still many things you can do while standing still. In Exodus 14:13, “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever.’” Wouldn’t you rather have God do something through you, than take a guess at what to do? A crisis makes you act in urgency and not necessarily in the wisdom of God.

You can be so distracting that the people around you can’t hear God. While they are trying to discern the Will of God, you may be stubbornly trying to find your own way and miss God’s Way. Some say, “I wish my spouse would get it together and do something.” There is a time to stand still and a time to do something.

Who’s opinion is most important to you? Your answer depends on how much standing you have done in God’s Presence to hear, pray, and know direction for life.

## Focus on Self

Self tends to make emotional decisions. When your mind is on self and not on God, you tend to allow faulty thinking and sinful emotions to choose the direction you will go. It takes maturity to learn how to sit in uncomfortable emotions and stay out of God’s Way. To choose to stand instead of react is not a natural response to self. Self wants to be heard, seen, and known. Ultimately self cares not about God’s Will but about its own way. The truth is that if you are to allow God to fight the battle that is His, then you must surrender your way and learn how to sit in uncomfortable situations, while continuing to focus on the truth of God’s Word.

**August 10**

## Who is Greater

*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*

**1 John 4:4**

**Focus on Christ**

What is your greatest fear? Who brings fear to your thought life? Are you afraid of people, Satan, or God? Who is the greatest influence in your life? Are events, circumstances, or current happenings in this world bringing you fear? At the time of this writing, the current fear in the world is the coronavirus. Do people fear this more than they fear God?

John wrote to believers to remind them that even though they are attacked with false doctrines and teachings, the One Who lives within them can overcome error with truth. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). You are not powerful, but God's Spirit living in you is powerful. If that is true, then why would you fear anything in this world?

You shouldn't fear the one who rules this world, but you should fear the One Who created this world. When you think you can confront all the wrongs with your own wisdom, you set yourself up for failure. Proverbs 9:10 reveals, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom..." How many people seek the Wisdom of God in a time of crisis? Why would you not consult the One Who is the greatest, Who resides in you, Who has already defeated evil in this world? Considering that God holds your life in His Hands, why would you focus on anything more than Him?

**Focus on Self**

When your attention is on self, you believe that you have to fight battles against the one in this world. That is not what truth says. Truth says that the One in you is greater than the one in the world. Therefore, when you are facing a difficulty and do not accept this truth, you will have fear believing you must fight. But if you place your mind on Christ, then you will have confidence in the One Who resides in you.

**August 11**

**The Word of God Endures Forever**

*...because "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever."*

**1 Peter 1:24-25**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you own that endures forever? Think about your possessions. How long will your car last? Or your house? What about your life? All of these are temporary.

When you consider the number of years since Jesus came to earth, life is so short. Not only is it short, but it also does not have much endurance. As the body ages, it becomes weaker, not stronger. As wonderful as human life is, it is not enduring and strong.

## Gifts From God

On the other hand, the Word of the Lord endures forever. Where would you rather place your time and attention? On the things that wither away or on what endures forever? The Word of God is not only permanent but also unchanging. Nothing can change it, nothing can detour it, and nothing can destroy it. While any perishable seed will vanish, the Word of God is the same now as when it was first given.

The only confidence one can have in preaching is to base it on the enduring and perfect Word of God. The Gospel is given to you through preaching. What makes it life changing is the eternal nature of the Word. It will always speak of a person's need to turn from sin to the Savior.

### Focus on Self

The way of man desires to follow the way of this world. Everything in the world will perish. Deciding to live by the Word of God requires denying self and following Jesus. The Word of God is not dependent on the way you choose to live your life. It stands forever. Ask yourself where you want to focus your attention in this lifetime. Do you want to focus on what stands forever or on what withers away?

August 12

### Fear the Lord

*Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?"*

Genesis 50:19

### Focus on Christ

Joseph told his brothers not to be afraid of him because of his position, but to be afraid of God. The brothers didn't recognize God's presence in their lives, or they would have been more afraid of God than Joseph. Even so, Joseph's brothers were not afraid of him until he was in a powerful position. Why? Because he had the ability to take their life. When he was at home with them, they knew they were able to take his life. The tables had turned. The truth is that God can take your life any time that He chooses. When you do not recognize God's Presence in your life, you do not fear Him. But when He chooses to place pressure on you, you pay attention. Why wouldn't you fear God all the time? Why is it that you fear creation more than the Creator?

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and years later found themselves afraid of him because of his position. They sinned against their brother, but, most importantly, they sinned against their God. Joseph responded, "Am I in the place of God?" As second in command of Egypt, Joseph tried to get his brothers to see that what was coming against them was the Hand of God, not Joseph. He pointed them toward God. Believers should be humble enough to know that it is not their place to attempt to stand in God's position. Why would you be afraid of a man and not God? Why don't people fear God? Because they don't believe He is real. If people believed God was real, then they would be afraid.

God took the sin of Joseph's brothers and turned it around for His good. Not only did Joseph extend mercy to the men who had wronged him, but he also extended mercy to their families and took care of all of them from that moment on. Forgiveness causes something meant for evil to be good. God's turning something wrong into good never justifies the initial sin. They did not need to sin for God's Will to be done. Nevertheless, they did sin; but God used it for good. God does not allow the enemy to do anything that He cannot use for His glory. God can use it all.

Sin nailed Jesus to the cross, but God defeated the enemy. Joseph's question to his brothers is a question that our world needs to answer today. "Am I in the place of God?" Do not be afraid of anything other than the God Who is in control.

### Focus on Self

Self desires personal power. It wants others to come under its rule. It wants others to know that it can bring discipline to them. This is what Joseph's brothers intended for Joseph and what they expected him to do to them when he was in power. But they missed one important detail. The Spirit of God was directing Joseph. Joseph's response was empowered by God's mercy and grace.

**August 13**

### God Decides

*For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.*

**Romans 9:15-16**

### Focus on Christ

Do you believe that God is obligated to do what you say? Many people believe that they can pray certain prayers and God has to answer them. For example, they pray, "God, please forgive me of my sin." There are no magical words that can cause God to do anything that you want Him to do. He is God, the Sovereign Lord, and has the right to show mercy whenever and to whomever He chooses. Nothing obligates Him to do anything for you. You cannot will God into doing something. Unlike a runner who accomplishes a goal by his own strength you cannot force God by your own strength to do anything you want. God's mercy depends simply on His willingness to provide compassion to whomever He pleases.

Who deserves God's mercy? God's mercy is not something anyone deserves. It is a gift that He chooses to give. When anyone believes that they deserve something from God, it reveals their arrogance and pride. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). While you don't deserve God's mercy, He often grants mercy. God is not looking for a deserving heart, He is

## Gifts From God

looking for a willing heart. God is a just God. Therefore, whomever He shows mercy toward will be the one who needs it.

Mercy and grace are two of God's greatest gifts to you. While grace gives you something you do not deserve, mercy withholds from you what you truly do deserve. When God shows mercy, count it as a great blessing.

### Focus on Self

Self is not qualified to make any decisions in regard to what God should or should not do. Self has no idea of the depth of the heart and, would therefore, never make a perfect choice. Self always chooses what is best for the flesh but not for righteousness. God is interested in holiness and knows exactly what He is doing. Why would anyone ever question God's choice to grant His child mercy and compassion? Remember there is no one deserving. However, God still loves and provides what His child needs.

August 14

### Confidence in God

*For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."*

Isaiah 30:15

### Focus on Christ

Was there a time in your life that you felt closer to God than you do now? Maybe God saved you from a difficult time, and you now find yourself falling back into what He saved you from. What do you believe brought you back to that place? God desires your whole heart. There are many traps in your path that can hinder your relationship with Him.

Before you realize that you have fallen, you will sense a strong distance between you and God. But God is gracious to draw you back toward Him through repentance. If you find yourself in a time of anxiety, then you are disconnected from the God of Peace. Returning to Him will provide you rest for your soul. When you choose to rely on anything other than God, you will be working hard to maintain what you have created. However, when you are still and allow God to take control of your life, you will find rest. When God is in control you need only be quiet and listen to find confidence in Him. Confidence in God allows a peaceful, calm spirit.

You will have true comfort only when you have complete trust in God. If you don't completely trust in God, then you will have mixed loyalties.

It seems that when things are going well, the response is to forget all that God has done and move toward the world. This tendency will lead you away from the God of Peace and toward a life of anguish,

misery, and trouble. Typically, it is not until there is trouble in your life that you turn to God for help. What if you would stay close to Him through both the good and the difficult times? This would provide consistent, stable, and lasting strength in His Spirit.

**Focus on Self**

Self lives according to comfort. As long as self is comfortable, it will stay emotionally in-tact. But when a crisis comes, self has nothing to rely on. A partial loyalty toward God and a loyalty toward self and other things brings double-mindedness resulting in distress. A quiet and confident believer is one who has returned to his God and has learned to live in His Ways.

**August 15**

**A Proper Perspective of Prayer**

*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

**James 4:3**

**Focus on Christ**

What does prayer mean to you? Do you believe you can ask for anything and God will listen to you? Do you ask God for a bigger house, a nicer car, or a better job? Do you ask God for what matters to you or for what matters to Him? God wants you to ask for His Will to be done on earth.

You deceive yourself if you think you are praying when you are asking for things that are for your own pleasure and not in line with the Will of God. God is not a genie and is not there to do what you want Him to do. A heart that is doing wrong will not have a proper view of prayer. James described a person who is lustful, covetous, and murderous. This person is in constant battle with the Holy Spirit.

You will never succeed spiritually if you do not consult God. When you are living for your own pleasures, you will not ask the Holy God for anything. Even if you did ask God under these conditions, He would not listen to your prayers. Asking amiss means that your request is off-target for what God desires.

To ask God for something that would glorify Him is to be on-target. Asking God to bless something that goes against His Will is an ungodly act. What does it mean to be on-target in prayer? Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). The condition for proper prayer is an abiding relationship with Christ. An abiding relationship is not filled with the pleasures of this world but with loving obedience to Christ.

**Focus on Self**

Self does not understand holy prayer. It simply wants its pleasurable desires fulfilled. Self sees prayer as asking to get what it wants.

## Gifts From God

Self does not understand the Heart of God and, therefore, does not know how to pray for the Will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Holy Spirit is the guide in helping a child of God know how to line up with the Heart of God. An abiding relationship with Christ will lead you to pray in the Spirit. When this happens, God will grant your request. This is proper prayer.

August 16

### Our Greatest Teacher

*You, through your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.*

Psalm 119:98-99

#### Focus on Christ

Who is the person on earth who has taught you the most? People tend to have great admiration and love for those who are their teachers. Learning happens in many different ways. Friends, enemies, trials, and successes all help us to learn; but, the greatest wisdom comes from God.

Only God's commandments can provide pure, perfect wisdom. If you use your own ability to think to confront an enemy, then you may be tricked or defeated. But nothing can outwit God. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). This wisdom only comes from God. While you can have a form of worldly wisdom, this is not the same wisdom that provides the fruit of the Spirit. God's Word brings greater teaching than the wisdom of the world.

When you learn the Ways of God, you have a greater understanding than your enemies or teachers. Obeying the commandments of God provides a direct connection with Him and allows His Wisdom to flow through you. When someone sits in the Presence of God, his spirit reflects Him. People will notice the power and authority through the words he speaks.

David's learning from God was built on the foundations that started with what his teachers had taught him. He began as a babe feeding on milk but advanced to eating meat that came from the direct teachings of God. The Spirit's teaching is what takes you beyond your teachers to direct learning. The goal of a teacher should be that a student graduates to a deep relationship with God. God's Word and precepts teach far beyond all that human teachers can teach.

#### Focus on Self

Self believes that it is wise and never wants its students to grow beyond itself. Self wants others to submit to its teaching and wants the credit. On the other hand, godly leaders want to bring others beyond their level of competency. While each is responsible to teach others



what they have learned, each person is also responsible for his own walk with Christ.

**August 17**

**The Sheep of His Pasture**

*So we, your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever; we will show forth Your praise to all generations.*

**Psalm 79:13**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you believe belongs to you? What do you control? What makes you the owner of possessions? Sometimes, when you believe you are in control of something, you later find out it has control of you. Possessions tend to take your time, efforts, and mind away from the most important eternal things.

Notice in this Scripture that we are God’s people, we are God’s sheep, and that we live in His pasture. We possess nothing because God holds ownership. Would you enter another man’s property and tell him what to do with it? Why do we do that with God? We do not own anything, but we possess everything because we are children of the King.

Is there something in your life that God has entrusted to you? Maybe a child, a message, or a position. Why has God entrusted you with what is His? For you to do with it as you wish? Absolutely not. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19)? All praise must go to the One Who owns you—God!

How will you spend the remainder of your life? You should spend it thanking and praising Him for all that He has done in you, for you, and through you. Your role is to give glory to God for the remainder of your days.

**Focus on Self**

Self wants ownership of all it sees and can’t see itself as being owned by anyone because that would be degrading in its eyes. When you realize that you are the sheep of God’s pasture and that He gave His only Son to give you a full and meaningful life, you want to serve Him. Learning to love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind is an honor, not an obligation.

# Gifts From God

August 18

## Peace Like a River

*Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.*

Isaiah 48:18

### Focus on Christ

How often are you at peace? Does your peace come in waves? Are there moments of peace followed by moments of anxiety? Or do you have a consistent peace? For many people, peace depends upon circumstances. Such peace is not consistent, but is constantly moving up and down.

The Peace of Christ is consistent. Christ supplies peace like a river to hearts that are surrendered to Him. The key to having consistent peace is deliberately choosing to obey Christ's commands on a moment-by-moment basis. Have you ever stood beside a beautiful river watching and listening to the flowing movement of water? It is so peaceful. It never ends. You can stand there all day long and hear the same sounds and watch a steady flow of water that soothes the mind. That is what it is like to have peace like a river. It is constant and never ends. This is all dependent on whether or not you heed Christ's commandments and commit yourself to a moment-by-moment walk with Him.

Peace like a river and righteousness like the waves of the sea provide power and authority to your life. When you live a righteous life based on His commandments, your mind is at peace and your actions are powerful to those around you.

Circumstances, events, and relationships are always developing and changing. How can you have peace like a river in the midst of this changing world? Through your relationship with God. He is never changing. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His Peace does not depend on your circumstances but is based upon His character. How could you not have peace with a God Who cares for everything that comes your way?

### Focus on Self

When is self at peace? When things are going its way. How often does everything go your way? The wonderful thing for the believer is that God is always present, loving, and providing. He provides everything you need that pertains to life and godliness. Peace like a river is available right where you are today. Being up to date with God in a deep and abiding relationship is the only way to have consistent peace and righteousness.

**August 19**

**Pick Your Battles**

*But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side."*

**Mark 9:39-40**

**Focus on Christ**

How do you know what you should speak for or against? Does it bother your spirit when you see someone performing a Christian act of good will in a different way than you think it should be done? Is your major concern what Christ says should be done or how you think it should be done? If your focus is on Christ and His Way, then you won't spend your mental, emotional, and spiritual strength trying to oppose things you are not sure about. Rather, you will be concerned about how Christ wants you to respond to needs.

The concern is not whether or not they are following you but whether or not they are following Christ. John was questioning because he didn't want the disciples to go the wrong way. Christians ought to rejoice when anything is done according to Christ's standard, no matter what denomination they come from. You really need to be more concerned about what you stand for and not what you stand against.

The key is focusing on what God has led you to do. When it is done according to God's Way, it will be proven by the authority of His Word. You do not need to spend all your time trying to find out if someone is doing things correctly. You should spend your time focusing on what God has called you to do. In the book of Acts, a similar circumstance occurs. Luke wrote, "And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

Don't spend your time trying to discern if others are of God or not. Do not use your spiritual energy fighting against humanistic thinking and half-truths that will take you off course from following the Ways of God.

**Focus on Self**

Self wants everyone to do things its own way. It becomes disoriented, disgusted, and distracted when others do things in ways in which it doesn't approve. As a believer, make sure you focus on the Ways of God and not humanistic thinking. It is refreshing to live by God's standard instead of trying to adjust to the ways of the world. A believer cannot be comfortable with both. Follow God with all your heart.

# Gifts From God

August 20

## Heal Their Land

*If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

2 Chronicles 7:14

### Focus on Christ

What needs to change in order for our nation to be healed? Do we need a new government? Do the school systems need to reform? Some believe our society needs to become more conservative. Just who or what needs the biggest adjustment?

According to this Scripture, the adjustment needs to be made by God's people. Many believers think that in order for the nation to be healed all the sinners need to stop sinning. Yet, God says that believers are the ones in need of adjustment. How do we make the adjustment?

1. **Humble Yourselfs**-This means to bend the knee and come under subjection of God. God's people must come to a place where they realize that the healing of a nation starts with submitting their lives to God.
2. **Pray**-What is your prayer life like? Is it up to date with God? Is it in a position to hear from God? God's people need to get serious about praying.
3. **Seek My Face**-This means there should be nothing between you and God that would hinder you approaching Him. Any relationship problems with others will hinder your ability to be face-to-face with God.
4. **Turn from your wicked ways**-Christians must recognize that they have sin in their lives and must repent of their wrongdoing and learn to walk in the Spirit of God.

All of these conditions for the healing of the land depends on the relationship between God and His people. No longer can you blame a sinful world for the condition of the nation. If God's people would turn back to Him, then an amazing healing would begin taking place in their families, their churches, and their nation. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

### Focus on Self

When your focus is on self, your desire for the land to be healed is based upon your desire for comfort. When times of trouble come, self is not happy with being uncomfortable. The desire of a surrendered heart to God is for the land to be healed. Revival and renewal will never happen without believers learning to walk with their God. Un-

fortunately throughout Scripture, God’s people turn away from Him time and time again. They become self-centered and leave their first love. How does God usually draw them back? He does it by allowing discomfort. When self realizes that it is powerless, its tendency is to turn back toward God. Why must you wait for times of trouble to be fully committed to your Lord and Savior?

## August 21

### God Hears

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

**1 John 5:14-15**

#### Focus on Christ

Why do you think people have a hard time listening? Do you think God has a hard time listening? What makes you confident that God hears you when you pray?

Your daily relationship with God is the only thing that can provide confidence in knowing that He hears your prayers. When a believer has an intimate relationship with Christ, the Holy Spirit builds within them a confidence in the Word of God. Confidence doesn’t come from your feelings about Christ or His Word but from thinking on, meditating on, and applying the truth of His Word to your life. As you live out His Word in obedience, you begin to see Him do everything He promised He would in His Word. This is what builds your confidence to know that when you ask Him something according to His Will He hears you.

Remember that every believer has an old nature of self-will. This self-will does not line up with God’s Will. If you find yourself making requests to God that do not line up with His Word, then chances are that your will is what is in control. In order for God to hear your prayers there must be a submission to His Will. This means you must be thoroughly acquainted with His Word in order to know His Will. Jesus said in John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” The way you know how to pray according to His Will is dependent upon your abiding relationship in Christ and His Word.

When you receive what you pray for, your confidence in prayer strengthens. This continual growth in prayer provides faith that when God hears, He will provide all that is needed to answer your prayer.

#### Focus on Self

Selfish prayers are not concerned about lining up with God’s Word. Self doesn’t care about God’s Will, but only cares about its own will. Isaiah 59:1-2 states, “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that

## Gifts From God

it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” Sin in your heart will block God from hearing your prayers. If it seems like God is not hearing you, then ask Him to search your heart and show you any wicked way in you. When God reveals your sin, turn to Him in repentance. Your heart then begins to line up with His Heart, and He will hear you.

August 22

### The Door to the Kingdom

*“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”*

Revelation 3:8

#### Focus on Christ

Have you ever tried to make things happen? How good are you at convincing other people to do what you want? Most people think of opening doors as creating an opportunity. Who opens doors for you? You are not able to convince Jesus to open the door to the kingdom because there are conditions to living in the kingdom. For Jesus to open the kingdom, you must keep His Word and not deny His name.

The open door that is spoken of in this passage is an opening to enter into God’s kingdom. The only One Who holds the keys to the kingdom is Jesus Christ. He is the only One that can open or shut the door! The church at Philadelphia seemed to have little strength in comparison to the many other religious people. But Jesus said, “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

If Christ invites you in the door to receive His salvation, then no one can close that door. The door of salvation is not open by family, spiritual heritage, or churches. God made salvation possible through His One and Only Son. No man comes to the Father but through Him. Once you have entered into the door of salvation, life opens up to all that God has for you.

Peter shared, “...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness...” (2 Peter 1:3). Spiritual blessings come only from God. In order to receive those blessings, the door must be opened to the kingdom. Every day this door is open is an opportunity to draw on the resources of the Spirit of God. God loves His children and desires to give them everything He has.

#### Focus on Self

Self wants doors to open in order that it be approved, followed, or comforted. However, Jesus was not talking about an open door for self. He was talking about whom He wants to enter into His kingdom. When He opens the door for salvation, self cannot receive any credit. Grace is all of Jesus and none of self.

**August 23**

**God is a Sun and Shield**

*For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.*

**Psalm 84:11**

**Focus on Christ**

Who receives a reward? Can you imagine parents withholding good things from their child? Love wants to give. God's Love is both gracious and just. He will not reward sinful behavior.

God is a Light that disperses darkness. He is a Shield to protect us from attacks. He provides grace that enables us to live in this world, and that grace leads to experiencing the glory of God in heaven. You receive graceful benefits as you walk in holiness. The word *uprightly* means without defect, blameless, faithful, and unblemished. What kind of life should you live to receive all of these rich blessings?

Notice in this verse that "no good thing will He withhold" from those who are walking in the ways of holiness. This is a conditional statement. You cannot expect wonderful spiritual blessings if you are not walking according to the Ways of God. Many people want grace no matter how they live. However, "the Lord will give grace and glory" only to a holy life.

**Focus on Self**

Self only wants to walk uprightly if doing so is beneficial. Self certainly wouldn't want to suffer for right living. People think they are entitled to receive all of God's blessings even though their lives don't match up to His Standards. Is there anything in your life that would make God want to withhold good things from you?

**August 24**

**God's Word is Perfect**

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes...*

**Psalm 19:7-8**

**Focus on Christ**

How do you view the Word of God? When you read the Word of God, does it refresh your soul? If not, what do you tend to turn to in this world for encouragement?

According to these verses the Word of God is perfect, sure, right, and pure. What does it do for you practically? These qualities listed



## Gifts From God

in these verses are the exact qualities that can be created in you. God's Word should become a mirror to your soul.

As you dig into the Word of God and allow it to convert you, you should begin to recognize a change toward perfection and away from imperfection, toward assurance and away from confusion, toward life and away from death, and toward purity and away from sinfulness. The Gospel is perfect in turning man back to God. God's Word converts the soul, makes you wise, rejoices your heart, and enlightens your view. This positive working of God refreshes and revives the soul because it gives direction for everyday practical living. The Word is alive and trustworthy even when you can't trust anyone else.

### Focus on Self

Self has limited wisdom, is unsure of itself, tends to be emotionally based, and is short-sighted. All of these things are the exact opposite of what God's Word brings to life. You must constantly remind yourself how important God's Word is for daily living. You cannot be like Christ without learning through His Word. Pursue and learn from Him, and it will rejoice your heart.

August 25

### God Gains Your Attention

*With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early...*

Isaiah 26:9

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night with a burden on your heart? Were you able to go back to sleep quickly? Did you have to discern whether it was due to the anxieties of this world or something God put on your mind for which you needed to pay attention?

There are times when your mind is focused on God and His Will so much that He wakes you in the night to reveal truth to you. Other times, He wakes you early in the morning and puts a Scripture on your mind to guide you. You can always count on God to get your attention whether in the middle of the night or early in the morning. Why? Because He loves and cares for you.

A key time for your soul to desire God is when you lie down at night to rest and when you sit with Him early in the morning. When you are lying down, you are in a vulnerable position. Sometimes all the troubles of the world seem to be on your mind making this a perfect time to seek God.

How do you know if your soul desires God? Would you know it by how you depend upon His Word for truth and direction and practical living? A key indicator as to whether or not your soul desires God is whether or not you hunger and thirst after righteousness. Only you can determine if you do.

**Focus on Self**

What does self do in the middle of the night when trouble comes across the mind? It certainly doesn't seek after God. It does not think about spending time with God early in the morning. It looks for comfort, anything to remove the trouble off of its mind. For the believer, peace comes in knowing that God's Spirit can speak to you in the middle of the night calling you to prayer or to rest in a truth He reveals to you.

**August 26**

**The Sorrow Of Christ**

*Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."*

**Matthew 26:38**

**Focus on Christ**

What overcomes painful emotions? When does a painful emotion become sinful? Are all emotions sinful? If they aren't, then which ones are and which ones are not? How would you know?

There are all kinds of discussions about emotions. Christians often make statements like "Emotions are not sinful." Yet, there are times when emotions can turn sinful. How would you know when that moment occurs? How could the Scriptures guard your heart and mind to keep you on target with God regardless of your emotions? Some say, "All emotions are God-given." However, emotions can be sinful; God does not produce sin. For example, Adam and Eve's sin in the garden began with negative emotions.

Jesus lived a life without sin, yet He clearly experienced deep painful emotions. From this insight you could conclude that there are emotions that are acceptable to God and there are emotions that are not acceptable to God. You can be tempted through your emotions. If you allow the way you feel about a situation to pull you away from the Will of God, then you sinned against God. How would you know if an emotion is acceptable or unacceptable?

Christ's soul was exceedingly sorrowful even to death, but Christ never sinned. Jesus never allowed these emotions to move too far. How did He deal with them? He recognized that He had to operate by Spirit and not by flesh. "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

When a painful emotion wells up within you, how do you respond? How you respond to emotions will be determined by your spirit. There are two courses of action when you feel sorrowful: 1.) Watch and pray 2.) Fall into temptation resulting in distress and discouragement. When you are not lined up with the Mind of Christ, you can easily be swayed away from the Will of God. Feeling sorrowful is not a sin, but remaining sorrowful without God's perspective has the potential to draw you into sin.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

What does self do when it becomes sad, grieved, or heavy of heart? It tends to move toward depression, defeat, and despair. What can bring self out of this discouragement? The things of this world rarely have an answer. The world can temporarily pull you out of sorrow, but it is only a matter of time before another circumstance draws you back to despair. Apart from God, sorrow is a vicious cycle. Christ showed us how to move away from sorrow by focusing on His Heavenly Father. This gains a new perspective. The Will of God gives you confidence in what to do next. It turns sorrow into joy.

August 27

## Weeping Over Sin

*Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.*

John 11:33

## Focus on Christ

What happens to your mind when your spirit is troubled? Do you believe your spirit is as troubled as Jesus' Spirit was? Why was Jesus troubled? Because His friend had died? Or because His other friends were sad? Take a closer look at the passages surrounding John 11:33, and you will see why His Spirit groaned. Jesus realized that the ones who were close to Him still did not believe Who He was and what He was doing.

Jesus was moved in His Heart because of what sin does to His people. He knew He was the Resurrection and the Life. But there were some who would not believe. In a moment like this, when others were trying to sort out Jesus' sorrow over the situation, Jesus' Mind was on the needs of the whole world, not just of Lazarus or of Mary and Martha. Jesus' groaning, troubled Spirit was over far more than the death of a friend; it was about the needs of the world. Jesus saw the needs of His friends, but He was already looking toward the cross in His Spirit. The pain and suffering that was coming His Way was overwhelming when He was in the garden praying. His life purpose moved Him to tears.

Human nature may assume that Jesus was troubled because His friends were sad and another friend had died. While this may be part of it, the full truth is that Jesus knew that He would raise Lazarus from the dead. Knowing this truth, He did not quickly run to his side to stop the death. When He witnessed the lack of trust from Mary, Martha, and even the Jews, He recognized a much bigger issue, the issue of unbelief. Although while truth keeps your mind clear, sin brings confusion. Truth was standing right in front of them, their minds were not on Him, but on their own sorrows.

**Focus on Self**

When self has trouble in its spirit, it searches for validation through pleasure, relief, or affirmation from others. Whatever its source for comfort, it is selfish in nature. However, when Jesus groaned and was troubled in His Spirit, His attention never wavered from the purpose of His Heavenly Father. Do you know God's Purpose for your life? If you do not, it is critical that you seek God's Perspective. Until you do, you will only be living in earthly satisfaction. When trouble comes, you will have no understanding. Believe in the truth and set your mind on Christ, and the joy of the Lord will be your strength.

**August 28**

**Who is on the Lord's Side?**

*And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed.*

**Mark 14:33**

**Focus on Christ**

How do you feel when you are about to enter a battle? Do you run toward or away from battles? Do you even recognize them? Wouldn't you like to enter a battle with good friends keeping watch over you?

Why did Jesus take Peter, James, and John? Jesus loved them, and they were in His inner circle. He wanted them to experience a spiritual battle with Him. Sometimes when you don't understand, you must still love and obey. You have a choice to make. Will you find a way to avoid the battle? Will you get busy and try to get your mind off of it? Or maybe you will go to sleep in order to get comfort? Or will you pray and ask God to teach you and take you through it? Avoidance doesn't make the battle go away; it just takes you out of fellowship with God. When the disciples chose to disobey, they entered into conflict with Jesus for which He reprimanded them. Jesus gave them instructions to watch with Him meaning to stay awake and to be on guard against danger. But they failed the test. Jesus continued to come back and give them opportunities to succeed.

You cannot transfer your troubled spirit to another person. Though Jesus was troubled and exceedingly sorrowful, the inner circle of disciples didn't get the message of His deep sorrow. You can also not transfer an obedient heart to another person. Obedience is between the individual and God. Other people should not be a factor in how you will obey Christ. However, once you obey Christ with all your heart, you will be of great help to those around you.

How long did it take the disciples to see the Will of God as it related to Jesus going to the cross? It did not come immediately. As their relationships with Him deepened, so did their understanding and obedience.

Jesus settled His sorrowful Soul with the Heavenly Father through prayer. Because a battle is much harder with an army of one than

## Gifts From God

with an army of many, He needed His disciples to join Him in the battle. While God provided all that Jesus needed, He also provides you with people in your life for support, comfort, care, and help in time of need. People cannot take away your troubled spirit, but they can walk with you through the difficulty.

### Focus on Self

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him because He wanted them to experience preparation for spiritual battle. He told them what would happen. He told them about His troubled Spirit. However, in that moment, they leaned on their own understanding. Did the disciples care about Jesus? Yes, as much as they could in their condition. Did they have a desire to follow Him? Yes, that is obvious in regard to what the Scripture has spoken about their relationships with Him. But there were still many spiritual truths that they simply could not see. When they were led to a strong teaching in regard to spiritual battle, they chose to lean on their own understanding rather than to listen to Jesus. Learn from the disciple's mistake. Watch, pray, and prepare for the battle. Preparation depends on your relationship with Christ.

August 29

### God is Greater than Betrayal

*When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me."*

John 13:21

### Focus on Christ

If you knew a friend would betray you, how would you react? Would you embrace them or push them away? You tend to respond in anger to people who do you wrong. Jesus responded in love no matter what the circumstance. How do you learn to respond in this way?

Knowing the Will of God can bring about a troubled spirit. According to Scripture, when you choose to follow Christ and share His teachings, you will face adversaries. "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Corinthians 16:9). When thinking on this, your spirit can be troubled.

Jesus knew that the Scripture needed to be fulfilled, that there would be a betrayal, and who would betray Him. He also knew that it had to take place. This knowledge troubled Jesus. To be betrayed by someone close to you is disturbing. Regardless of the emotion in His Spirit, He had to stay the course. He could not let what would happen distract Him from the purpose set out before Him. The salvation of the world was more important to Jesus than His own personal interests. How often do you get pulled off the course of God's Will because of a negative emotion in your spirit?

God's Will does not force everyone to follow. People follow their own way more often than they follow God's Way. Regardless, what

other people do should have no influence on your walk with God. Jesus' connection with His Father was His first priority. He set His Mind on things above. To be able to follow God's Will regardless of emotion, you must die to self. Christ must increase; you must decrease.

### Focus on Self

Self must die in order for you to have the right spirit toward people who betray you. Your spirit will not be made right by making other people treat you properly. Your spirit is between you and Christ. Christ had a troubled spirit without sinning. It is true that as a Christian you will have times of trouble in your spirit. What differentiates having a troubled spirit with sin versus without sin? The difference is where your thoughts are. Christ kept His Mind on God and not what would happen to Him. Don't run from your troubles. Take your troubles and run toward Christ, and He will settle your spirit.

August 30

### A Picture of Righteous Anger

*And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.*

Mark 3:5

### Focus on Christ

Why do you tend to get angry at someone? Is it because they do something you do not like? For most people, that is not the reason. The reason you most often get angry is because someone did something against what you believe or value.

This is the only occasion in the New Testament where the word *anger* is directly used with the life of Christ. Of course, Christ never sinned; therefore, any action of His was righteous. Notice in this passage that while He looked at them with anger, He was grieved by the hardness of their hearts. This is not a picture of man's anger but of godly, Christ-like, righteous anger. James 1:20 states, "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." It is dangerous to assume that Christ's anger here, is the same as man's anger. In essence, this assumption says that Christ cannot produce righteousness. Therefore, you must begin with this understanding: the anger of man is not the same as the anger of God.

The uniqueness of righteous anger is that while Christ looked at them with anger, His main focus was the condition of their hearts. This principle is found throughout Scripture. Often, God was angry at the sin of His people, but He relented from His anger and bestowed grace and mercy. If God did not relent, then there would be no men or women left on the face of the earth.

## Gifts From God

When was the last time you were angry at a close friend and at the same time were concerned about the condition of his heart? Make sure that you don't quickly evaluate your emotions as being godly just because Christ's emotions were godly.

### Focus on Self

The anger of man has a completely different desire than the righteous anger of God: "...and were by nature children of wrath..." (Ephesians 2:3). The desire of man's anger is to get even, to make the person pay, and ultimately to get rid of the person who offended or harmed them. God's righteous anger is to protect, restore, and redeem. Do not confuse the two because, if you do, then you will fall into the snare of the devil. Before you know it, you will be following flesh and not the Spirit of God.

August 31

### Rooted and Grounded in Christ

*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*

**Colossians 2:6-7**

### Focus on Christ

The believer's life is rooted in the relationship with Christ. That is a matter of truth since you received Christ as your Lord. But would others know that your roots run deep by how you live for Christ? There are many levels of depth in being a disciple. The different levels are displayed in Jesus' twelve disciples. How would you know if you are at the depths that you should be in your walk with Christ?

To walk in the depths of a relationship with Christ means to be active in how you talk and listen to Christ. To walk requires a person to always be moving. A relationship with Christ is not static. You cannot stay where you are and move on with Christ. When you first became a Christian, your roots were not deep. At that point in your Christian walk, it was not as important that your roots were deep, but that they were growing. To be established in the faith, one must be in an active, growing, and developing walk with Christ.

The psalmist said, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. (Psalm 1:3). The roots of a tree allow it to receive the nutrients that it needs to produce fruit. The same holds true of a Christian. To produce fruit and have life, you must root your life in Jesus. This provides you with the nutrients that you need for growth and development in your spiritual life. To be disconnected from Jesus generates a life that does not produce heavenly fruit.

Paul said that you are to be established in the faith as you have been taught. All of us have at least two teachers: first, the Holy Spirit;



second, someone who disciples you. God puts these two in your life to deepen you. Pay close attention to both of these because both are a gift from God for your personal growth. When you remember this, you will approach the growing process abounding with thanksgiving. Be thankful, first, for the gift of these teachers.

**Focus on Self**

Self doesn't want to follow instructions. Self wants to give instructions. The greatest detriment to personal spiritual growth is to think you can make it on your own. To recognize that you need growth in Christ does not mean you cannot start the process of growing today. Invest your time and energy in learning to walk in the Ways of Christ, and you will be established in the faith.

**September 1**

**The Example of Christ**

*And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.*

**John 17:19**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever thought what it would take for you to try and purify yourself? What could you do that would cleanse yourself and make you holy? Of course, your answer should be *absolutely nothing*. Sanctification has nothing to do with your merits and abilities but everything to do with the merits of Christ.

Jesus is the Truth. His sanctification was for the sake of those who would come to Him. All that He did was an example of how to walk in Him. He lived this way because He loves you. Since Jesus had no sin, He did not need personal sanctification. He sanctified Himself to provide you redemption. This redemption makes it possible for anyone to have a life that is purified, holy, and cleansed for the purpose of serving God's kingdom.

The development of a Christian is a process from the nature of sin to holiness. This is sanctification. You cannot become a Christian and stay where you are. Though you were sanctified when you received Christ as Savior, you are also continuing to be sanctified as you pursue a deeper walk with Him. This walk with Christ doesn't happen in a day, a week, or a year. This is a lifetime pursuit of building a relationship with Christ.

How thankful should you be that Christ stayed focused on His Purpose? He did not have to pursue this for Himself. He was without sin. He did it only "for their sakes." That means He did it for you.

**Focus on Self**

Self is so focused on its own pleasure that it cannot see the value of what Christ provided. In fact, to a heart that is following its own way, sanctification is of no desire. Holiness is not the goal of a sinful

## Gifts From God

heart. But when you see what Christ has done for you, it encourages you to seek a consecrated, pure, and holy life.

September 2

### Who Or What Is Your Treasure?

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**Matthew 6:21**

#### Focus on Christ

What is important to you? Where do you invest most of your time? Is it in a hobby, your work, your family, or your service to God? You need to evaluate your life to determine where your greatest interest lies. How would you feel if you lost your keys? They represent your life!

When your treasure lies in earthly possessions, there is a high potential for your heart to be crushed. When your treasure is destroyed, your heart will be discouraged. It may feel like your life is over. You should not place your trust in anything that has the potential to be destroyed. Why? Because earthly possessions are temporary and cannot provide any lasting satisfaction.

Where should you place your trust? Trust should be placed in a person of integrity, not in inanimate objects. Why? Because objects have no ability to change anything in life. A person can make a difference but not just any person. The ultimate Person of integrity is Jesus Christ. When you place your trust in Jesus, realize that He has "...blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..." (Ephesians 1:3). All the resources of God are available in the Person of Christ. When Jesus is your treasure, your heart is secure for eternity.

Where do you want your treasure to reside? Do you want it to be something on earth? Or would you rather it be something that lasts for eternity? Think of the difference between your heart being focused on something on earth verses on Jesus for eternity. There is not much comparison between the two. When you focus your heart on Christ, you receive an eternal treasure.

#### Focus on Self

Self's treasure is wrapped up in fading possessions that cause it to be viewed as important. The danger is that self will never acquire enough possessions to fill the void that only Christ can fill. Stuff is of no substance to a heart that is desperate for God. Do you recognize what incredible treasure lies in the Person of Jesus Christ? If you don't, then it is time that you learn.

September 3

**Worship is Inward not Outward**

*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*

**John 4:24**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth? God is Spirit! Not one of many spirits! He is Spirit and must be worshiped on a deeper level than just the physical. To worship in spirit is more than the physical posture during worship. It is the deep concern of the heart. You also must have the truth of Jesus residing in your life to worship. Worship, then, is not just physical or just truths taught about worship; it is both. To have one without the other is not true worship according to Jesus.

One must be born again spiritually in order to learn the truths of God’s Word. How would you worship One you do not even know? Why would you worship One you do not know? When you have no truth in regard to who God is, what exactly are you worshipping? When you can engage freely in sin during the week and raise lifted hands on Sunday to a Holy God, how exactly is that worship? Worship is adoring and praising your Creator, the One Who saved you from your sin. Of course, you would not know this without the truth of God’s Word, and you would not be able to discern it without the Spirit of God.

Singing, giving praise, lifting hands, and giving offerings are all acts of worship. God’s people were worshipping God in these ways in Isaiah chapter one. Yet God said to them that it was not worship. Why? Because their hearts were not in it. They were not worshipping in spirit and truth. They were *doing* and not *loving*. You can do many things that you believe is for God and at the same time, have no love for Him in your heart. This is not worship. “And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30). This is acceptable worship to God. God is not interested in rituals but in your heart.

God told His people, “Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear” (Isaiah 1:15). If you do not have a right heart toward God by obeying His commands, then your worship will be wrong. Though you may have a physical response in worship, it is only genuine if the heart is in obedience to God’s Word. The way in which believers live all week will determine if they are ready for genuine worship in spirit and in truth.

**Focus on Self**

When self tries to worship God, it judges itself by the actions people see. Self wants to be seen and cares little about the condition

## Gifts From God

of its heart. If self can hide the inward parts and only look good on the outside, then it is satisfied. The problem is that this is unacceptable to God. Who are you worshiping? Self or God? You will know based on the condition of your worship. Are you worshiping in spirit and in truth?

September 4

### Peace and the Mind

*Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble.*

Psalm 119:165

#### Focus on Christ

What happens to the mind when it is in great peace? What are the thoughts of a mind at peace? A mind at peace is grateful, forgiving, hopeful, confident, willing, merciful, humble, and has full trust in God regardless of the circumstance. Do you have any idea of the value of a mind at peace?

A mind at peace is still and is free to serve God. It understands that He is the only One Who is able to provide its needs. This mind glories in the truth and longs to hear from its Supplier. It seeks always to hear from God and gets lost in the truth of God's law. This type of peace cannot be earned because it is a gift.

Great peace does not come because you attend church. Great peace does not come because you tithe. Great peace does not come because you do a Bible study. Great peace comes because you love God and His Word. The relational love that you have for God is an indicator of the amount of peace that He will impart on you. God manifests Himself to those who love Him. God is your peace.

Many view spiritual leaders as great giants of the faith who have all that they need. Many do not pray for or minister to these leaders because they think leaders have no needs. Yet every person, no matter who they are, have the same spiritual needs. Great peace doesn't come because you are an experienced believer. It comes from being in love with God's Word and living in the truth of God's Word. No one can say that they have been a believer long enough and consistent enough to not have spiritual needs. The spiritual battle is raging, and no believer is exempt. Prayer is the posture of a soldier of Jesus Christ. Therefore, every believer is in need of prayer and the empowerment of God in order to have victory over the enemy.

To believe that you arrive at peace based upon the length of time that you have been a believer is a complete lie. Peace comes from your mind being stayed on Christ because you trust in Him (see Isaiah 26:3).

#### Focus on Self

The mind that is fixed on self is constantly conniving to get what it wants. This mind is exhausted and does not rest. It is always replaying the encounters it had during the day. It is focused on having others

view it as great and ,beats itself up when it believes that it has failed. Can you see the value of a peaceful mind? You can live whichever way you want, but it is best to be guided by a peaceful mind produced by God's Spirit in you. If you don't want to stumble, then focus on God's Word and you will be guided away from the traps of a troubled mind.

## September 5

### Truth in Love

*...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...*

**Ephesians 4:15**

#### Focus on Christ

Other than with love, how else can truth be spoken? Can truth be spoken with harshness? Can it be spoken with a bad attitude toward the person with whom you are speaking? Can you speak the truth while feeling disgusted?

Evidence that a believer has been growing in Christ is that he speaks the truth from a loving heart. It is not enough for a believer to just state truth. Truth without love is unfeeling, harsh, and offensive. What would be the purpose of speaking the truth without love? The purpose would be to overpower, win, and show knowledge. This approach does not care about the relationship at all. The purpose of God in speaking the truth is salvation and a restored relationship. When you speak the truth outside of God's Purpose, there is no change affected in the person's heart.

On the other hand, you can have all the Love of God in your heart but if you don't speak truth, then you still have a flawed objective. Believers are to always base their conversations on the truth of God's Word. In your conversations, truth should be central in your content. But the power of that truth is felt deeply when people see the Love of God. This awesome combination of truth and love helps both the speaker and the receiver grow in the things of Christ. Since Christ is the Head, He is the One Who produces the change. His Truth and His Love are always perfect. Make sure that when you speak you are in right fellowship with Him. Only then will the effect be according to the Mind of Christ.

Speaking the truth without love does not make you grow in Christ. Trying to love someone without speaking the truth does not make you grow in Christ. This simple verse makes it clear: speak the truth in love, in fellowship with Christ, and you will see spiritual growth.

Can you speak the truth in love while being out of fellowship with God? No. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of love is given by God from a relationship with Christ. Therefore, it is impossible to speak the truth in love when you are out of fellowship with God. Without fellowship with God, there is no love. To be in love is to be in Christ.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self wants to set others straight! It wants to be known as always being right. Believers must learn to walk in the Ways of Christ and grow in the Love of Christ. This love, along with the teaching of the Holy Spirit, will always guide you in speaking the truth. As you follow this guidance, you will experience incredible spiritual growth.

September 6

## A “spirit” of Gentleness

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

**Galatians 6:1**

## Focus on Christ

Does your spirit operate more consistently by the leading of the Holy Spirit or by the leading of your flesh?

The human condition is universal. Every human has the condition of sin and is vulnerable to temptation and to being overtaken by trespasses. The way in which you approach someone who has been overtaken by a trespass lies heavily in whether or not you understand that you have the same condition. You must realize that you are just as susceptible to falling into temptation as anyone else. Simon Peter followed Jesus; but, in a moment of weakness, he denied Him. David followed God but in a moment of weakness, was overtaken by the lust of his flesh. Don't you believe that the response of each of these men to temptation surprised themselves?

To believe that you are exempt from being overtaken in a sin is a very dangerous place to find yourself. When you have the proper perspective of the truth the outcome of restoring will be a spirit of gentleness. Never forget what qualifies you to restore a person. It is not your ability but Jesus Christ's. Who is qualified to restore one who has been overtaken in a fault? Those who are spiritual. What does it mean to be spiritual? It means walking by the Spirit and being more mature in their faith than the average believer. Consistency is the key to being qualified for this type of restoration.

Gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit, but it is when you walk in that way consistently that you develop a character of gentleness. If you are consistently walking in the Ways of the Spirit, then you become mature in the faith. This character only develops with consistency. You cannot be up one day and down the next and develop character. It is not about trying to act gentle. It is about allowing Jesus to display Himself through your spirit with no effort on your part.

No one should ever rebuke, correct, or attempt to restore a person without a spirit of gentleness. To do so would disqualify you as being spiritual. The flesh tends to attempt to restore a person with arrogance and conceit. Flesh cannot produce spiritual fruit. Spiritual fruit is pro-

duced by Jesus through an abiding relationship. You simply bear the fruit.

**Focus on Self**

A difficult concept for self is to accept that it is not equipped to produce what is necessary to be effective in the kingdom of God. Self believes that it is able to produce character in and of itself with no help from anyone else. While this may be true for worldly living, it is not true for kingdom living. To be effective in the kingdom is to be qualified to restore God’s people to a relationship with Him. Self must decrease and Christ must increase.

**September 7**

**Peaceful Living**

*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

**Romans 12:18**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it mean to be at peace with other people? Is it possible to be at peace with everyone? Does peace between people mean that both parties have to be at peace?

Notice that the verse begins with, “if it is possible.” That very statement makes it clear that it is not always possible to be at peace with everyone. Though some people may not want to make peace with you, you should always strive, seek, and labor toward being at peace with everyone. Peace does not hinge on whether or not the other person is interested in making peace with you, it lies on the truth that it is a command of God. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord...” (Hebrews 12:14).

One of the greatest ways to hinder peace is to quarrel with someone. To seek peace with all is to live above reproach. When there is discord between you and a person, there will be conflict between you and God. To seek peace with people means to be in right relationship with God.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). He also said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Jesus made it obvious that there would be people who would come against you. They may not want peace, but you can pursue peace. Don’t be guilty of doing something that would give them an excuse for not being at peace with you. You cannot stop people from attacking you. You may get offended or wounded but keep your focus.

Would things be better among Christians, family, and friends if we never provoked people to an argument? While others may still become angry with you, walking in the Spirit will keep you in perfect



## Gifts From God

peace. Remember Jesus “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...” (1 Peter 2:23).

### Focus on Self

Self is always looking for the approval of others. It does not enjoy controversy. It may say anything to receive acceptance whether it is the truth or not. To be at peace with others means you must be at peace with Christ first. A person of peace does not pursue arguments, quarrels, or conflict. A person of peace seeks to obey the commands of God and, in doing so, will be at peace with people.

September 8

### The Holy Spirit Witnesses All Things

*And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”*

Acts 5:32

### Focus on Christ

Should you listen to God even when you don't understand? Do you believe that the Holy Spirit knows what you need to know? Is it possible for you to be a witness for Christ just as the Holy Spirit is a witness?

Have you ever been an eye witness to a crime or an accident? If so, people depended on you to help explain what really happened. Some people may have wanted you to tell the story the way they want it told, not necessarily as it happened. Others may not have wanted you to testify to what you saw because it might incriminate them or prove them wrong.

The disciples witnessed the life, death, and resurrection of Christ; but the religious leaders wanted to silence them about what they saw. They did not want any witnesses to the fact that He was the Son of God. Christians have also witnessed the life of Jesus. Even though our witness is not physical, we have the evidence of Scripture and the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. But many times others do not want you to live a life as a witness to Christ because it reveals what they do not believe.

In John 12, the religious leaders came not only to see Jesus but also to see Lazarus who had been raised from the dead. They wanted to stop the testimony that came from this miracle. “But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (John 12:10-11). The same thing was happening in Acts 5.

Since we are His witnesses, it must be evident by what we do and say. We should be ready to give ourselves up for the sake of the Gospel. If we do not let Christ rule in our lives, then we are not His disciples and cannot be His witnesses. If you are a witness, then you will

represent Christ even in the trying and difficult times. The Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God. If you walk in the Spirit, then your life will be a witness to the power of Christ. The power of Christ has become alive in you and turned you from sin to righteousness. Since the Holy Spirit is a witness to all things, He can give you direction in holy living in any area of life. Both the Holy Spirit and those who obey the commands of Christ witness that Jesus is Lord to a watching world. Both testimonies are miracles of God. When the Holy Spirit enables the believer to live a holy life in the presence of unholiness, it gives witness to the power of Christ living within.

### Focus on Self

Self only wants to see things from its perspective. Just like the religious leaders did not want to hear the truth from honorable witnesses, self does not want the truth. Self is interested in being flattered. It is amazing that Christ has made you His ambassador. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Your life is a witness to the power of Christ but only as you walk in His Ways and obey His Commands. Your life alone is not a positive and compelling witness. The power of the Spirit living in you makes you a powerful witness of Jesus Christ.

## September 9

### The Spirit Guides

*So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"*

**Acts 8:30-31**

### Focus on Christ

Is it difficult for you to learn a new concept? Does your pride hinder you from being teachable? Do you need to know someone's credentials before you are willing to listen to them? The Holy Spirit has no earthly credentials.

In this biblical encounter, you see a man of great authority under the queen of the Ethiopians needing help to understand the book of Isaiah. An angel of the Lord sent Philip as a servant to guide the man. From the start of this encounter, the Holy Spirit guided both Philip and the man of authority. Philip was directed to go toward the south along the road and he simply obeyed. Why would a man of great authority listen to someone who was running on foot toward his chariot? Only God could set up this encounter. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him..." (John 6:44).

The Holy Spirit guided the entire encounter. Many Christians tend to follow their feelings instead of the leading of the Holy Spirit. If God led you to this man in the desert, would you follow Him? God's direction does not always make sense to human logic. God had a child

## Gifts From God

needing help and answered by sending His servant. What would have happened had Philip decided not to follow? Disobedience was not even an option for Philip. Philip must have been up to date with God in order to hear what he was to do next. Often there are distractions in your life that make it difficult to distinguish the Voice of God from all other voices. When you walk with God, the Holy Spirit will make things clear and bring to your remembrance what and how to obey.

When it comes to understanding God's Word you need guidance. There are Christians who have been prepared ahead of time to help in times of need. God uses His people. Just as He has done with Philip and the eunuch, He will do the same for you. Are you prepared to receive the one whom God sends? It may not look like the person you expect. You must be willing to learn from whomever God chooses to teach you. If you are not willing, then you will miss the activity of God, and your growth in Christ will be hindered. Stay up to date with God so that you will recognize the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to teach everyone else, but it is not interested in instruction. Self is too proud to think anyone else could be qualified to be its teacher. Humility simply wants to learn more of God and is not concerned about whom God chooses to guide them. This kind of servant of God simply wants to learn how to walk with Him to a deeper level every single day.

September 10

### The Lord's Presence

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

Joshua 1:9

### Focus on Christ

What gives you courage to face tests and trials? Is it the personal support of a friend? Are you strong only when it concerns your area of expertise? Do you become discouraged and afraid when it is an unfamiliar area of personal knowledge and experience?

What is the prerequisite to experiencing God's Presence? "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8). To be in the Presence of the Lord is to be in His Word. A Word from God will provide courage and strength during the most troubling times. Strength and courage is the result of recognizing God's Presence in your life which comes from spending time in His Word.

Notice that to be strong and courageous is a command. Why? Because it is His strength that He is speaking about. When you are living

an obedient life in Christ, you will have courage and strength in Him. He is not commanding you to be this way but to abide in Christ.

Many Christians try to perform the commandments of God without ever spending time in His Presence. Do not expect to have strength and courage during difficult times if you are doing this by your own ability. The Scripture says, “God is with you wherever you go,” but you should never go anywhere without knowing where He is first. Your instructions for *going* will come from your time with Him in the Word.

### Focus on Self

When is self strong? When people affirm its beliefs and values. Let a little trouble comes its way, and self is shaken. For the believer strength and courage are a by-product of a deep relationship with God. You don't have to worry about what test or trial is coming your way, your concern should be whether or not you are walking in God's Presence. When you are, you will not be afraid nor dismayed but will find your rest in Him wherever you go.

## September 11

### Exchanging Glory for Evil

*Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.*

**Judges 2:11-12**

### Focus on Christ

Do you believe there is only One True God? Do you follow Him with all your heart? Which is worse—to deny there is the One True God or to believe He exists and follow other gods?

Idolatry is often ignored in the mind. Mark 12:30 states, “And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.” Serving self or something other than God is sinful.

The human mind is a powerful tool that can be set on God or on anything other than God. The Christian mind tends to justify what it loves or places ahead of God. One example is playing sports on Sunday. What is wrong with sports? Let's take a moment and think about a practical example. If you planned a meeting with a person on Sunday, and they told you they would attend but they chose to see a baseball game instead, then how would you feel? Now think of it from God's perspective. When you choose anything other than worshipping God on Sunday, you have made a mental choice to forsake God. The choice you make is based on what holds the most impor-

## Gifts From God

tance to you. While sports is the example here, there are several other ways to forsake God. Conviction begins in what you think about God and how devoted you are to His Ways. If you have a high view of God, then your mind will choose Him. If you have a low view of God, then your mind will choose what matters most in your life.

The children of Israel chose to serve Baal instead of God. They turned to false gods and turned away from the True God. Does this really happen? Yes, it does. Jeremiah 2:11 states, “Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for what does not profit.” When you read this it would seem that this is far worse than serving a sport. But is it? In our day, idolatry is not considered a great evil, but idolatry is such a great evil because it affects your relationship with God.

Sports are not a great evil, but serving sports above the One True God is a great evil. Remember what God has done for you. He sent His Son to save you. God treats you with patience, love, and care. When His children forsake Him, He must respond in a way that protects and leads them back to Him. Forsaking God is a sin that reveals God’s anger. Why? Because you have to deny His Love, Care, and Patience to do so. God’s nature deserves your full worship and the only obedient response is to love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind.

What is the purpose of God’s anger? God’s anger is the discipline of love. His anger over sin is what protects you from complete destruction. Just as a child does not enjoy the discipline of a parent, neither will you enjoy the discipline of God. But the discipline of God is what restores the deep relationship with Him. A love relationship with God is well worth the discipline.

### Focus on Self

Self doesn’t think anything it wants is evil. It does what is right in its own eyes. The children of Israel were influenced by their culture and their friends and were more concerned about what others thought than what God thought. Would they have done this had they been concerned about what God thought? Believers need to keep God preminent in their thinking so that the culture and other influences of this world do not persuade them to go after evil instead of holiness. Do you understand that anything that draws you away from the One True God is evil? It is not ok to engage in evil practice. It is evil to do what is right in your own eyes.

**September 12**

### A Reflection of Christ

*Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength.” So the land had rest for forty years.*

**Judges 5:31**

**Focus on Christ**

What are the origins of blessings in your life? Do they originate with you or with something outside of yourself? Nothing that comes from God originates with you. In the same way, Jesus is the Provider of everything, and you are the receiver and the reflection of Him.

How is Jesus, the Son, like the physical sun? The sun provides light, heat, and power to the earth. There would be no food to eat apart from the effects of the sun on the earth. No one could touch the sun and survive. How do these characteristics compare to the spiritual Son of God? Jesus is light and power and provides spiritual food to the children of God. He also provides heat as a comfort to those who walk in His Ways. He can also bring the heat of destruction to those who choose not to follow Him. The children of Israel had rest in their land for forty years as they reflected God's Love. Then, they did evil in God's sight and destruction came. Which side of the Son would you choose?

At night the moon gives light to the earth in the midst of darkness. But, the moon is not the sun. It is a reflection of the sun. As a child of God, you are not called to be the Son but to be a reflection of the Son. The Scripture states, "...let those who love Him be like the Son." The Son is light; you are not. However, when you reflect the Son, you appear as light. The Son is powerful; you are not. Yet, as you are like the Son, you are powerful.

When believers love like Christ, they become radiant and powerful. Love is not weak but is the most powerful force on earth. Because Love is God. "But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18). You should reflect the Life of Christ, the Ways of Christ, and the Evidence of Christ so that the whole world can see God in you.

Your goal is never to be the Son but rather to glorify the Father by following the Son. The qualification of this power lies in your love for God. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). To love Him and to be like Him brings a life of blessing. Yet, the moment you turn from Him, He will bring defeat.

The goal is not to focus on being light. The goal is to focus on your personal relationship with God. Through this personal love relationship, the reflection of the Son will be a natural outcome. Do you think the moon tries to be like the sun? No, it fulfills its purpose by doing its part to reflect the sun. Stop trying to be something and start loving God. This is the qualification of being like Jesus. Get to know more about the Love of God and you will become more like Love.

**Focus on Self**

Self believes its blessing originates from within. As long as self pursues perfection, it never knows its needs. How can self produce light on its own? While it can do works that mimic the Ways of God, those who do not walk with Jesus cannot reflect light. Godly work is only what is done through God's Son, the light!

# Gifts From God

September 13

## Desires of the Heart

*Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

**Psalm 37:4**

### Focus on Christ

What are the desires of your heart? Do you pray for these desires? How do you know if your prayers are in line with what God desires for you? You need to find out if your heart desires God's Heart.

What brings you delight? Your spouse? Your children? Your car? Is your delight an emotional response to something good? Emotional responses are not the focus of Scripture.

Before God gives you the desires of your heart, you must meet His condition, based on delighting yourself in the Lord and not circumstances. One who delights in Him will have righteous desires. God is not interested in giving you the desires of your sinful heart because those desires draw you away from Him. James said that a person "...is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14). You need to make sure that your desires flow out of time spent with God.

You will know if your delight is in God by how much you trust and obey Him. If your heart is discouraged, depressed, and unhappy, then your delight is in yourself and not in the Lord.

You know that your delight is in the Lord when your desire lines up with the truth of His Word. God desires righteousness and self desires sin. When full of God, the human heart will desire what God desires, not what self desires. Your desires do not come from your thoughts, your success, or your possessions. God alone grants desires that are righteous as you line your heart up with Him.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to fulfill its own desires. Self is so sure that it is always right that it believes it can ask God for anything it wants. God did not give believers the right to ask for whatever they want. Delighting yourself in the Lord means denying your own desires and asking God to make His desires become your desires. Is that how you begin your day?

September 14

## Rely on God at All Times

*Thus the children of Israel were subdued at that time; and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on the LORD God of their fathers.*

**2 Chronicles 13:18**



**Focus on Christ**

Can you remember a moment when God humbled you? What did your spirit feel like in that moment? Were you sad, troubled, comforted, or confused? Maybe all of those. When you processed that moment with God, you probably received confidence that He was so interested in you that He met your needs. Sometimes, the beginning of sorrow brings the humility that instructs you in how to rely on God more than ever.

When you are weak, Christ is strong. If you were consistent in recognizing your weaknesses, then your faith would grow stronger. Faith does not increase when you feel in control. In fact, being out of control of your future helps you depend more on God. You cannot trust in predictions, desires, or goals; you must trust in the person of Jesus Christ. He alone will comfort you like no one else can.

Relying on God means leaning on Christ for support like on a crutch or a cane. You need help from something outside of yourself. You prevail when you rely on God for your needs. You must submit yourself to God before He will instill in you the willingness to keep on pursuing His Promises no matter what the circumstances.

Faith leans on the Truth of God instead of intellectual reasoning. When you are in danger, you lean on and trust in God for something you cannot produce. Trials bring desperation which moves you to faith. Never fear, because Christ has overcome pressures of this world.

**Focus on Self**

Self relies on self and works hard at figuring things out on its own. It believes that strength is power, but that is not what God says. God, and only God, is power. Self is weak whether it admits it or not. There is no kingdom-strength in self. The power within a person is based upon that person's willingness to accept its weakness. "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

**September 15**

**God is a Majority**

*And Asa cried out to the LORD his God, and said, "LORD, it is nothing for You to help, whether with many or with those who have no power; help us, O LORD our God, for we rest on You, and in Your name we go against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; do not let man prevail against You!"*

**2 Chronicles 14:11**

**Focus on Christ**

Is it enough that God be for you if everyone else is against you? Are you satisfied in life when God approves of you, even though friends and family do not? Would you rather have thousands of people on your side or just the One True God?

## Gifts From God

From a human perspective, we tend to be fearful when the whole world is against us. Who do you turn to first for help? Asa had an army of almost 600,000 valiant men which seems comforting when you are going into battle. However, Asa's army was facing a larger army of over a million men with greater weapons. Fortunately, with God, the number of men is not what provides strength. One person with God is a majority. Don't worry about the numbers against you, just be concerned about whether God is on your side.

God can conquer without effort. It is simple for God to solve your problems. Yet, in the midst of a personal problem, it seems as though nothing can solve it. When you orient your mind and heart toward God, you are in a position for Him to take over your problem and provide His answers. God doesn't provide an answer to your problems until you are willing to give up your humanistic answers. He wants to solve your problems to receive all the glory. Hold on to God, and He will get you through your struggles. God can help with thousands of followers or with a few weak individuals. He alone decides the source of strength. He is only waiting to hear you cry out to Him for help.

### Focus on Self

Self feels strong in numbers. When there are many people on it's side, self pridefully believes what it is doing is right. Often in churches, the leadership wants to see an increase in numbers. Scripture does not focus on an increase of numbers. In fact, that idea is humanistic. The truth is that Jesus is the Head of the church and can do as much with a body of twelve as with a body of ten thousand. Jesus took twelve misfits, one of which betrayed Him, and turned the world upside down. God is not interested in numbers alone but in obedient hearts. Exchange trust in self for trust in Christ.

September 16

### Seek and Find

*And all Judah rejoiced at the oath, for they had sworn with all their heart and sought Him with all their soul; and He was found by them, and the LORD gave them rest all around.*

**2 Chronicles 15:15**

### Focus on Christ

How do you know if you are seeking God? Is there a special time of day when you make the effort to seek God? Or is it an all day occurrence? How would others know if you are a person who seeks the heart of God?

Your main goal in life should be to seek God with all your heart, mind, and soul. According to Scripture, God is your life. "That you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days..." (Deuteronomy 30:20). If indeed He is your life, then it is

worth discovering how much effort you give to seek Him. Much of your energy should be spent on seeking the One Who created you.

There are many things in life that you may seek. Some of these things are out of your reach. If you seek finances, then you may not always find them. If you seek fame, then you may be disappointed. If you seek positions of influence, then they may already be filled. Yet, if you seek God, then you can and will find Him! Everyone can find God if they seek Him. When you begin your relationship with God, you must get to know Him. You do so in the Person of Jesus Christ. When you know Him, you find peace, joy, love, and contentment in life.

One hour on Sunday morning is not enough time to know Him. This small investment of time will starve you from the best of life in Christ. Seeking God with all your heart will enhance all human relationships as long as all parties involved are building a relationship with God. If someone is not seeking God, then your relationship with that person will be difficult. The key to a godly relationship is Jesus. The Mind of Christ brings people together.

Take a moment and reflect on what you may love more than God. Do you love finances? Do you love being known? Do you love anything in this world more than you love God? Seeking God cancels your love for the world. When you seek Him you will find Him. All things that take His place in your life will melt away. God is seeking you more than you are seeking Him. Turn to Him, and He will be right there waiting for you.

When you find God, He will give you rest. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29).

### **Focus on Self**

Self does not look to others for help but wants to do everything on its own. It desires achievements that will make a name for itself and lift itself up in front of others. Christ wants you to lay aside self and seek Him with all your heart. You will find Him when you do this, and He will give you rest and abundant life.

## **September 17**

### **The Power of Prayer**

*O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You."*

**2 Chronicles 20:12**

### **Focus on Christ**

Do you think that you would be better off fighting the enemy or praying to God about the enemy? How would others see the glory of

## Gifts From God

the Lord if His people decided to fight in the same way in which His enemies fight? The enemy of the Lord fights between flesh and blood. In the Lord's battle, physical weapons will not work. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Do nothing and pray. This sounds like an easy concept, but have you tried it? This idea goes against every ounce of humanness that is in you, for human nature is to fight. To do nothing but pray takes the control away from you. One thing a human does not like is being out of control. Don't believe in prayer but in the God Who answers prayer. Are you stronger when you are in control or when God is in control?

Three armies were coming against King Jehoshaphat. The king admitted that he had no power against these three armies and that he didn't know what to do. This was not a time for physical fighting but for praying. Why? "Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's'" (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Would you head into a battle with songs of praise? "And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: 'Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever'" (2 Chronicles 20:21). This demonstrated faith.

Faith is the key to victory as long as your faith is in Jesus. Faith is not intellectual but is trust in a person. Faith is a relationship with Jesus. To believe Jesus is the Son of God as a truth or concept is not enough. You must believe He is your Lord and Master. This takes daily effort to strengthen your belief. This kind of trust will anchor you to right living.

### Focus on Self

Self relies on its own strength and cannot see the need for relying on something it cannot see. It puts all of its trust in its own strength, power, and abilities. King Jehoshaphat was humble enough to see that he didn't know what to do. As he turned toward God, God provided an answer that he would have never contemplated: place the choir in front of the army and go to battle singing praise to your God. Praise takes your eyes off your problems and puts your mind and heart on God. Prayer changes your perspective.

September 18

### Right Living Comes From a Right Relationship

*But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You.*

Psalm 5:11

**Focus on Christ**

In whom do you put your trust? Is there anyone in your life whom you run to for help when you are in trouble? Do you run to people, finances, or institutions before you run to God for help? You need to learn that the first place to consult wisdom and help is in the Person of Christ.

The way to a deep walk with Christ is found in this one verse. Trust, love, and righteousness are the ways in which you develop a deep relationship in Christ. If you get this in order, then you will recognize how to make right decisions for everyday life.

First, put your trust in Christ. Trust means to take refuge or shelter by running to God. This is practical faith. Running to Christ for safety because you trust Him should be the response of a child of God. Why would you shout for joy when you place your trust in Christ? Because He defends you. Placing your trust in Christ protects you with all of God's Power. This is definitely a thought worth rejoicing over.

Second, love Christ by discovering in depth how He first loved you. Loving His Name means loving His Character. The deeper you trust God, the deeper your love for God will grow.

Third, obey God and experience His righteousness. Joy is the outcome of trust and love. This joy comes from right living because of a right relationship. Christians are not joyful when at odds with God, or viewing a circumstance from their own perspective. Seeking God through prayer is crucial in lining up your mind with His Mind. When you are able to see the circumstance through God's perspective, great peace and joy results. This joy creates a strong desire to praise God. When you begin to praise God for Who He is, your wrong thinking will begin to melt away. You cannot praise God and be miserable.

In whom do you place your trust? To experience the joy of the Lord, you must place your trust in Christ. Until you do, you will not grow in love, joy, and peace. Place your trust in Christ today and you will not regret your decision.

**Focus on Self**

Self doesn't trust anyone or anything that does not agree with it. Self cannot see beyond the obvious. Trusting in God requires you to see beyond your own thinking. Trust the God you love. Obedience is a natural by-product of a deep love for God. Love God and right living will be produced.

**September 19**

**Trust and Obey**

*Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."*

**John 6:28-29**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

Do you believe that God knows the truth about your situation? What does it take for you to put your whole trust in God and Him alone?

Humans are programmed with a desire to fix problems in life. You seek to find what it is you need to do, and do it. The people were asking Jesus, "What shall we do?" That is the wrong question. A better question is "How can I learn more about Jesus?" You will learn more about Jesus when you realize you don't have the answer and must turn to someone for help. To understand how desperately you need the Savior, you first need a healthy perspective of whom you are according to Scripture.

Faith is trust in God and distrust in self. As long as you think you have all the answers you will not trust or have deep faith in God. It is like a two-sided coin. You have both at the same time: trust in God, and distrust in self. Distrust in self is not an unhealthy view of self but a humble view of self. Until you believe that without Jesus you can do nothing, you will put your trust in self. It is only when you realize the incredible grip that sin has on your heart, mind, and soul that you will know that your own thinking is never going to solve trouble in your life. To live in Christ is to die to self. Therefore, by trusting God and understanding your condition, you will realize you know nothing without God. You receive wisdom from God when you believe in Him.

Many Christians want to do something for God without being with Him. When you trust and obey God by believing in His Son, He will manifest Himself to you. Consequently, you will begin to become like Him. When you become like Him, you will not need to ask what to do. You will know what to do because your mind will be lined up with His Mind. To do anything without first being with and trusting in Jesus, is not the work of the kingdom. The work of the kingdom allows God to change you from the inside out. Then, you will not have to find work for the Lord because the work just becomes who you are. When you are changed into the image of Christ and live your life, the work of the Lord is accomplished. Take God at His Word, trust in His Son, and believe on His Son; and He will supply all you need for right living. Faith is not doing something but is trusting someone. All God asks of you is to trust and obey.

## Focus on Self

Self doesn't want God to tell it what to do. Rather, it wants to receive a list of tasks and accomplish it on its own. However, God desires you to trust Him not to overpower you, or to be a dictator. He wants you to trust Him because He understands the sinful condition of your heart. When you learn to trust God and not self, you can fully comprehend the hymn writers words, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

September 20

Rivers of Living Water

*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*

John 7:38

Focus on Christ

Is there a connection between belief and the work of the Holy Spirit? If the Spirit’s work in your life depended on the depth of your belief in Jesus, how much would He be able to accomplish?

Jesus often saw His disciples struggle with unbelief. His disciples even said, “Lord, help our unbelief.” The need is not for more of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit resides in every believer. Your need is to be strengthened in your belief in Jesus. Why would rivers of living water flow out of a heart that does not believe the pure Word of God?

There will be several transitions and changes in circumstances in your lifetime. Each one of these is an opportunity to grow in your belief in Christ. The belief you had at the beginning of your relationship with Christ will not sustain you when a trial begins because trials are designed by God to increase your trust in Him. It is one thing to say that you believe in Jesus; but if you do not live like you believe, then you do not believe. A good way to test your belief is to honestly examine your heart when a trial enters your life. Christ will satisfy your inner being with peace in the midst of chaos and will bring joy in sorrowful times, with a sense of victory when others may attempt to hinder or discourage you.

A river starts from a source, usually a spring, which feeds water into the river and causes a natural flow. Just as the source feeds the river, Jesus feeds your heart. Can the flow of a river be blocked? Yes, it can. When natural debris or a man-made dam is constructed, the flow of the river becomes less powerful. Has the river lost its power? No, it has only been blocked. This happens in the heart of a believer who is discouraged. The power source is always available. Rivers of living water is contingent upon belief, not perfection. Limited resources do not apply to the Holy Spirit. Streams of living water will flow out of those who believe in Jesus.

Continual fulfillment of the abundant life never stops when your life is filled with Christ’s Spirit. Rivers of living water flow from you by the unlimited Power and Nature of the Holy Spirit.

Focus on Self

Self receives its power from its own limited knowledge and understanding in this world. How much can one person know about everything in the universe? Not much. This is not so with the Holy Spirit. As long as you have full belief and trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit will produce rivers of abundant life, understanding, and ful-



## Gifts From God

fillment that will carry you through any test from this world. That is a powerful way to live.

September 21

### A Faithful Servant

*His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."*

**Matthew 25:21**

*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*

**Luke 16:10**

### Focus on Christ

Can you imagine standing before God and being asked, "What have you done with the gifts and assignments that I have given you?" What special gifts has God given you to manage? Remember, God gives these gifts for His Glory. You are not the owner, but the manager.

All abilities are given by God, but He gives different abilities to each one. "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey" (Matthew 25:15). You may have a special talent in your life that comes naturally. Never forget the One Who gave it to you. Considering Him, what will you do with that talent? Remember, without proper care and management, this can be taken away in an instant. You must see the gifts and blessings from God as Him trusting you with His possessions. This may be people, talents, assignments, or abilities. God entrusts you with His treasure in order for you to treat it and care for it as He would. He desires you to use it for His Glory.

What does it mean to be faithful in what God has entrusted to you? How will you use the gifts that He gives you? Many times people desire the "quarterback" position—the position that is seen and noticed. But a football team needs all of the positions to function. This is a great picture of the church. The church needs every member to function in the assignment God has given. If you are not careful, then you will be focused so much on what you believe you need to be doing that you miss being faithful in what God has entrusted to you.

If you are unable to be faithful in what God has entrusted to you today, then not only will He not provide additional opportunities, but He may also remove His gifts from you. A healthy fear is required to manage God's possessions. Would you trust someone who steals to guard your most prized possessions? God does not take the mismanagement of what He has entrusted to you lightly. You shouldn't take it lightly either. In a parable, Jesus said, "For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him" (Luke 19:26). You will give an account

to God of how you use what He has entrusted to you. Have you been faithful in what God has entrusted to you? Remember you manage something you do not own.

**Focus on Self**

Self wants to receive rewards for its abilities and talents. Self believes that it is great because of the talents it possesses. It does not see these talents as God-given. Remember that as a child of God, all that is entrusted to you is His and must be used for His kingdom and His glory. If it is not, then He will take it away and entrust it to someone who will be faithful. A humble servant is thankful and responsible no matter how small the assignment. Serve God with all your heart.

**September 22**

**Live by Faith**

*Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

**Hebrews 10:38-39**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever wavered in your belief in God? Have there been times in your life where you have been so discouraged that you had to ask God to strengthen your belief? What kind of things test your faith? Your faith may be tested in a difficult relationship, a financial crisis, or the loss of a loved one.

If any other person or thing is in first place in your life, then this opens a huge door for your faith to be shaken. This is the reason why it is critical to have your relationship with God as your number one priority. When God is first in your life, your faith should be strengthened with trials, not weakened. If you are only one degree off of the truth, then it doesn't seem like much. But if you continue to walk in that direction, then the gap between you and truth increases. Sometimes your confidence in God is shaken by a subtle shift in direction. Confidence increases when you have an absolute certainty in the trustworthiness of another. God richly rewards the believer who courageously confesses his faith. He rewards the Christian not because he has deserved the reward in the sense of having merited or earned it. God dispenses His gifts to those who earnestly seek Him. What confidence do you have in Christ?

“But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’ ” (Luke 9:62). Jesus erases everyone's excuses for not following Him. You cannot let friends, family, career, or personal agendas get in the way or diminish your faith in Christ. True belief will choose Jesus first. To live by faith means to seek a word from God daily. God's Word to you is

## Gifts From God

the best guidance and advice that you could possibly receive. When you put Christ first, you choose what is best not only for you and your family, but also for generations to come.

Faith is not transferable from one person to another. It comes from your own deep and intimate walk with Christ. Though you can learn from others, what you learn from them must agree with the Word of God. When you choose to draw back from your faith, you are choosing to leave abundant life and return to limited life. This is what the Israelites chose to do time and time again. God would deliver them, and they would eventually return to their old ways. You must set in your mind that there is nothing worth losing your faith in God over. Until you do, you are in danger of drawing back and returning to bondage.

### Focus on Self

Self wants everyone to live by its own standards and beliefs. Putting faith in others is not self's desire. For the believer, faith is strengthened by the amount of confidence in God. The believer wants to trust in someone other than self. This requires complete trust in God and complete distrust in self. Living by faith will never happen when you trust yourself more than God. But living by faith will keep you close to God and protect you from returning to your old ways. Put your hand to the plow and don't look back!

September 23

### Who Deserves Salvation?

*What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.*

**Romans 3:9**

### Focus on Christ

Do you find yourself frustrated because there is someone in your life who won't believe in the Ways of Christ? Do you find yourself wondering how long it will take for others to see the truth of God's Word? Do you pride yourself on the fact that you are saved? Do you look down on others because they are not saved?

Sometimes a believer who is trying to live by the Word of God becomes frustrated with others who are not living according to God's Ways. They think it unfair. It can also seem unfair when a person who does not know Christ seems to live a successful life while you are serving God and feeling all the difficulties of life pressed upon you. Another level of unfairness comes when a new believer understands the depths of God's truths, when it took you years to understand the same truth. Yet, when you have a personal relationship with Jesus, you will be thrilled when a new believer comes to salvation. If you find yourself frustrated, then check your heart.

Jesus is looking for obedience. Struggling with fairness arises when you feel as though you have been dealt with unjustly. When you do

something wrong, you want God to give you mercy. However, when you feel as though someone else has done you wrong, you want justice, not mercy. This mindset ignores obedience to Christ in favor of fairness for self. This type of thinking is not of God.

Every person is under the law of sin. If you have received God's salvation, then your mindset should be one of gratitude and thanksgiving. A person who has received the blessing of God's Spirit wants to share that blessing with everyone.

You should rejoice when a new believer finds a relationship with Christ, no matter how sinful that person's past. Paul wrote, so ask yourself: "Are we better than they?" His answer was "not at all" because we are all under sin. If you think otherwise, then you are living out of religion and not a relationship with Christ. When you have a relationship with Christ you have His Heart. The Heart of Christ provides salvation for all who will receive it.

### **Focus on Self**

Self wants to be treated fairly but is not concerned with how others are treated, unless of course self believes others are getting better than they deserve. But Christ died once for all. "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit..." (1 Peter 3:18). Do you believe that self should be able to decide who receives God's gift, or do you believe the One Who died for all has the privilege of offering grace as He chooses?

**September 24**

### **Unnoticed but Rewarded**

*Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

**Matthew 6:1**

### **Focus on Christ**

What does God reward? Does God reward your actions? Does God focus on good deeds?

Some Christian groups focus on works more than righteousness. It is not that they don't believe in righteousness but that they believe that works will produce righteousness. That is the opposite of what Jesus taught. Righteousness is an obedient act.

Jesus knew that the people had a desire for their works to be seen by people rather than God. The nature of sinful people is to be recognized for the good that they do. What is the basic problem when a person wants to be recognized for doing good? It is selfish ambition. The goal of this heart is not for the advancement of the kingdom but the advancement of self. What reward can a human being give you for doing good? They can give you a word of praise, a trophy, a public recognition, or a heart-felt thank you. But notice Jesus was not

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\_\_\_\_\_ talking about rewards from people but about rewards from His Father  
\_\_\_\_\_ in heaven.

\_\_\_\_\_ If you do good so that others may see, then your reward will not be  
\_\_\_\_\_ from God but from another human being. Though this may feel good,  
\_\_\_\_\_ it has nothing to do with eternal rewards. Rewards given by people are  
\_\_\_\_\_ temporary. God's rewards are eternal. The praise of people will come  
\_\_\_\_\_ and go, the moment will eventually be forgotten, but God's rewards  
\_\_\_\_\_ are constant and everlasting.

\_\_\_\_\_ The principle that Jesus taught is that you should not do good  
\_\_\_\_\_ works to receive a reward. Rather, you should do the works of God  
\_\_\_\_\_ because you love Him. When you do, you will only care about what  
\_\_\_\_\_ God sees, not people. You may not even notice this kind of obedient  
\_\_\_\_\_ righteousness, but God will reward you for it.

### Focus on Self

\_\_\_\_\_ Self takes all the credit it can get in front of as many eyes as possi-  
\_\_\_\_\_ ble. This type of mentality is not edifying to others and is not looked  
\_\_\_\_\_ upon with pleasure by God. If you are doing works for credit, then you  
\_\_\_\_\_ must know that this will not advance God's kingdom. The goal of the  
\_\_\_\_\_ works of righteousness is to exalt the name of Jesus, not your name.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Until you are ready to lose recognition in front of people, you will  
\_\_\_\_\_ struggle with doing the works of the Lord.

September 25

### The Call of Jesus

\_\_\_\_\_ *As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he*  
\_\_\_\_\_ *arose and followed Him.*

Matthew 9:9

### Focus on Christ

\_\_\_\_\_ Have you ever heard the call from Jesus? What do you think of  
\_\_\_\_\_ when Christ calls a person? What do you gain when you follow Christ?

\_\_\_\_\_ To accept a call from Christ is to believe that God has the absolute  
\_\_\_\_\_ best intention for your life. It means accepting that the ways of the  
\_\_\_\_\_ world are sinful and will limit you in your ability to think and live.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Understanding that worldly living is limited and God's Way of living  
\_\_\_\_\_ is much higher provides a perspective that allows you to follow Christ  
\_\_\_\_\_ regardless of what you might lose. What you lose does not compare to  
\_\_\_\_\_ the blessings that God has for you. Humans place so much emphasis  
\_\_\_\_\_ on what they believe will get them ahead in life or will bring them to a  
\_\_\_\_\_ place of comfort. Do you truly believe that comfort is better than God?  
\_\_\_\_\_ If you do, then you are not ready to accept a call from God.

\_\_\_\_\_ The first call of Christ is to a relationship with Him. Will this cost  
\_\_\_\_\_ you? Yes it will. Many will not understand your choice. The people  
\_\_\_\_\_ whom you lose because you choose a relationship with God are proba-  
\_\_\_\_\_ bly people who are not helpful to you. Jesus said, "And everyone who  
\_\_\_\_\_ has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or chil-

dren or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29). Many times God has a greater relationship in mind for you than the ones you now have or He may restore weak relationships. His restored relationship will be much better than the one established on sin or He may also bring someone else into your life that will be a rich treasure to supply you with what you need to run your race. Christ's call is not to give up something as much as it is to receive a better way of life.

Do you have any idea of the vast power of God? Christ's call is a call of authority that provides new direction. Just because you do not understand it does not mean that it does not exist. God's power is so vast that Jesus was able to walk up to Matthew and say, "Follow Me," and Matthew obeyed. Why? Jesus had the Authority of God. At this point, Matthew did not know Jesus, but he chose to follow Him. Do you obey God that way? A call from Christ is the result of Christ choosing you. Keep in mind that you did not choose Christ. Think about how He has loved you and chosen you for His Purpose. If you truly believed this, then you would drop everything and follow Him just as Matthew did.

Human nature wants to know the details before doing something. God calls you from an ordinary life to a God-focused life. His call is from your ways and thoughts to His Ways and Thoughts. Therefore, you will not know the details because only God knows the future. Thinking that knowing the details will provide you with what you need is not right thinking. God is the only One Who can provide for your needs. Trust in Him and you will have peace even in uncertainty.

The life that you received because Christ has called, chosen, loved, redeemed, and empowered you for His Way of life is the most valuable thing that you could receive in all of eternity.

### **Focus on Self**

Self does not want to give up anything but wants to gain everything. If you ask self to give up a job, house, family, or possessions, then self would think you are crazy. Christ does not consider what you value. He calls you because He knows that what He calls you to is worth far more than you ever thought you could possess. Follow Him and experience the abundant life.

## **September 26**

### **Sheep Among Wolves**

*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*

**Matthew 10:16**

### **Focus on Christ**

How do you respond to those who attack you? Do you put up your defenses? Do you go on the offense? Many times the response

## Gifts From God

to an attack is to argue. How much is really accomplished with an argument?

When Christ sends you out into the world for His Purposes, He sends you out harmless as a sheep. As you encounter difficulties in this world, you should face them like Jesus suggests. A sheep has no sharp teeth or claws to defend itself. Sheep are gentle and meek. This is the way in which Christ sends you out. When you are like a sheep, you must depend on the Shepherd for protection. The only defense a believer has is weakness. In this weakness, the strength of Christ will be shown to a watching world or even to other believers who attack. Make sure that when you go out, it is because Christ sent you. He will protect you as you are on mission for His Purposes.

If your response to attacks is to get in a battle, then Christ's power is not seen through you. When you fight others, they simply focus on your strength and try to come back with another attack. When Christ battles for you, they may not correct their actions, but they know there is something different and unique about your spirit.

To be harmless as a dove reinforces the principle of being as sheep in the midst of wolves. If you have observed a believer being ganged up on by others and have seen that he kept his cool in the midst of this, then you were probably impressed. Only the Holy Spirit could give them the ability to stay calm and harmless in the midst of attacks. What is most important is not that one stays calm, but that Christ is the One Who receives the glory for how you respond.

Jesus also said that you should be wise as a serpent. This means to be aware of and avoid the danger. If you are looking for a fight, then someone will oppose you. What you should do is avoid fights and look for opportunities to represent the Spirit of Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self has a strong desire to argue. It is human nature to defend what matters. The problem is that argumentation is sin and does not bring peace to any relationship. Self wants to fight and to win. But the goal of a spirit submitted to God is to bring peace. When you follow Christ, your desire will become His desire, and He will provide you with the Spirit you need to remain calm in the midst of a fight. Self cannot produce this type of Spirit. Only Christ living in you can produce this type of Spirit.

September 27

### Blessed for Belief

*And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*

**Matthew 11:6**

### Focus on Christ

What offends you? Are you offended when a novice tries to teach you something that requires credentials for teaching? The world has many standards for education, career assessment, counseling, tech-



nical skills, and professional ethics. You wouldn't think of asking someone with credentials in auto mechanics to give you instructions for how to clean your teeth. Background can sometimes hinder you from receiving the right information. After all, a parent can give incredible wisdom to his child without having credentials in every area of life.

Jesus came from a background that was not considered enough for many religious leaders. Remember, He was born in a borrowed stable and placed in a food trough for animals. His parents were not wealthy, and His learned trade was that of a common carpenter. He did not come from a family of professional clergy. His life was of poverty. There was little probability of His being the Messiah. Many did not receive His teaching for these reasons. They missed out on the blessing of knowing Him because of their prejudiced views.

Therefore, He said, "Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." If you are offended by His earthly poverty, then you will not see the kingdom of God. In our day, Jesus would not have the proper credentials to pastor most churches. He would need an undergraduate degree, a seminary degree (preferably a doctorate), and years of experience. These credentials are not wrong, but they do not necessarily represent one's character. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed" (1 Peter 2:7-8).

Jesus' life was His credentials. He did what He said He would do. He lived what He taught. Wisdom does not come from your background, your parents, or your education. While all of those are helpful, they do not guarantee that you will be a person of integrity who can give great advice about many areas of life.

How about you? Will people listen to you when they see how you live? Do others gain confidence as they see you live for Christ? You will be blessed as you trust in Christ. Do not be worried about what others think of you because you follow Christ. Stand up for the One Who gave His life for you and trust in His Ways and Truth. Get over the prejudices of this world against Christ and His followers. Do not let their wrong thinking keep you from the blessing of following Him with all your heart. As you do these things, it will be evident that you are not offended by His life. If you are persecuted for following the Savior, then you are blessed.

### **Focus on Self**

Self is always worried about being seen from a proper perspective. It loves recognition and credentials. Self thinks that it is of value if it has a great record of success. However, Jesus is concerned over your character. He wants to give you abundant life that will guide you into all truth. This life in Christ will be full of wisdom from the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Forget your worries of what the world thinks about you and be proud, not offended, of Christ.

# Gifts From God

September 28

## Everyone Can Hear

*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

**Matthew 13:9**

### Focus on Christ

Who can hear? Everyone who has ears. Ignorance, arrogance, and avoidance are not acceptable excuses to those who can hear.

No one is left out. All can hear and understand. All can hear God's Word and obey what it states. Every believer has the Presence of the Holy Spirit. Therefore every believer can hear what the Spirit is saying. Education does not determine how one hears the Spirit. Neither background nor culture are the determining factors for hearing. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

A new believer has the same Spirit as a seasoned believer. Experience and the amount of God's Word in their lives may be different, but there is nothing the Holy Spirit cannot teach to either. All of us have a sinful nature. All believers have something else in common—the ability to hear.

You are responsible to God for what you hear both spiritually and physically. You cannot plead ignorance when you hear God's Word and Ways over and over again through preaching, teaching, reading, and listening to friends and family. God will hold you accountable for hearing, whether you plead ignorance, indifference, or slowness of hearing.

All are responsible for hearing and obeying the Word of God. No excuses are accepted for not listening. Lay down your reasons such as, "I'm trying!" or "I don't like to read." God will not accept these against the backdrop of His providing His only Son to save you and His Spirit to guide you. Stop rebelling and begin believing and obeying.

There are only a few things that keep a person from hearing:

1. Being too busy with your own thoughts,
2. Acting like you know enough and don't need to hear anymore, and
3. Ignoring what you have heard and acting as though you didn't hear.

Keep doing this and you will become deaf to God and He will leave you to yourself. Pray that never happens to you. Rejoice and be glad for the ability to hear.

### Focus on Self

Self does not believe that there are things it needs to hear. When it comes to spiritual things, self is lazy. It will do everything to keep up a career status but tends to do very little to keep up a relationship with God. Think of the ramifications of hearing a word from God and

not listening. This brings consequences not only to self but also to everyone around you. When God speaks, you will do well to listen.

**September 29**

**The End from the Beginning**

*Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure..."*

**Isaiah 46:10**

**Focus on Christ**

When you start to read a book, do you start at the end? What about if you missed the football game on Sunday and recorded it to watch later? You would guard yourself from hearing who won the game.

God had some of His prophets prophesy in the Old Testament things that were not accomplished in their day. Yet, we know the outcome because God put it in print for us. God knew the end of the world before He created the world. He knew the result of the flood before He told Noah to build an ark. He knew the need for a Savior before He created human beings. There is nothing that He did not know from the very beginning. He knew how your life would end when He created you.

Since God had His Plan from the beginning He knew exactly what His Purposes would be and how they would come to pass. He said His Counsel would stand and, therefore, nothing will stand in the Way of God accomplishing His Will. If God wants something to happen, then what could you do to stop it from happening? God knows the direction of your life. How much effort should you put into knowing His Will and the Mind of Christ if this is so?

Jesus knew the end from the beginning. "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Matthew 16:21). Jesus knew what the outcome of His life would be before He was ever born. Even so, there was no power on earth or hell that could control Him or change Him from accomplishing God's Counsel. If you are assured that God's Counsel will stand, then you will have comfort, satisfaction, and hope to follow everything He says.

The struggle with knowing the end from the beginning is that you still do not know the details. The details are revealed by God as part of the process of growing in Christ. To know the details requires sitting daily in the Counsel of God. Though you don't know the details of the process, you can trust God for the details. Never lose hope on a promise that God has given you. The end will be worth every struggle, battle, and conflict. Stay focused on Christ and leave the details to God.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self wants to know all the details and how they pertain to its own self interest. Self is really not interested in how things end for others, just for itself. The believer is more interested in a daily relationship with Christ instead of trying to figure out all the details of what to do next. A genuine hope for all the needs of life is present when your relationship with Christ is right. "Don't sweat the details," is a good phrase to apply here. Simply trust in the One Who knows the end from the beginning.

September 30

## Thirst for God

*O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.*

Psalm 63:1

## Focus on Christ

Have you ever been really thirsty? You might even say your throat was extremely dry. What did it drive you to do? You probably sought after something cool to drink. How do you feel after you drink when you are thirsty? Every human being thirsts for water and cannot survive without it.

People think that they can survive without God. The believer's soul should thirst for God. You will never thirst for God unless you know your need for Him. Sometimes you have a need and try to fill it with substitutes that will not satisfy. What substitutes do you turn to instead of God? The author of this Psalm, David, had gone through a time of exile in the desert. He knew thirst. Some people do not thirst after a relationship with God, but, instead yearn to keep a list of rules. Do not seek after rules, seek after God.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus shares that the first thing you need to do is be poor in spirit (see Matthew 5:3). That means you should know your need. In humility, you should seek after God because He is the only One Who can supply living water that will satisfy. God created the spirit of man that ultimately knows its need for something outside of itself. That need is satisfied when a person seeks after God to fill one's thirst. When the soul thirsts after God, it will be satisfied in Christ (see Psalm 63:5). How much of God is available to a thirsty soul? All of Him, at all times. The Scripture states, "...for in Him we live and move and have our being..." (Acts 17:28). Everything in life is available in a relationship with God through Christ His Son. You would have to work against God to be unsatisfied in your soul. When you walk with Christ, you no longer have to be thirsty.

When your thirst for God is satisfied in your relationship with Him, you will have a willingness to keep following Him. Some foods satisfy your cravings. If you overindulge, then you may not continue to

crave it, or it may not satisfy you as it once did. This is not so with God. If you are seeking Him and are satisfied with Him in a relationship, then your craving for Him will never be completely satisfied.

### Focus on Self

Self seeks after itself. Whatever brings pleasure is viewed as moral and appropriate for self. The believer, when focused on God, has a higher standard. The spiritually-minded person craves God's approval. Your ways will be established perfectly when you seek God, find satisfaction in Him, and follow Him with all your heart.

## October 1

### Be Still

*Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*

**Psalm 46:10**

### Focus on Christ

How do you handle stillness? Do you have anxiety when activity ceases? Do you think that you have to do something in order to relax? If a friend of yours was in crisis and came to you for help, then would your first thought be to advise him to be still and know that He is God? Or would you look for an action he must do?

The prophets spoke about being still in regard to battle. "And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever'" (Exodus 14:13). A spirit of fear will keep you from seeing the salvation of the Lord, will keep your mind on the situation, and will create a need to do something. On the other hand, love will keep your mind on God and bring stillness to your soul.

Just because you are a Christian and you do something in response to a situation does not mean what you did is a Christian action. God's Ways are not your ways (see Isaiah 55:8). You may tend to confuse action with relationship to God. God is not looking for you to act on His behalf; He is acting on your behalf. "Now therefore, stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD concerning all the righteous acts of the LORD which He did to you and your fathers..." (1 Samuel 12:7). You must be still in order to recognize God. As long as you are actively trying to do something to solve your situation, you will not recognize God's activity.

It is difficult for the human mind to fathom the capabilities of God. You cannot come close to comprehending the capabilities of God as long as your mind is on your problems. Your problems are pitifully simple for God to solve. You just need to be still and watch the work of the Lord. He can make wars cease and desolation come. Knowing God is so great, be still and know that He is God.

## Gifts From God

You need to be still and see God working instead of working so much to accomplish what you want to happen. If you do not hear God clearly, then it may very well be that you are focused on your own desires. As you focus on Christ and His Life and Purpose for you, your mind will settle. To complain of your circumstances will cause you to be blind to the Will of God. Complaining about your situation makes your problem more complex in your mind. As long as you are quarreling and complaining, you will be fighting against the Will of God. When God is exalted in your mind, your response will be obedience. “Be still and know that I am God.”

### Focus on Self

Self desires comfort. When self is uncomfortable it reacts with complaints and ungratefulness. The Israelites were being rescued from bondage. Yet, the minute it became difficult, they wanted to retreat back to bondage. When you find yourself desiring to retreat to your old ways, you may want to be still and remember that God has rescued you. Fear comes when your mind is focused on your problem and not on the God of your salvation. Following God’s Ways brings discomfort because it is not your way. But you need to decide how you want to live. Living a life in bondage will never provide the abundant, peaceful life that Christ came to offer you.

October 2

### Spiritual Concentration

*Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, because of the voice of the enemy...*

**Psalm 55:1-3**

### Focus on Christ

When you are on-target spiritually, what causes you to lose your spiritual concentration? Are you easily distracted? Why is it that one negative event of the day can spoil ninety previous victories? Don’t lose spiritual concentration. Keep your mind focused on God. “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3).

David was upset because he could not concentrate on God. Why couldn’t he concentrate? Because he was troubled and distressed at the voice of the enemy. David was caught off guard at King Saul’s chastening. He was a victim of Saul’s anger, but he was also a victim of his own unbelief.

What happened to the boy who fought Goliath? What happened to the person who wouldn’t wear armor and instead went to fight in the name of the Lord? The same thing can happen to you. No matter how many victories you gain, you will still have failures. No matter how many books you write, lessons you teach, successful businesses you create, or money you acquire, you will still get mad, sad, lonely,

weak, or troubled. Why? Because you do not choose to trust in God for your need at that moment.

Do not give in to the threats of the enemy but rather ask God to help you stand strong in their midst. David was afraid that his life would be taken. He was consumed by this thought. This great fear produced anguish in his heart. His physical body was disturbed by the fear of his mind. He had lost spiritual concentration.

David was like so many of us. When difficulty comes, we just want to escape. We want to fly away from all of our troubles. But remember, God is powerful enough to deliver you in the trouble without having to move you out of the trouble. Though David said that he could withstand the threat of an enemy, it was very difficult to withstand an attack coming from someone who used to be his close friend. You cannot afford to let a human relationship interfere with your trust in God.

### Focus on Self

Self does not have spiritual concentration. Self is not focused on God. What caused David's distress? He was concerned about what would happen to him and not focused on God's Will and Purpose. David was called to be the king. Do you believe that God would call him to be the king and then hand him over to the enemy? When your mind is focused on self, you will be afraid, discouraged, and defeated. But, when your mind is on Christ, you will be at peace.

October 3

### Obedience Confirms Praise

*Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.*

Psalm 50:23

### Focus on Christ

How do you offer praise to God? Is it through proper words you speak? If you say, "Praise God!" is that enough? What is God looking for you to do or say in order to praise Him?

God said, "What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?" (Psalm 50:16-17). This is certainly not a way to praise or glorify Christ. The wicked hate God's instruction. They don't listen to Him. They speak evil and deceit. They continually gossip about and slander other people.

Christ is looking for disciples who honor Him with both their lips and their conduct. Religious ceremonies and promises do not protect a person from judgment. Obedience and trust show a proper relationship to God. Christ takes what you say and do seriously.

Pure worship and praise is seen by God when you have a pure heart and a pure life. God offers salvation to those who do what He says. If you obey the promises of God, then it shows your love for



## Gifts From God

Him. God desires for you to trust Him and believe in Him. When you choose to disobey God, you are not taking Him at His Word. This is not praising Him. This is disobedience. Lips that speak praise from a life that is disobedient is deceptive and displeasing to the Lord.

A heart full of praise comes from a life that loves the Lord. When you love God, you will obey Him. When you obey Him, you will be praising Him.

### Focus on Self

Self desires praise from everyone. It is not looking to praise God but to gain praise from everyone else. Self lives a life of pleasure and expects to be told how wonderful it is. The nature of sin is to do what is right in your own eyes and not hold any regard for what God says. You will never praise God while disregarding His Word. A life that is obedient to God is a life that reveals deep praise for Him.

October 4

### Obedience and Holiness

*Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

1 Peter 1:13-16

### Focus on Christ

Who is the driving voice in your thinking, self or God? Is your mind made up to go your own way or is your mind made up to only go God's Way? The accepted posture for a disciple of Jesus Christ is a guarded mind that is sober. If your thinking is not right, then your obedience will not be right.

How can a person come into the Presence of God and not recognize his own sin? When you are in the Presence of God, you are in the Presence of Holiness. The light of holiness reveals sin that is in your heart. Without the Presence of God, you cannot move from sin to holiness. Personal holiness is a result of what God has produced in you. It is not what you have attained but Whom you obey that makes you holy. Obedience is holy living. Why would a person refuse to obey someone who is taking care of him? Because he has a rebellious heart.

The children of Israel did not forget how God parted the Red Sea. Their problem was that they chose not to live by faith, holiness, and obedience. They wanted a new kind of life independent of God. Independence from God and His church will cause holy failure. A refusal to obey God is a refusal to be holy. Every time you think of doing something your own way, you become just like the children of Israel. They wanted their way and God's provisions. You cannot have both.

It is either God's Way with His Provisions, or your way with your provisions.

Prepare your mind for action; be self-controlled; fully set your hope on the grace of Christ, and you will see the Holiness of God develop in your life. Holiness is the characteristic of a person seeking after God's own heart and is best recognized as God's Presence. Jesus Christ alone is the Source of your holiness. If you want to obey Jesus, then you must recognize His Presence in your life. When you recognize God's Presence, you realize that you are not like Him. Then, you will want to be holy as He is holy.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to do things it's own way but receive all God's blessings. The way of self is enmity to God. God will not bless sin, He will bless holiness. To live a life of holiness is to submit your life to the Ways of God. Then, you will have everything you need for life and godliness (see 2 Peter 1:3).

**October 5**

### Obedience and Morality

*...and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

**2 Corinthians 10:6**

### Focus on Christ

Why do you do the right thing? Is it because you have been raised with good morals? Do you obey the law so that you will not be embarrassed? Or do you obey the law because you love God?

Only as we obey God do we perceive things both morally and spiritually. Right feelings are produced by obedience, never vice versa. Morality is a tyrant and a bully. It will drive you to attempt to be good in your own human strength. You can choose to live a good moral life without depending on God. But Christ does not want you to try to live as best you can in your strength. He wants you to get into His Word and discover how to obey Him. Obedience will produce morality in you.

Many try to make the Christian life too difficult. Setting standards will do that. The Christian life is Christ working in you to develop what He wants in and through your life. How do you get that? Obedience. Living by a set of morals is extremely difficult. Morals are always nagging at you, and you can never get ultimate victory over them.

Your free will to choose wrong is what makes obedience have value. It is not obedience when you do something because you have no choice. Your obedience would have no value if the power to sin were taken away. Learning to live an obedient life through a relationship with Jesus is a pleasure.

## Gifts From God

Obedience produces morality. One writer said, “One step in obedience is worth ten years of study.” If you want a cure for a moral problem, then find it in obedience. Luke 9:23 states that you must deny yourself. Therefore, your only right is the right to give up your rights. A good way to see if you have the right perspective is to rehearse what you are thinking. This allows you to realize whether you really are what you want to be.

Moral thinking and duty (i.e. Bible reading) is not the same as a relationship with Christ. Before you do something, ask yourself, “Will this produce a likeness to Christ?” Obedience works in all situations. Disobedience causes damage, confusion, and disorder. Obedience to Jesus Christ will make the meanest, vilest men and women become saints.

Are you trying to live a good life so you can be a Christian or because you are a Christian?

### Focus on Self

Self’s desire is to go its own way. This is a challenge when considering obedience. To obey God, you must deny self. Denying self is a lifelong daily process that is only achieved in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Following self may provide you with what you want in the moment, but there are consequences when you choose to disobey God. When God directs you, the best response is to obey Him.

October 6

## Obedience and Truth

*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

**John 8:32**

### Focus on Christ

How would you define truth? Is it a concept? Is it a group of methods? Can all truth be discovered in the world’s greatest library?

While obedience and knowledge can lead you to the Truth, it does not set you free. Only a relationship with Jesus can set you free.

Just because you know the truth does not make you obey the truth. Many people think education answers all of life’s problems. Simple knowledge of a subject does not make you follow the subject’s instructions. Truth is spiritual, not intellectual. You perceive Truth by doing the right thing, not by thinking it out.

Obedience to Truth is obedience to a Person. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Therefore, all the answers are found in Jesus. Jesus also said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). You will know if you really believe what Jesus says if you stay in the Word, pray in faith, and follow all of His commands. To obey the commands of Christ, you must obey the first great commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul.

Listen to the words of Truth, Jesus Christ. He continually said, "I tell you the truth..." Why? Because He is the Truth and can only speak the Truth. If you want to know more about what you should do in life, then get to know the Person of Jesus Christ. He always speaks the truth.

James 1:22-24 states, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was."

**Focus on Self**

Does self want to know the truth about it's own heart? Self is not interested in finding out ways to change. It is interested in everyone around them bending to what it desires. At the core, self is pride. Pride in your heart will make you think you should be accepted just the way you are. The problem is that God has a standard for your life. When you become personally acquainted with Jesus, you will know the Truth and will be set free from your own ways and thinking. You will then acquire a new, vibrant way to look at life.

**October 7**

**Obedience and Joy**

*The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart...*

**Psalm 19:8**

**Focus on Christ**

Where does joy come from? Are you only joyful when things are going well? Do you need to have a light-hearted moment in order to sense inner peace and joy? Only when you follow what God has commanded will you experience the abundant life. A believer will never be joyful in disobedience.

Following God's commands are drudgery when followed out of duty. But when you have a love relationship with God, it brings you great joy to follow His commands. The people you refuse to listen to will never have a deep relationship with you. But if you begin a relationship and listen to the heart of the person, then you get to know and trust them. Joy for the believer begins at salvation and continues through an abiding relationship with Christ.

Confidence, peace, and joy come when you know God will never abandon you. Why would you trust someone you do not know? If you get to know Christ, then He will fill you with joy as you spend time in His Presence. Many people seek joy from the Lord and yet they do not experience it. Why? Because they seek joy without having a relationship with Jesus. Believers rejoice when they trust God's Word and live by the Truth.

But why does the law of Christ bring joy? Because it restores your mind to things that are of good report. Paul said, "...whatever

## Gifts From God

things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8). Set your mind on things above, and your joy will be full.

### Focus on Self

Self is only joyful when things go right. However, true joy for the believer is present no matter what is happening. If you want to know true joy, then love Christ and do what He says. You will never be completely joyful until your heart and mind is lined up with the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Disobey Christ, and you will become discouraged. Obey Christ, and you will experience freedom.

October 8

### Faithfulness

*Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.*

Hebrews 3:1-2

### Focus on Christ

What person in your life holds your affections? Would you do anything for this person? Would you do anything for this person even if it were wrong? Jesus was faithful to His Father, the One Who appointed Him.

When thinking on whom you are affectionate toward, did Jesus even cross your mind? Affections toward anything other than Jesus has the potential to draw you away from being faithful to God. The life of Christ was a life of suffering, but Jesus never wavered toward His faithfulness to His Father. Why? Because God had Christ’s Heart, Mind, and Soul. Does God have your heart, mind, and soul?

A heavenly calling is not one to be taken lightly. There will be times of difficulty. There will be times when it may feel like the enemy is closing in on you, and you cannot move forward. There will be other times when you are ready to give up. In those moments, God will remind you of Who appointed you. As a child of God, you are not living to serve self but to serve Christ. With this in mind, it is important to understand that faithfulness is not complete at the time of salvation. Faithfulness is developed as you seek God. The more consistent you are in being faithful, the deeper your faithfulness becomes. Deep relationships require consistent actions that demonstrate a life of love and devotion. How devoted are you to the Ways of Christ?

Your faithfulness will grow as you learn that God will always be faithful to you. The very fact that God sent His Son for you reveals His faithfulness. When you begin to recognize God’s faithfulness, the idea

of disobedience begins to fade away. If you want to be faithful, then simply model your life after Christ.

**Focus on Self**

Self desires others to do things in service to its own comfort. Faithfulness requires a deep love for others. You will not be faithful to someone you do not love. Christ modeled His faithfulness to you by showing you how much He loved you in two ways. First, He gave His life to save you from your sin. Second, He placed His Spirit within you to continually teach you how to be faithful to His Ways. He saved you and gave you power to live a life of faithfulness. He solved your problem and gave you the power to live in this new Way.

**October 9**

**Encouragement for the Discouraged**

*For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*

**Hebrews 12:3**

**Focus on Christ**

Are you discouraged? What is it that easily discourages you? Is it the actions of people? Or is it the absence of material things that you desire? When you are discouraged, how do you feel physically? Does it make you tired? Does it stress you out?

When you find yourself knee deep in discouragement, take a moment and consider where your mind is focused. Many times there is a sin under the surface that is drawing your attention. What should you do when you realize that sin is causing problems? You should set aside all sin and run the race with patience and endurance. Be sure that you do not run the race for the Lord Jesus Christ with anxiety and weakness. If you try to live the Christian life by your own human abilities, then you will lose the race.

Jesus was able to endure His race (the cross) because of the joy set before Him. What joy? How could Jesus be joyful when He was about to be killed? He was joyful because He was providing life for the people He loved. His Love was so great that He provided a Way of life for you to endure living in this world. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). As Jesus prayed for His disciples, His desire was not to remove them from difficulties but rather to protect their hearts from evil.

The way in which you live a life that is not weary and discouraged is by focusing on living for Christ and others. When your mind is thinking about your love for Christ and others, you cannot focus on your own insecurities. To keep your mind encouraged in the midst of hostility, ask God to help you focus on others needs and not your

## Gifts From God

own. It is amazing how discouragement disturbs your mind when you dwell on your problems. But the moment you see the needs of others your heart begins to move your mind from your own troubles to the provision needed for those in trouble.

When you become weary in dealing with difficulties in life, remember how a perfect Savior endured the persecution of sinners for you. This will strengthen your heart and mind toward the task that is set before you.

### Focus on Self

While self is easily discouraged, Christ can easily encourage. Focus on your life in Christ, and weariness and discouragement will melt away. When you focus on self, you will get overwhelmed in the pit of discouragement. If Christ could endure hostility from sinners, then you can experience His Righteousness over your unrighteousness. Be encouraged and live for Christ.

October 10

### True Light

*That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*

John 1:9

### Focus on Christ

What is the purpose of light? Without light how would you see through darkness? Light protects you from running into the wrong things. If you can see clearly, then you will know what to avoid and what path to walk.

Jesus is the true Light, not John the Baptist. John came to give testimony of the Light. Notice the words “true Light.” Only a true light will keep you safe. Darkness will lead you into dangerous territory. But there are some who walk in darkness who look like light. These false teachers are the opposite of Christ. They do not give light that keeps you safe. To stay clear of these false teachers you must grow in knowing the “true Light.”

Sin separates people from God and results in eternal death. But acceptance of the light (Christ) connects people to God, resulting in eternal life. If you want direction in life, then you have to come under the influence of Light (the Truth). Until you see your need and that your life is in darkness you will not seek light. You will be comfortable with living in the dark. Once a person receives the Light of Christ into his life, he has to continue to walk in His Light in order to understand more spiritual truths. How do you walk in Christ’s Light daily? The only way is to read the Word, turn to God in prayer, and apply what He reveals to your life. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105).

The Light of Christ is available to every person, but not all will respond to the truth. Those who choose not to respond to the light,



will continue to walk in darkness. Because they do not see their need, they will perish in darkness. But there is a way out for those who choose Christ.

Light from Christ will open up truth to one's mind. He will drive away darkness, doubt, and deception. When Jesus is real in your life, it is like turning the light on in a dark place—you see new things in a clear way.

### Focus on Self

If you are doing the wrong thing, then you avoid the light. Self doesn't want to be caught doing something wrong. The easiest way to accomplish that is to avoid the light. To attempt to avoid being wrong is to put yourself in a dangerous position. If you are wrong and don't admit it, then you will still suffer the consequences. Why not depend on the Light (Christ), to cleanse you from sin and light a new path for you?

## October 11

### What Do You Seek?

*The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, "What do you seek?"*

**John 1:37-39**

### Focus on Christ

What are you looking for in life? Would you rather have material possessions or eternal love? What do you seek from Christ?

It is no secret that many people have a desire to have close intimate relationships. But the hard truth is that few people have these types of relationships. Why? Because the way to a pure intimate relationship is a deep walk with Christ. The reason for this is that, without Christ, relationships tend to be focused on what self can gain instead of the joy that comes from being with the one you love. Jesus has many roles in the life of a believer. One of those roles is Friend. "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

Many people approach relationships as though it is a task. Their thought process is "I will do this for you, if you do this for me." This thinking does not lead to intimacy. Jesus knew many who followed Him while He walked on the earth wanted something He could give them. They were interested in what He could do for them. They were not interested in simply being with Him. This is why the response of the two disciples is so beautiful. When Jesus asks, "What do you seek?" Their response is to ask where He is staying. They had a desire to be with Him.

## Gifts From God

It is mind blowing to think that God sent His Son and provided a way for believers to experience an intimate relationship with Him. But the sad truth is that few have a desire to only *be* with Him. It is evident that so many never experience the beauty of a intimate, pure relationship. The only way to achieve this is to seek to *be* with Jesus. He, in turn, will give you a heart that is equipped to handle a love that surpasses anything you could ever dream. God's Love is needed to be close to people. Without His Love, you will never reach full potential in your relationships.

If Jesus asked you, "What do you seek?" How would you respond?

### Focus on Self

Self seeks relationships to fill its own agenda. There is a concept that if you fill my need, then I will fill your need. This is not from God. God's Love is not dependent on needs being met. The Love that comes from an intimate relationship with Christ is compelled to serve others even if they never do anything in return. Loving people in this way will not be accomplished in the flesh. This can only be obtained when you walk in the Spirit. Search your heart. What do you desire from God?

October 12

### Jesus Must Increase

*He must increase, but I must decrease.*

**John 3:30**

### Focus on Christ

Do you believe you are a minister? Did you know that as a believer, you are a minister? Do you believe that there are different requirements for different believers? Every believer is a minister. Every believer represents Christ to the world. How you live for Christ is how the world views Him.

The way to function properly in ministry is to live in humility. Christ must be enlarged, and you must be diminished. If Christ is diminished, then you will be elevated. Ministry doesn't exist for you to elevate yourself. Ministry exists to elevate Christ. John the Baptist was a prophet and the forerunner to Christ. There had not been a prophet in four hundred years before John. In Matthew 11:11, Jesus said John the Baptist was the greatest man who ever lived.

Yet, John said that Christ must increase and he must decrease. John's disciples were jealous that Jesus was getting more attention than John. But John affirmed that the ministry was not about John but about Jesus. John was not jealous of Jesus. Did you know that you cannot make a humble man jealous? The focus of the Gospel of John is written that you might know and believe that Jesus is the Christ and by believing have life in His name.

John gave 5 reasons that Christ must increase (John 3:31-35):

1. Christ is from heaven and must be above all—v. 31.
2. Jesus knows from first-hand experience; no one had to teach Him—v. 32.
3. God is true and cannot lie. If that is so, then you must believe in Christ—v. 33.
4. Jesus Christ is God the Son Who is equal to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit—v. 34.
5. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His Hand—v. 35.

If you do not elevate Jesus in your life, then you believe you are greater than Him. While believers would never say that, they may demonstrate it by how they live.

### Focus on Self

The desire of self is to be first place in all areas of life. Self is not interested in making a name for Christ but in making a name for itself. This never allows you to experience life in Christ. Why does Christ need to increase and self decrease? Never forget the sin that so easily entangles you. As long as you are first place in your life, sin will always be right there to draw you into its grip. When you allow Christ to increase, not only does this glorify God, but it also protects you from the evil one.

## October 13

### Silence Does Not Remove Sin

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

**Psalms 32:1-2**

### Focus on Christ

Do you try to hide your sin? How does it make you feel when you know you are guilty but don't know if anyone else knows?

David experienced a time when he committed sin against God. This experience brought deep depression. As soon as he repented, his joy was restored. Before repenting, he kept silent, trying to hide from God. When sin is deep within and you know you are guilty, the tendency is to be silent toward God because you think this will pass.

David thought no one knew about his sin. Do you think you can hide from God like Adam and Eve thought they could? You cannot hide from God. When you know you have committed sin against God, He will not allow you to be comfortable. Other psalms record that David was not able to sleep because of his guilt. If you are trying to hide your sin, then you will still suffer from its effects.

## Gifts From God

Time will not heal your spirit. Over time, your sin will affect you physically. It is human nature to resist admitting you are wrong. As time goes by, you will become more comfortable with silence toward God. You might say, "My sin is just a small sin."

Though David was silent in his confession, he still experienced sorrow for his sin. Tormented by his guilt, David was driven to sighing and groaning. The only one who knows the power and torment of conviction are those who have endured.

### Four Evils in Two Verses:

1. **Transgression** signifies the passing over a boundary, doing what is prohibited.
2. **Sin** signifies the missing of a mark, not doing what was commanded; but it is often taken to express sinfulness or sin in the nature, producing transgression in the life.
3. **Iniquity** signifies what is turned out of its proper course or situation, anything morally distorted or perverted.
4. **Deceit** signifies fraud.

The three acts mentioned to remove these evils are *forgiving*, *covering*, and *not recording to your account*. God disciplines those He loves. He sees the bigger picture of your sin and what great harm it can bring. He alone can forgive, cover, and erase the sin. When God grants forgiveness, you are blessed indeed.

### Focus on Self

Self does not recognize sin apart from a relationship with God. Self is interested in being right and fighting to the death to prove that it is right. The sad part about this life is that you will not know what you are missing. A life that is forgiven of sin is able to enjoy the blessings imparted by God. Sin separates you from God. You are just a repentant prayer away from being back in fellowship with God.

October 14

### Unwilling to Yield

*But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

**John 5:40**

### Focus on Christ

How difficult is it for others to convince you to change your thinking? This is a difficult thing to do, especially when you are discussing Christianity. Many believe there are multiple ways to get to heaven. But what is the only way to eternal life? What does it take to convince people that Jesus is the Way to eternal life?

Jesus stated that the Old Testament gave evidence that He was the Messiah. Yet, many were not willing to come to Him for eternal life. Even His Life and Miracles should have convinced them, but it did not. If your heart is unwilling, then no act or person will be able to

convince you otherwise. Jesus Himself did not convince those who were unwilling to yield.

People today are not easily convinced. Convincing someone to come to Christ will never take place without the person yielding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Every person has a choice. God does not force Himself upon you. You must choose to accept the gift that He has provided. But you must also be willing to come to Jesus in the way He requires. You must come as a sinner. It is a difficult task to accept the fact that you are a sinner. Why? Because human nature is built upon pride. Pride is a sin that blinds a person into believing that they have no need of a Savior. This is a lie. On the other hand, humility allows a person to admit the fact that they need Jesus. Until you recognize this need you will fight against the gift of life that Jesus offers.

If people continue with this rebellion toward Christ, then they will die without Christ. They will not die because they cannot come to Christ but because they will not! Many accept man-made religion but reject the only One God sent—His Son Jesus. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). God offers salvation to every person. The problem is that many refuse this offer.

### **Focus on Self**

Self is stubborn and unyielding. It always wants its way no matter the cost. Selfishness defeats and destroys relationships. You cannot have a relationship with your spouse, children, or friends and remain unwilling to bend. More importantly, you cannot have a relationship with Christ if you are unwilling to yield. Turn from self toward Christ and experience eternal life that fulfills the deepest needs of your spirit.

**October 15**

### **Are You Together?**

*Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?*

**Amos 3:3**

### **Focus on Christ**

Think of your closest friend. Would you say that you and your friend are constantly disagreeing? Or do you and your friend get along? Do you and your friend think alike? Do you agree with God? Do you think like God? Is it difficult to be with someone who disagrees with you?

If you were going to take a physical walk around the block, then who would you take with you? Wouldn't you want to take someone that you love? As simple as it sounds, you must get it in your mind that walking is not the same as standing. Walking is active, constant-

## Gifts From God

ly moving. When you are walking in agreement with someone, you are actively building a deeper relationship with them. In the Bible, there are many degrees of walking with God.

You can walk before God as Abraham did. That means to walk with the eyes of God watching you. If you walk in front of your friend, then you are in full view of his observing eyes. You can also walk after your friend. If you admire your friend, then you will want to learn his ways and follow his example. To walk after God means to set your life pattern on the Ways of God.

Walking with your friend is seen as two lives in agreement, union, and like-mindedness. When you walk with God, you do so because you are in agreement. When you love and live for Christ, you walk with Him in togetherness. When you walk with a friend you love, you can share all the details and concerns of your life. Jesus cares for you and wants to hear and help you with your smallest concerns.

Do you have this intimate care and agreement with Christ? If you have been born again, then you should. If not, then you cannot walk with Him. You do not desire to be with someone who is disagreeable. If you find yourself in disagreement with Christ, then you must change your mind to line up with His. Christ will not change His Mind to line up with your mind. To be in agreement and to walk with Christ, your mind must be transformed into the Mind of Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self desires to force others to line up with its own thinking. Instead of submitting to the Mind of Christ, self wants to have everyone get on board with its desires. This can be somewhat confusing in regard to healthy relationships. Self may get what it wants, but it will not get lasting, agreeable relationships with others. Are you in a disagreement with someone? If so there are three possible scenarios that you can follow:

1. You can have the other person bend to your desire.
2. You can bend to the other person's desire.
3. Both of you can bend to God's desire.

When both of you bend to God's desire, both desires are the same. This is when you will be walking together.

**October 16**

### The Spirit's Power

*Is the Spirit of the LORD restricted? Are these His doings? Do not My words do good to him who walks uprightly?*

**Micah 2:7**

### Focus on Christ

Do you recognize that being entertained is not the same as an encounter with the Holy Spirit? You can perform a perfect order of wor-

ship and miss out on the power of the Holy Spirit. Do you see the power of the Spirit in your life? Do churches function by the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit? Church was never intended to be a social gathering where people come to show their talents. God's church should not operate on human power but on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Micah's day, the false prophets tried to convince the people that things were okay when they were not. The nation was not developing under this kind of leadership. Later at Pentecost, the people exalted Christ, saw sin, and repented and were converted. The message in the New Testament was empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of the Lord is not restricted. But God will not force Himself upon people who desire to go their own way. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Jesus was knocking at the door of the church. His Spirit empowers the work of the church, but waits for His people to open the door to His Power.

This is not a restriction of the Holy Spirit, but a failure among believers. Do you see the power of the Spirit in worship services or the performance of human abilities? The same power of God in the early church is available today.

Do not attribute to the Holy Spirit the weakness of people. When you only see what man can do in a church, you may confuse that with the work of the Spirit. Then, you miss out on the power of what the Spirit can do. A non-believer should attend church and experience something that is different than the world. When a non-believer only experiences the world at church, the result is a lack of understanding as to the value of the church. Instead, people need to experience God when they attend church.

God's Word does a great work in people who follow His Ways. If His people are not active in His Word daily, then they will miss out on the power of His working.

### **Focus on Self**

Self wants to accomplish things its own way in its own strength. Too often people have learned to be satisfied with what they can personally accomplish. The world is tired of seeing what people can do. What if the world saw what only God could do through His people? Seeing God's activity would gain the attention of a lost world. In every major awakening or revival throughout history, the world paid attention when they saw something only the power of the Spirit of the Lord could accomplish.



# Gifts From God

October 17

## Eternal Wealth

*Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me? Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother...*

Psalm 49:5-6

### Focus on Christ

Why would Christians fear when evil days come? Why should you be afraid when wicked deceivers surround you?

Many people fear when they think they are alone. Yet, during alone times, there is an opportunity for Christ to speak to you. When you are completely alone and focused on Him, you experience His Presence. Why? Because it is then that you realize Christ is the only One Who can help you. Friends may give good advice, but advice cannot console you like Christ.

Jesus Christ is the only One Who can save you from your sin. This act of redemption cost Jesus His Life. There is no amount of money that can buy this gift for you. It only comes through a relationship with the One Who saves—Jesus.

Can't people see that the most intelligent, wealthy person dies just like the poor, misguided person? The wealthy die and leave their wealth behind just as the poor leave their poverty behind. There is no eternal life apart from God, but there is eternal death without God. People think that they can endure forever, but that is a myth. All will perish just as the grass of the field or animals in the forests. The wealthy people live in mansions now, but, when they die, they will be put in the ground just like anyone else. Their bodies will decay just like the poor.

Ask Christ to help you invest in eternal things today. Christ will help you focus on eternity instead of time. Put your trust in Christ today, and He will calm your fears and focus your mind on what is truly important.

### Focus on Self

Self doesn't even give eternity a thought. The desire of self is to seek pleasure. While many invest their financial wealth for retirement, that is still not eternal investment. "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:30). Wouldn't it be better to invest your time spent with God Who will provide for all your needs? Not only will He provide for your current life, but He has already prepared eternity for those who know Him. Why would you ever invest in things that fade away and spend no time investing in the One Who holds eternal life?

**October 18**

**God Alone Delivers In Time Of Trouble**

*I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness...Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.”*

**Psalm 50:11-12, 15**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you think God needs you? What do you own that God cannot do without? Who do you call when you are in trouble? Is there a particular person you tend to call first before you even consult God? You need to learn how to turn to Him first.

God has no need for your car, house, family, money, or talents. He said that He knows every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field already belong to Him. If God were hungry, then He would not tell you. You cannot provide anything for God. God is not dependent on anything you offer Him.

People think they can bargain with God. What do you have that would entice God? God states that it is not He Who needs help from you. In time of trouble, you must call upon Him.

God expects you to do more than go through the motion of worship ceremonies. He expects your total dedication to Him and His Way of life. Obedience and trust show a proper relationship to God. If you need to be delivered from trouble, discouragement, poor decisions, emotional struggles, or difficult circumstances, then turn to God.

When God delivers you, your response should be to give Him praise, honor, and glory. Some people have no intention of honoring God; they just want relief from their troubles. Many state that if God will just help them, then they will serve Him for the rest of their lives. But when their problems are solved, they simply go back to their old lives.

Call upon God, and He will deliver you. God desires your obedience, not your empty promises and worthless possessions. Give Him your best.

**Focus on Self**

Self thinks everyone is waiting on it to know what to do. But God is not dependent upon your knowledge and wisdom. He already knows what to do. The key to God delivering you lies in your willingness to submit to Him. He is not interested in your performance or abilities but in a heart surrendered to Him through obedience.

# Gifts From God

October 19

## The God Of All Comfort

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

### Focus on Christ

Who or what do you turn to for comfort? What settles your spirit when your mind and heart are troubled? If you are not closely connected to God, then you will feel hopeless. But you don't have to live that way.

Praise be to the God of all comfort. Peter exclaimed that God has the power to give you everything that pertains to life (see 2 Peter 1:3). That means that God is able and willing to comfort Christians in all circumstances of life. God is not One Who is only able to comfort in some situations. He is able to comfort in all situations.

What is happening in your heart and mind right now? Is there a lack of peace? Then God can give you a peaceful heart. Is there a lack of joy? Good news! God is the God of joy. Do you need patience and endurance? What about gentleness? Are you having trouble being kind to someone who seemingly does not deserve kindness? God has the answer.

God is the God of all comfort who comforts you in all your troubles. Not some of your troubles but all of them. God not only wants to comfort you but also wants to teach you how to comfort others in times of their distress. Through your distress you can learn the comfort of God. Patience is the key in learning. An anxious, tense, frustrated, worried person cannot comfort others. A patient Christian relaxes those around him. How? By the fruit of the Spirit that resides in him. It is not the ability to physically relax that comforts but rather the abiding Presence of Christ which fills a Christian with a peaceful, joyful, loving spirit.

Remember, God is the God of all comfort and people are not. But, the Christian who "walks in the Spirit" can comfort others with all the resources of the God of comfort.

### Focus on Self

Self seeks comfort in temporary things. Food can bring comfort. Friends can bring comfort. Even watching a movie can bring comfort. But this type of comfort is temporary and will not sustain you over time. God can provide comfort through a friend, through a family member, through His Word, through prayer, but most importantly through a relationship with Christ.

**October 20**

**God's Path Is Safe**

*My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.*

**Psalm 25:15**

**Focus on Self**

How do you watch for future danger? Are you so cautious that it takes forever for you to make a decision? Do you believe that if you think long enough that you will see all the possible failures? If so, then you are greatly mistaken. Why? Because you simply cannot know everything.

If a person was walking in the woods where it was common knowledge that many animal traps had been set, then he would carefully watch where he was going. Why? So he would not fall into a pit or a trap.

Satan has many traps set for you. How do you avoid them? Do you avoid them by consciously and carefully watching for each trap? This passage states that if you keep your eyes always toward the Lord, then you will always be on a path that avoids traps. Christ knows every trap in your path.

If you spend all your time trying to avoid danger, obstacles, and pitfalls, then you will not make much progress. Your salvation is not in your ability to avoid traps but in your total trust in the Lord. If you trust Him enough to keep your focus on Him, then He said He would pluck your feet out of the traps. That means your path will be straighter, safer, and more secure.

You need God to help you each day to focus on Him and follow His path. Ask Christ to graciously show you His Ways and Wisdom for the day. He alone can help you to live honestly and uprightly.

**Focus on Self**

Self desires to do everything on its own. Self does not think about the fact that God sees and knows everything. Pride tells you that you must do it yourself. If you search for traps as you walk, then you will not see them all. It is only a matter of time before you fall. In fact, if you are going the wrong way, then you will not recognize the traps. You will not be able to know what is of God and what is not of God. Focus on Christ and learn from Him. When you do, you will have no problem recognizing Him. Remember God is the ultimate long range planner.

# Gifts From God

October 21

## The Lord Hears The Righteous

*The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.*

**Psalm 34:17-18**

### Focus on Christ

Who is qualified as righteous? According to Scripture, “There is none righteous, no, not one...” (Romans 3:10). There is only One Who is righteous—Jesus. Through faith in Him, His righteousness is imparted to you. Who is qualified as righteous? The one who has an abiding relationship with Jesus.

Those who walk in an abiding relationship with Jesus know that they have a need and dependency that can only be filled by God. “The righteous cry out and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from their troubles.” Does that mean that all the problems of the righteous are taken away? No! It means that the peace of God that passes all understanding allows the righteous to experience peace in the midst of their problems.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Only those who are humble and broken, knowing that God is their only answer, can be close to God. God does not desire a relationship with a person who thinks they have no needs. God desires a relationship with the person who is so broken that he realizes he is bankrupt and without hope apart from God.

This kind of person desires a relationship with God and is willing to serve God no matter what. These people don’t care if problems come. The righteous believe God is powerful enough to give a peace that passes all understanding. A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord will deliver him from all of them.

### Focus on Self

Self does not acknowledge a need for God. Self is so consumed with its own desires that it cannot see its bankruptcy. Until a person is able to recognize their spiritual need, they will have a wrong view of Jesus and will not walk in righteousness. Jesus died in order to save you from your sins. Turn to Christ and learn from Him. In a desperate time? God will hear your prayers and impart peace to your heart.

October 22

## Rich in Mercy

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world... among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of*

*our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

**Ephesians 2:1, 3-5**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you think you deserve in life? Do you believe your life is so complete that God must give you what you want? Do you see yourself as dead in trespasses and sins? It is hard to see the mercy of God when you do not have a proper perspective of who you are apart from Him.

It is amazing how God brought us from “children of wrath” to children made alive together with Christ. Even while we were going our own way, God intervened to make us alive in Christ. Gratitude should be the response to God’s rich mercy. It is easy to take for granted what God has done for you in providing so rich a salvation. While it may be easy to be thankful for salvation when it first happens, years later you may begin to take it for granted. Over time the truth of salvation can become stagnant to the one who does not continually build a relationship with Christ.

His Love made you to be something you could never be on your own. God did not pay the price of the death of His Son so that you would still act as “children of wrath.” Many say they have been redeemed but still attempt to go their own way. Their lives are not known by God’s rich mercy and great love. They do not believe Christ is the Head of the body. If they truly saw Christ as Head of the body, then they would know they could not go their own way and obey Christ at the same time.

Take time to praise God for the salvation He provided through Jesus Christ. Ask God to remind you through the day to reflect on His Life, His Way, and His Truth. While Christ reminded the Ephesian church to remember the height from which they had fallen (see Revelation 2:5), God reminds them (and you) here of the awful depths from which He has raised them.

**Focus on Self**

Self believes it deserves all good things. As long as you live on this earth, you will battle with your old nature. The minute you decide to step away from your first love, you will return to your old nature and look like you did before you received Christ. There is danger in allowing self to lead your life. Self will always choose comfort, pleasure, and self preservation, no matter what it will cost the kingdom of God. In order to live in the new nature, you must submit to the Ways of God and realize that you can never become like Christ apart from an abiding relationship with Him. Christ is your new life. Cling to Him and you will move further and further away from who you were before your salvation.

## Gifts From God

October 23

### Acceptable To God

*...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.*

**Romans 14:17-19**

### Focus on Christ

What kind of Christian do you like to be around? Think for a moment about the Christian who has most influenced your life. What character did they display that attracted you to their life? It was probably the fact that they lived a consistent life for the Lord, or perhaps they never seemed to buckle under a load but stood strong through trials and temptations. It may have been that you were attracted to their constant joy or peace. It may have been that they always had a word to say about what God was doing.

Christians are attracted to persons who testify for Christ. Spirit-filled Christians don't enjoy complaining. You cannot be Spirit-filled and not testify about what Christ has done in your life. The more you testify of Christ, the more positive you become.

Christians are also attracted to persons who testify by serving Christ. If you have a servant heart, then you will see where God is at work and serve Him in that place. Loyalty to Christ is your work. Many Christians try to work for God without knowing Him. God desires us to know Him through obedience.

Christians are also attracted to testimonies about the Person of Christ. If your testimony makes anyone wish to emulate you, then it is a false testimony not a witness to Jesus. As you testify of Christ, others are attracted not to you but to the Spirit of Christ Who lives in you. Why would other Christians be attracted to your life? Would they see the Spirit of Christ living in you so much that they wanted to know more about Christ?

### Focus on Self

Self is not attracted to the Spirit of God, because self loves the darkness. Exposure is scary to self. This is why God gifted you with His Spirit. Only the Spirit of God in you will attract you to spiritual things.

October 24

### Boast Only In God

*In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever.*

**Psalms 44:8**



**Focus on Christ**

Do you find that you make mistakes every day? Do you find that you say things you should not say or think things you should not think? Do you get upset with events and people every day? If so, then how could you think about boasting on that kind of lifestyle?

The correct position for your mind is to boast on God all day long. There is no alternative but to boast on a loving, just, perfect God. He is the only one worthy of praise.

Do you ask these kinds of questions?

1. God, why is this happening to me?
2. God, why do You not come to my rescue like You have in the past?
3. God, can't You see that I am hurting?

Does this sound familiar? If so, then turn your focus back to God. Do not trust in your physical strength, mind, or will to get you through the day. Trust in Christ. As David knew that his sword would not bring him victory, you must learn that your position or power will not bring you victory. Either you must depend on Christ or you must decide to go your own way without Him. You cannot have it both ways. Choose Christ for everything that comes your way. When you do you will see how you can boast in God all day long.

**Focus on Self**

Self chooses to go its own way. It does not understand the need for trials and tribulations. When God's Love enters and begins to place pressure on you, do you accept it with open arms or do you fight against it? When you understand the purpose for the pressure, you will begin to understand how much God loves you. Praise Him for all things that He brings to your life. For it is all good.

**October 25**

**Unshakeable Faith**

*And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."*

**Luke 22:31-32**

**Focus on Christ**

Has your faith ever been tested? Have you ever failed a test of faith? Do you think anyone can pass all the tests?

Satan is always looking for a moment to defeat a true believer. If he can make you fail a test, then he thinks your faith will weaken. Of course, Satan does not have the Wisdom of God, nor does he know what is in the heart and mind of individuals. Christ knows that when failure happens, true believers will return to Him and experience a

## Gifts From God

deeper life with Him than before the failure. This strengthening by Christ gives you a new platform for ministry.

Peter did fail a test of faith, but his faith didn't fail him. It brought him into a deeper relationship with God. No one is above failing a test. If you read further into the story of Peter, then you will find that he experienced deep repentance over denying Jesus. After he returned to Christ through repentance, he preached one of the most effective sermons in the Bible. Why? Because his faith did not fail, and Christ strengthened his faith. This faith carried him through the future trials that he endured. Unshakeable faith is determined by God, not by you. Remember the faith that saved you is the faith of Jesus Christ. His Faith will never fail.

When can you strengthen others? When you have gone through a failure and then returned to Christ in victory. It is then that you have a platform for ministry. If you desire to learn some of the deep things of God, then whom should you call for help? Would you call on a person who knows nothing about God? Would you call on someone who just recently accepted Christ as Savior? Most likely, your tendency would be to call on someone whom you know has walked with God and has done so consistently for years. Why? Because you are looking for the Wisdom of God. God's Wisdom comes through years of learning from His Word and experiencing the tests and trials of life with the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

When Christ prays for you, count it as coming to pass. Nothing Christ prays for will ever fail.

### Focus on Self

Self has no desire to go through struggles. A natural human desire is to avoid difficulties. A believer has no desire to seek out difficulty, either. Both will experience difficulties, but each has different resources to draw upon for help. Though tests and trials will come to you as a believer, you have the prayer life of Christ sitting at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for you. Though you may not know whom to call upon for prayer and help here on earth, you can always count on Christ as a Friend and a Savior. If you fail the test, then make sure you turn toward Christ quickly and return to a strengthened faith.

October 26

### Precious Promises

*...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

2 Peter 1:4

**Focus on Christ**

What do you deserve from God? Riches? Health? Power? Love? Nothing? It is amazing that God has chosen us to love us and provide so great a salvation. Jesus Christ is a precious Promise from God to a needy people. Can you believe that you have been given the ability to participate in God’s Divine Nature? What an incredible gift.

Imagine that you are a partaker of the Divine Nature. You participate in His Divine Nature in order to live a holy life. It is through these great promises that you share this Divine Nature. What promises? All the promises of God. Specifically, Peter is referencing the promises of Christ. Jesus promised to leave His Spirit with you. This is the amazing way in which you participate in Divine Nature. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you can experience the attributes of His Spirit. No longer are you limited by your human frailness and shortcomings. You can experience the Love, Peace, Joy, Gentleness, and other Ways of Christ.

You are not God; you are human. But thanks be to God, you can be holy as God is holy. This is only because of the precious promises of Christ. You obtain the holiness of God by practicing what Christ taught you as you walk in His Spirit. “And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

Think of what Christ’s promises have done. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, your corrupt nature has been defeated and now you can live in holiness, alive to Christ and dead to sin. But if you are not walking in Christ’s Spirit moment by moment, then your tendency is to revert back to your old nature. As long as you abide in the Vine, you have life that allows you to participate in the attributes of Christ. Cut the branch from the Vine and the branch will die. You must have the power of Christ flowing through you consistently if you are to experience holy living. Like a battery being constantly charged, the power comes from an outside source, not from yourself. The battery becomes useful for many things when charged. Christ gives you the power and the energy to grow, develop, and build godly character. It is amazing that God’s Divine Nature is so kindred to the human spirit that He can take up residence in you and transform you to be like Him.

Why are these promises so precious? Because they have already been fulfilled. Peter helped the early church focus on the hope of the eternal fulfillment of promises. He knew they needed encouraging in the midst of trials and persecutions. The promises of Christ coming to provide salvation and the ability to walk in His Ways had already been fulfilled. Isn’t that what encourages you today? Eternity does not wait to begin in some future and far off century. Eternity is being experienced right now as you walk in the Spirit of Christ.

**Focus on Self**

Self tries to be god-like. It is useless to try this. Self can say it is a god, but it cannot make anything happen as God can. You cannot experience being Divine, but you can experience the Divine Nature.

## Gifts From God

As long as self attempts to be in control, the Divine Nature is absent. God wants you to give up your selfish ways and experience the Divine Nature of Christ's Spirit working through you. This requires self to admit that it has no goodness in itself. Self is a sinner and needs a Savior. When a person yields to Christ and places trust in Him, the attributes of holy living become active and real. What an incredible way to live!

October 27

### Spiritual Wisdom

*These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

1 Corinthians 2:13

#### Focus on Christ

How would you know the difference between man's wisdom and God's Wisdom? Who knows the things of God? Can man even know the things of God?

"Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Only the Spirit of God can teach the Wisdom of God. The natural person cannot understand spiritual truth. It is natural to reason out truth and try to understand it from a human perspective. The problem is there is not enough reasoning to understand the Wisdom from above. Only God Himself can teach you His Ways. To believe and think that you have the capacity to understand the things of God without the Spirit of God is to think too highly of yourself.

How have you learned the things that you know? How have you learned about the people who are in your life? You can only know what someone is willing to reveal about himself. This is true for God. You can only know what God is willing to reveal to you. God does not reveal Himself to the proud but to the humble. Why? What would the proud do with the Wisdom of God? Would they exalt Christ or would they exalt self? The key to the kingdom is leading others to Christ, not to yourself. It is crucial to understand that, without the Spirit revealing the Truth of God, you will never understand God.

#### Focus on Self

Self thinks that its wisdom is supreme. It spends time trying to think out all the solutions to life's problems. But without God you will have limited knowledge. How could one think that his reasoning is greater than the knowledge of the God Who created the universe? There is only one answer. Arrogance! It is much simpler in life to live by faith in the One Who created the universe than by the limited knowledge that can be contained in one mind. Spiritual wisdom requires dependance upon the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Choose to live this way, and you will begin to understand the deep things of God.

**October 28**

**Courage for Today**

*Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the LORD.*

**Psalm 31:24**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you have courage or are you discouraged? Where do you think courage comes from? Do you only have courage about the things that you think you control? Are you courageous when you have the majority of people on your side?

In this Psalm, David was reminded of the things that God had done for him. When the Scripture states, “Be of good courage,” it does not mean that you are supposed to think strongly enough that you become internally courageous. This courage does not come from your own qualities, but from thinking on all the things that God has done for you. When you remember the mighty acts of God, it gives you courage. This courage is the result of being strong in the Lord. As you remember what He has done, your faith is strengthened and hope renewed.

When was the last time that you systematically thought through all the mighty acts of God in your life? If you have not recently, then, you will become discouraged.

There is only one hope without disappointment. That is Jesus Christ. God does not make promises that He does not keep. You may believe that things are not working out the way in which He promised. In this case, your mind is set on your own thinking and not the hope found in the only One Who is faithful. When you lose hope, you are drifting away from your first love. During difficult times you must cling to Christ. He is the only Anchor that can hold you.

**Focus on Self**

Self is courageous when it feels safe. Allow a few things to get out of order, and self loses all courage and hope for progress. The great thing about courage from God instead of from yourself, is that there is nothing that He cannot do, no place He cannot go, and no action He will not take to redeem His own. When you know that God has that kind of Love in His Heart for you, you can be of good courage. He will strengthen your heart and give you hope that will motivate you to continue to follow Him.

# Gifts From God

October 29

## Security in God

*But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil.”*

Proverbs 1:33

### Focus on Christ

Whom do you listen to? Does the person or thing that you listen to bring security or unrest to your mind? Where does fear in your thinking come from? Do you think that people who saturate their minds in the Word of God become fearful because of what they are reading? For those who are living by God’s Word, peace comes from the Word. For the person who is not living by God’s Word, fear comes.

Many people are unaware of all that is secure in their lives until it is suddenly removed. Security is not something that you may consciously think about, but you know when it is gone. To be insecure is to live a life full of fear. You cannot receive security by hiring a firm to watch over your life. Only Christ can watch over your life and bring true security. Anything that can be taken away should not be where you invest your life. Even the largest bank in the world can experience failure. The Word of God will never fail.

Why would God provide a Guide for your life if it didn’t matter whether you followed it or not? You will only listen to those whom you deeply respect. If you don’t have full confidence in Christ, His Spirit, and His Word, then you have no place to find security in this world. If you desire to dwell in safety and in peace, then you must listen to the Word of God. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). When you do what He says, your obedience proves that you listen to His Word. When you listen to His Word, you will have security in Him. It is a powerful thing indeed not to live in fear of the evil in this world.

### Focus on Self

Self listens to its own thinking and misses out on the incredible Wisdom of God. Self is so arrogant that it cannot see its own blindness. You never see the Truth with a resistant, prideful, arrogant heart. Spiritual Wisdom comes from God to a heart that is humble. Fear will eat you alive. Faith will settle your spirit. Which way sounds more secure?

**October 30**

**Shelter in Place**

*For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.*

**Psalm 32:6-7**

**Focus on Christ**

Where do you turn in times of trouble? Do you have a safe place to go to when the troubles of life are overwhelming you? Have you ever observed how a little child runs to a mom or dad when they are in danger? It is a natural instinct to run to the one whom you believe can shelter you. Why wouldn't it be natural for a believer to run to God when they are in danger?

If you are godly, then you constantly go to God in prayer. "There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God" (Romans 3:11). When you have a desire to seek God in prayer, it is because He first began to pursue you. When God pursues you and you respond to Him, He will become everything that you need in times of trouble. Prayer is the way in which you communicate with God. It allows your heart to line up with His Heart. When you are able to view life from the Heart of God, you will have peace.

When do you find God? God is found quickly when He is pursuing you. Some people are afraid of God's pursuit. Yet, your greatest fear should be when He is not pursuing you. God only pursues those He loves. Therefore, if it is obvious to you that God is coming after you, then that is the time to stop running. Let Him catch you. Then, respond to His Ways. When you do, troubled times will not overwhelm you.

Do you like to feel safe? Are there times that you just want to run away and hide? When you feel discouraged, full of doubt, or fearful, run to God. He is your hiding place. When you are in trouble, pursue safety. God is your shelter. The best shelter in place is to be with God. He alone can change sadness into joy.

**Focus on Self**

Self finds safety in money, people, places, and things. When a pandemic strikes, those things cannot provide safety. Anything that can be lost is not a strong shelter. To be in a large house without the Presence of God does not feel safe to a believer. In the same way, the believer can live in a small house with the Presence of God and feel safe.



# Gifts From God

October 31

## No Fear in Love

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.*

1 John 4:18

### Focus on Christ

Does fear ever keep you from accomplishing common tasks? Where do you think this fear begins? If you ever experience fear, then you need to determine the source of your fear. If perfect love casts out all fear, then what makes you fearful? Second Timothy 1:7 states, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Every human experiences fear. Not all fear is negative. There is the fear of the Lord that leads you away from evil. There is fear of danger that keeps you safe. These are examples of reasonable fear. However, there is also a fear that can debilitate your life. This fear breeds depression and keeps you where you are. It is unreasonable fear when the threat of danger no longer exists, yet you still are not able to function. When this unreasonable fear begins to cripple you, it is not because of perfect love.

You must ask yourself some important questions when you are experiencing this kind of fear. First, whom are you mad at? Second, whom have you not forgiven? These questions will move you to the heart of your fear. If God is perfect Love, then why would you be experiencing fear when His Love casts out ALL fear? It is because there is something in your heart that has broken fellowship with Him.

If perfect love casts out fear, then hate will create fear. You might say that hate is too strong of a word for you. But when you think about the person with whom you are having difficulty, you probably could not say, "I have a deep love for them." If God is a God of Love and His child has hatred in his heart, then fellowship has been broken with Him. When fellowship is broken, perfect love is missing. This perfect love only comes from a relationship with God.

### Focus on Self

Self becomes extremely fearful when it loses control or feels weakness in a relationship. The way to remedy this is not to try and regain control. The believer must see that if there is a weakness in a relationship toward God or others, then the way to strengthen that relationship is to learn to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. When the Love of God permeates your heart and mind, it flows out of you toward others around you. Love truly will correct many wrongs.

**November 1**

**The Great Physician**

*When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

**Mark 2:17**

**Focus on Christ**

What does a person really need? Why do we think we have no needs? Our deepest need requires us to admit we are sick. Is it hard for you to admit that you are sick? When talking about your spiritual condition, can you always know when you are spiritually sick?

Have you ever known someone who thinks he is well but is sick? You can have a disease on the inside of your body that is wrecking your health. You may not detect it until it is too late. In the same way, there are many things in the world that can lead you to believe that you are well spiritually when, in fact, you are sick. When you have a nice house, a comfortable car, a full bank account, and a healthy family, you will most likely believe you are well. What would happen if all those things were removed? Things of the world tend to cloud your view of your need for God. You need God whether you know that you do or not.

You may see many people living a life that God does not condone. When you watch their lives, you recognize that they need God. What about your life? God looks at the inside of a person. Therefore, if you cannot see the sickness of your heart, then you need Christ to reveal what is wrong. To resist seeing your sickness will destroy you from the inside.

Everyone needs Jesus. It is not about whether or not you are spiritually sick: you are spiritually sick. Every single human has sin and needs a Savior. Those who believe they are righteous will not receive any help from Jesus because they don't see a need for Him. However, this doesn't mean they don't need Him. It is so comforting to know that Jesus is the cure no matter how sick you are spiritually.

**Focus on Self**

Self doesn't have enough information to diagnosis its own sickness. You wouldn't go to a mechanic for a heart transplant. It doesn't make sense to turn to yourself to diagnosis a sin problem. You need the Expert, the Holy Spirit, to convict and convince you of sin. One other thing is required: face up to what is revealed then, the Great Physician will provide the cure.

# Gifts From God

November 2

## Strengthened by Words

*“Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people were strengthened by the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.*

**2 Chronicles 32:7-8**

### Focus on Christ

Are you currently facing any battles? How do you approach the battle? What kind of resources do you use to prepare for challenges? Do you turn to people, finances, past experiences, or your personal reasoning? Most people turn to these sources before they turn to God. For many, God is the last resort. However, Hezekiah recognized that God was the first One to approach.

Hezekiah turned to God along with the prophet Isaiah. They sought God for deliverance. King Hezekiah experienced true revival and depended on God to take him through all his battles. If a king can depend on God to lead a nation, then surely you can trust God to help fight your battles.

There is no battle that is too difficult for God. But it is hard to allow Him to fight for you because it is not human nature to do so. Human nature wants to do it by itself. It requires handing over control. But do you really believe that a battle in your hands is better than a battle in God’s Hands? It is prideful to believe that you can direct your life better than God.

If you are focused on an arm of flesh being your provider, then you will have fear. Flesh is limited in its resources to answer life’s problems. If you do not understand this yet, then you need to learn. You can be strong and courageous if you give up your way and put your faith in God.

Hezekiah relied on God and he spoke words that reflected his heart and confidence in God. When you speak from a spirit that trusts in the Lord, your words will strengthen those around you. Strength is necessary in times of trouble. Make no mistake, strength comes from the Lord.

### Focus on Self

How often does self turn to its own resources for help? The answer is quite often. If your focus is on yourself, then you don’t think about God. The believer should be exalting Christ in such a way that self is not of primary importance. When the focus is on Christ, self is defeated, and you find strength and a whole-hearted surrender to His Ways. Recognize that sources of help outside of God are simply flesh and you will readily and willingly turn to God for your help.

**November 3**

**God is My Strength**

*Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind.*

**Psalm 73:21**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever been troubled in your thinking? Maybe you were thinking something that you knew wasn't correct, but you couldn't seem to get your mind off of the wrong thought. Why is it that you sometimes know what is right, but your feelings lead you to think differently?

The psalmist observes evil people enjoying the pleasures of this world. His mind reasoned that righteous living didn't seem prosperous. His wrong thinking moved him to wrong feelings. Sometimes you feel sorry for yourself because you expect righteous living to bring prosperity to you. But all you are experiencing is difficulty. The psalmist said, "For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3). This thinking grieves the heart.

You cannot separate the mind and the heart. They affect one another. If they are negative, then you will respond with raw negative emotions. If they have the right perspective of Christ, then they will be grateful, loving, and positive with a godly perspective.

The heart is the seat of your thoughts and emotions. When your thinking becomes bitter, your emotions turn negative and destructive. When the mind moves to wrong thinking, it troubles the entire soul.

When you realize that your thinking is wrong, you need to repent and return to God. Then you will understand what this verse means. "My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26).

**Focus on Self**

Most of the time, self is unaware of what is driving the behavior that it chooses. It tends to blame everything except the true culprit—the heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). To think that someone living an ungodly life is living a better life than someone walking with God is in fact a thought that proceeds from a deceitful heart. If you recognize this in your heart, then you do well to repent and turn back to God. This thinking leads your life to a place that you do not want to go. When you come to your senses and get your thinking straight, you will realize that God will hold your hand and carry you through the difficulties. Submit to Him.

# Gifts From God

November 4

## The Goodness of God

*The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him.*

**Lamentations 3:25**

### Focus on Christ

How do you handle times of waiting? When you find yourself in a time of waiting do you have peace or anxiety? What do you do during those times? Waiting does not mean inactivity.

The book of Lamentations comes from the heart of an emotionally exhausted Jeremiah. He was grieving over the condition of Jerusalem. His assignment was difficult, but he knew that the people would receive help if they turned to God.

To a heart that is not in relationship with God, times of waiting can be tormenting. When you remove all the distractions from your life and are left only to look within, you come face to face with the truth of your heart. When there are distractions, you can avoid what is lurking within. But to those who seek God, waiting can be joyful. When you realize that you are called to a relationship with Christ, and your main focus is on Him, whether there are times of activity or times of waiting, you can be content. God uses times of waiting to develop your character into the image of His Son. When you focus on the hope that is in Christ, you can endure afflictions. Because Christ alone can bring ultimate restoration. God is good to all, but especially to those who are seeking His Ways.

We wait for God by spending time with Him in prayer. Conversation is best when two people wait to hear what the other one has on his heart and mind. You wait to hear what he will say before you start talking. After he speaks, your response will show if you listened and considered his words. Love listens and responds.

Few know how to listen in our day. Christ is looking for those who desire to learn from Him. The way He knows you are listening to Him is by the amount of time and effort you put into reading His Word. What are you doing while you are waiting for Him?

### Focus on Self

Self does not listen but just wants to be heard. When your mind is focused on yourself, you will struggle during times of waiting. Many things you seek will leave you empty. When you seek God, He responds and fills you with peace in your soul.

**November 5**

**God's Love**

*And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.*

**1 John 4:16**

**Focus on Christ**

How would you know that God loves you? How do you come to believe that God loves you? What does the love of God look like?

The answer to these questions are found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Love of God became flesh and dwelt among us to take the penalty that we could not pay. Christ paid the price for your sin, so that the power of God would allow you to exchange your sin for His Spirit. Why wouldn't you be able to believe in this Love? The answer is simple. It's because you can't see your sin through the eyes of God. If you were able to see the wickedness in your own heart, then you would begin to understand the Love of God.

Why would you ever want to hold on to your sin that nailed Christ to the cross? When you understand the Love of God and abide in that Love, you will want to run from your sin. Sin and the Love of God cannot coexist in your spirit. You cannot serve two masters. You will either love one and hate the other, or you will be a very confused individual.

How do you develop a love relationship with God? There are three steps to developing a love relationship with Christ. First, you must place your faith in Him. It is difficult to love someone you do not trust. When you love God with all your heart, you will desire to believe Him at His Word and obey what He tells you. Second, you must develop this love for Christ. This is accomplished by spending daily time with Him and building a true relationship. This abiding love only grows as you follow Him in obedience. Third, you must deepen in your love and watch as righteousness develops. The Holy Spirit will automatically provide you with His qualities to live His Way in righteousness. You do not develop righteousness in your own strength, but in an abiding relationship.

**Focus on Self**

Self invests its efforts in ways to receive love, attention, and comfort. Christ's abiding love cost Him His Life. He was willing to lay His life down to help you understand what it really means to love. This kind of Love is a free gift as a result of an abiding relationship with Christ. You might say that you don't really understand what an abiding relationship with Christ means. If you don't know what it means, then take the effort and time to begin to understand what Jesus meant in John 15 about an abiding love.

# Gifts From God

November 6

## Is Competency Unacceptable?

*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*

**Colossians 3:23-24**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever noticed that people in the workplace do not always give their best effort and perform their job the way it was intended? Of course you have!

### Characteristics of Competent People

**Truth #1**—A competent person’s work will reveal incompetent workers. Competency is unacceptable to incompetent people. When you do your work as though you are serving Christ, you will have the highest standard possible. This service naturally reveals any low standards of work (such as just doing the minimum instead of the maximum).

**Truth #2**—A competent person’s leadership will be chosen over incompetent workers. Whether at home, church, or the workplace, you should do what Joseph did when Pharaoh put him in charge of his possessions. Joseph looked for competent people to take the chief positions. “And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock” (Genesis 47:6). Your level of competency should encourage higher strategies for achieving the best possible outcome in the lives of others.

**Truth #3**—A competent person will be commended by other competent people. Competent people do not measure themselves by themselves (see 2 Corinthians 10:12). To measure yourself as competent would be an exercise in personal flattery. Let your work speak for itself. When other competent people see your standard of excellence, they will commend you and be challenged and encouraged to raise their standards.

Let your work, leadership, and relationships reveal the competency of your actions. God asked Cain, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:7). Diligently work, lead, and love, and you will be accepted and commended by competent people.

Remember that your life as a believer is to raise the standard that honors Christ in all you do.

### Focus on Self

Self is not interested in being competent but desires to be seen as competent in order to be exalted. When someone who is competent reveals the incompetency of self, self becomes angry. Wouldn’t it be easier to serve God and keep a high standard for your life and your work? Instead of trying to be seen as competent, why don’t you strive to be competent? Obedience to Christ will result in competent actions.



Your confidence will come not because of your abilities but because of your obedience.

**November 7**

**But With God**

*But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."*

**Mark 10:27**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you think is possible with human beings? Do you think that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to? Most people know they are limited in what they can do but desire to be unlimited. That can only happen with God.

Christ will never lower His standards so that discipleship can be easier. You cannot buy eternal life or daily discipleship. It is impossible.

The human mind focuses on what it can see. If the circumstance looks grim, then the human mind says the outcome will be bad. This is not faith. Faith believes in what is not seen. God sees ALL and knows every crevice of a human heart. Because of this, He knows what needs to take place in order for His Will to be accomplished. Your mind is not able to conceive what God will do or why He will do it because your mind cannot know all things that God knows. Jesus told the disciples that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, but it is not impossible with God.

Wealth tends to make a person think nothing is impossible. What does it look like for God to pursue a heart that loves wealth? It can look ugly because it usually requires God to bring loss and brokenness to a person who depends on wealth. If you looked at a man who was losing his mind and falling apart, then you may think that his situation is impossible. But if you look to God you will know that those who are broken in spirit are more likely to come to the Lord. Brokenness leads you to God. You don't have to face impossible situations when your faith is in God. Because with God all things are possible.

**Focus on Self**

One of self's greatest weaknesses is revealed when it doesn't have a large bank account. Self thinks money can buy happiness. But many wealthy people who have come to know Christ have discovered that happiness is impossible to buy with money. Invest your life in the impossible. It is the only investment that will last for eternity.

# Gifts From God

November 8

## Go In Peace

*And He said to her, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."*

**Luke 8:48**

### Focus on Christ

Do you believe in the healing power of Jesus Christ? Do you believe Jesus will heal every person of every physical difficulty? It is obvious in the Scripture that He chose not to. Jesus knew that every person living on the face of the earth would one day face death. Sometimes death is the healing. When it comes to healing, we can't tell God what has to happen. We have to have faith to believe that what happens is His Will.

It is human tendency to turn to many different treatments in the world to receive help and healing. Usually, Christ is the last resort. When all else has failed, it is important to ask whether or not you believe in Him. The woman whom Jesus talked to in this verse had done just that. She had "...spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any" (Luke 8:43). This woman struggled with this sickness for twelve years. There are people in our world who have been battling with a sickness for many years. Have you been battling with a sickness for many years?

It is not hard to recognize physical sickness. When someone is physically sick, we tend to focus only on the physical. What made Jesus heal this woman? Many believe that this woman was healed because she physically touched Jesus. In fact, most likely this woman believed that if she could just physically touch Him, then the power would go from His Life to hers and heal her physically. She thought she could escape being recognized by touching Him among a large crowd of people. However, what healed her was not her hand touching Jesus, but her faith touching His Heart.

There are many misconceptions regarding the healing power of Christ. Many people believe that asking for healing automatically leads to healing. Consider what healing means? God heals for His Glory alone. Sometimes living with a physical struggle can be the instrument God uses to keep you dependent upon Him.

### Focus on Self

Self is not interested in God's Will but in its own will. When self believes that it should receive something, it is not understanding the healing power of Christ. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Christ's Faith will make you spiritually well and allow you to "Go in Peace."

**November 9**

**The Joy of Salvation**

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*

**Psalm 51:12**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you remember when you first received Christ into your heart? Take a few minutes and think on that. What was it like for you?

It is not impossible to lose the joy that you received at the time you received Christ. When you received Christ you were filled with joy. But the repentance that leads to salvation is not the only time repentance is required. If repentance is a one-time occurrence at salvation, then why would you lose joy? What would be the reason that you would lose joy in Christ? When you choose sin over Christ, fellowship with God is broken. When fellowship with God is broken, a barrier develops between your heart and the source of its joy. A lifestyle of repentance is required in order to continue a relationship with Christ.

Maybe something terrible happened to you in your life. Your response could be that you cannot possibly have joy through this terrible circumstance. This is not biblical. The Bible states, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials..." (James 1:2). Your joy doesn't come from circumstances but it comes from God.

There is a second part to the verse: "And uphold me by Your generous Spirit." In every moment of your life, you have a choice as to how you will respond. According to Scripture, your response will either be in God's Spirit or in your flesh. Many times when a trial hits, your spirit is not in tune with God, and the response is sin. This sin will continue to steal your joy because it will keep you separated from your source of joy—God.

Why would you need God to uphold you by His generous Spirit? Because you cannot do it without Him. You will not have joy in your relationship with Christ without His Spirit carrying you through it. God must carry your heart in His Hand. Any other way will lead you away from God and toward sin. What a gracious God that you serve! Not only does He provide salvation, but He also upholds you through His Spirit. Praise God. The joy of your salvation is continually restored as you see Christ accomplishing through you things you cannot do on your own.

**Focus on Self**

Relying on self is dangerous because self desires sin. Sin is what breaks your connection with God. In order to live in the fullness of your salvation in Christ, self must be denied. Sin is lurking around every corner. The goal of sin is to draw you away from God. Choosing sin leads to depression and anxiety. Before you know it, the joy

## Gifts From God

you once had will disappear. If your joy is gone, then repent and return to God Who is the joy of your salvation. He will uphold you with His generous Spirit.

November 10

### Chosen for Service

*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.*

**John 15:16**

### Focus on Christ

Would you want to choose your mentor, or would you want your mentor to choose you? If you were making the choice, then what qualities would you look for? What would Jesus see in you that would cause Him to choose you? It is amazing that Christ would choose you even when you were dead in trespasses and sin. The only explanation is Love.

Jesus chose you for a mission. He chose and appointed you to bear fruit. This fruit is not physical; physical fruit gets rotten in just a few days. That is how works look to Christ. He knows that what you can produce is not worth more than a few days of comfort. If you can learn to let Him produce fruit through your life, then you will have fruit that will last for eternity.

He did not choose you to accomplish the mission you want. Many think they chose to follow Christ. Such people think they are in control. Being in control and obeying God's Will are opposites. If you do things your way by staying in control, then you will not see the need to obey God's commandments when they don't agree with your thinking.

Jesus then said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you" (John 15:18). You cannot be a friend to the world and a friend to Christ. If you are like Christ, then the world will hate you. Jesus was hated by the world. If you want to be like Christ, then don't expect to live by the world's standards and by its approval.

### Focus on Self

When you think higher of yourself than you ought to, you believe that you are more than capable of leading your own life. The flaw in this thinking is that the desires of self are not the desires of God. While you may choose to lead your own life, you cannot do so and follow Christ. To follow Christ is to lay down your life and live His life. It requires faith to believe that Christ truly is a better long-range planner than you are.

**November 11**

**The Fruit of Righteousness**

*He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*

**Proverbs 11:29-30**

**Focus on Christ**

What is it that you can do that would bring trouble to your own house? What is it that you are currently doing that brings unrest to your family? What are you doing that brings rest to your house?

This verse condemns pursuing the world's idea of success in a home. If you continue to make wrong decisions that bring trouble to your home, then you will no longer be seen as the leader. Only the wise of heart, who have a willingness to serve their family, will bring relief to the home. You lose your reputation if you continue to make trouble in your home. When you lose your reputation, you lose your right to be the decision maker. Christ wants you to submit your will to the Will of God. That means you are to be a servant to God because in His sight your knowledge is foolishness.

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The Words that I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). When you live by the Spirit, you have wisdom and bring much value to the home. This wisdom comes as the fruit of righteousness. When you live the right way consistently, your life becomes a good example and teaches the Ways of God. The right way of life produces a positive fruit that others around you want to experience. “He who wins souls is wise” means that wisdom includes winning others to Christ. The idea is not just winning them to be saved by God but also bringing them to the point where they want to live like Christ.

You must decide which life you want to live. A life that provides life-giving fruit or a life that quenches the work of God's Spirit.

**Focus on Self**

Self is foolish when it comes to the things of God. According to Scripture, “your ways are not God's Ways” (Isaiah 55:8). When you go your own way, you will cause trouble to those who desire to walk with God. What is the point of standing in the way of God's Will for someone else's life? It is foolish to stand in God's Way. Doesn't living a life of righteousness in Christ make more sense? A tree of life sounds much better than inheriting the wind.

# Gifts From God

November 12

## The Spirit of God

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

**Galatians 5:25**

### Focus on Christ

What does it mean for you to live in the Spirit? Do you understand what happened at the time of your salvation? You became a new creation. You are no longer dead in sin, but you are now alive in Christ. If you are a new creation, then you don't look, act, or think the same way in which you did before salvation. You must ask yourself, "What difference has Christ made in my life?"

A born again Christian should have a distinctly different life from the previous life. This life is a life in the Spirit, not in the flesh. Others will notice the difference that Christ makes in your life when you live by the Spirit. This new life in Christ is filled with love, joy, and peace that is beyond human understanding. No longer are you controlled by the negative human emotions that so easily guide the life of an unbeliever. Now, you have faith, not fear; love, not hate; joy, not discouragement; and hope, not sorrow. It is amazing how God's Spirit changes you from an old way of life to a wonderful, abundant, and meaningful life.

This life in Christ is not a suggestion to the believer, it is a command. If you are a believer, then you must walk in this new way. Yielding to the power of the Holy Spirit reveals to God, self, and others that you have been saved by the power of Christ. If you live in the Spirit, then you are commanded to walk in the Spirit.

What would be the point of receiving Christ and continuing to live the way in which you always lived? There will be no evidence to others of the power of God when you choose to live in your flesh. You can talk about God all you want, but your life will not reflect the life of Christ if you do not live in His Spirit.

### Focus on Self

When you decide to live your own way, you are walking in the flesh. This is the way that people who do not believe in God live. Why did Jesus die for the salvation of sin? Was it so that Christians would continue to live in sin? When you live in your flesh, with the Spirit of God in you, you are quenching the Spirit. This is not looked upon lightly by God. Enter into the life God has for you, submit to Him, and walk in the Spirit.

**November 13**

**Follow Like Jesus**

*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

**John 20:21**

**Focus on Christ**

How did the Father send Jesus? He sent Him with power to accomplish the mission set before Him including rejection and abuse. Are you willing to receive the negative as well as the positive side of God's assignment?

If you have accepted Christ into your life, then you have a commission to go. All believers are called to be sent out by Christ, not just those in "full-time ministry." You don't have to be a pastor to be called out and sent on an assignment by God. The Great Commission is for all believers to go; you need permission to stay.

There is no place in Scripture that tells you to stay where you are. You cannot stay in the same mindset or same level of spiritual development and proceed forward with Christ. If you choose to stay when Christ tells you to go, then your relationship with Him will lose spiritual ground.

"Peace to you" is for all believers. Since all are included, all are to be sent as His ambassadors. When Christ sends you, He also equips you and goes with you. Christ is with you wherever you go. You must decide if you will follow Him. If you don't, then you are living for self and not for Christ. You cannot disobey God's commission and still walk with Him. You also cannot expect to have peace if you refuse to follow Him.

Jesus never did anything without the Father's guidance. In the same way in which God sent Jesus, He is sending you. In order to follow God, Jesus had a deep, intimate relationship with His Father. He did nothing without consulting Him. "Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner'" (John 5:19).

**Focus on Self**

Self wants to make its own assignments. It thinks that it would have peace if everyone else would do what it wants. But Jesus said peace would come to you when you do the Will of the Father. People are confused in thinking that their way is the most comfortable way. When Christ lives in you, the most comfortable way to live is by walking under the leadership of His Holy Spirit. You will never have lasting peace until you give up your rights and follow Him.



# Gifts From God

November 14

## Power, Love, and a Sound Mind

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

2 Timothy 1:7

### Focus on Christ

Can you imagine having a shy or timid faith? Little would be accomplished. If God doesn't give you a timid faith, then who does? Is it a lack of confidence? Why would you have fear if you believe in Christ? God does not give you a spirit of fear nor timidity when it applies to His work.

Christ gives believers a spirit of power because that is what is required to do the work of ministry. You will face all kinds of danger as a believer. Paul knew that Timothy would face enemies of the faith, as well as trials and tests of every kind. Possibly the greatest battle would be to face his own thinking.

The Christian life cannot work without the empowerment of God's Spirit. When you are empowered by God, love will be maximized in your heart. Perfect love casts out fear (see 1 John 4:18). When God's Love is residing in your heart, there is nothing that you would not do for someone you love. God's Love covers a multitude of sin. When you have the Love of God, you love regardless of how the other person acts or reacts to you. This is a power that you cannot generate yourself. God gives you power and love to accomplish His Will. Do you believe that David had God's Power and Love when he faced Goliath? Yes, he did. He faced the giant without fear. Do you think he had power and love when he committed murder? No, he did not. That was driven by fear. Fear is a by-product of sin. There is no power or love in sin.

A sound mind means thinking in the right perspective with the right focus. This mind is not easily troubled. Why? Because the Power of God's Spirit coupled with His deep Love keeps your mind focused on Christ. When this happens, you will not be living in fear but will be ready to function as a strong soldier of Christ.

### Focus on Self

Self-confidence produces fear. As you live according to the world, self-confidence can benefit you. But when you live for the kingdom of God, self will flounder and be completely ineffective. There is nothing in self that can produce fruit for God's kingdom. If you are faced with a God-sized assignment and have crippling fear, then you are relying on self and not on God.

**November 15**

**Bind and Loose**

*Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

**Matthew 18:18**

**Focus on Christ**

What does it mean to bind things on earth? What about to loose things on earth? Do all believers have this authority? Is this a tactic we are to use in our prayer life?

In order to learn what Christ meant when He said bind and loose, you first need to know the standards of heaven. Without knowing God's standard, you will not be able to know what is prohibited and what is permitted according to God. The words *bind* and *loose* as described in Scripture means to prohibit and to permit. In Jesus' day, these words were terms used often by the Jewish religious leaders.

Jesus gave His disciples the power to have the design of heaven be present on earth. Whatever they prohibit or allow in the church on earth was according to God's design in heaven. This was accomplished by only prohibiting and allowing what is in line with the teachings of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Often this passage is misused in prayer. Some pray for God to bind people here on earth. This is incorrect. Jesus said "Whatever," not *whomever*. If you could bind a person, then it would overpower man's free will. Even Christ will not overpower a person's will.

How does this apply to every believer? You should only live by the truth of the Word of God. If Christ permits it, then obey it. If He prohibits it, then run from it. If discipline is ever needed in the church, then it must follow the standards of heaven and be practiced on earth (see Matthew 16:19).

**Focus on Self**

The standard that is needed to follow this passage is not heeded by self. Self is not interested in the protection of the church but in protecting itself. The standards of heaven are designed to guide, direct, and protect God's people on earth. When they are followed, the church looks like Christ. Self is not interested in looking like Christ, but in being exalted. Usually when someone desires to protect himself, he will allow anything in order to be liked by people. This is not what the Scripture means when it says loose and bind. The Scripture is talking about the church, not an individual.

# Gifts From God

November 16

## The Words of My Mouth

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.*

**Psalm 19:14**

### Focus on Christ

Are there any words you have spoken this week that would not be acceptable to Christ? Would it shock the people around you if wrong speech came from your mouth, or would it be expected?

David reflected back on the positive experience of coming to know God causing him to be thankful for the forgiveness of his sin and providing him a heart that desired to serve God. David wanted not only his words but also his heart to be right. He knew that if he committed his whole life to God, then the strength of God would protect him from living in sin.

The mouth represents the outward part of a person, and the heart represents the inward thoughts and attitudes. Jesus said that what is on the inside comes out of the mouth. If your inner heart and thoughts are right, then your speech will be right. You should pray like this everyday: "Lord, please help me to only speak words that are acceptable to You and encouraging or enlightening to everyone around me."

As you pray, reflect on your heart. Ask God to show you any wrong way in your heart. Jesus said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). If the heart is pure, then you will have proper speech. Only when your mouth and heart are acceptable to God will the strength of Christ be recognized in your life.

### Focus on Self

Self tends to blame improper speech on difficult circumstances. If things would be better, then self would be kinder. But that is not true. When the heart is in right relationship with Christ, the external actions will be right. If your speech is negative, then your heart is not right. Focus on your internal relationship with Christ, and you will experience the strength of your Savior.

November 17

## Sin is Obvious

*Now the works of the flesh are evident...*

**Galatians 5:19**

### Focus on Christ

Can you tell when someone is angry or distraught? Do you think other people know when you are upset? It is not hard to know when people close to you are upset.

When Paul said the works of the flesh are evident, he means that they are obvious. It should be obvious to you when your closest friends or family members act in a sinful way. Even non-believers can recognize works of the flesh. Why would Paul say that sin is obvious and then give a major list of obvious sins? He wants you to see how simple it is to see a sin problem.

Most people want to make discerning sin in their lives such a complex process. This list in Galatians 5:19-20 reveals that these sins are so common that they are easy to observe. The only reason most people wouldn't see these sins is that they are trying to receive acceptance for their wrong doing.

Why is it easy to see sin in others but difficult to observe it in yourself? You give more grace to yourself than others. The psalmist said that we flatter ourselves too much to detect or hate our own sin (see Psalm 36:2).

If the works of the flesh are evident or obvious, then believers should quickly acknowledge their sin problem, turn in repentance to God, and begin doing works of righteousness. To say that it is difficult to diagnosis a sin problem is a direct violation of this verse. Repentance is simple, not easy.

### Focus on Self

Self does not want to know its problem but desires to flatter and inflate its own ego. The danger in this is that it puts you in double jeopardy. You are wrong but convinced that you are right. There is no resolution to this. To be redeemed by Christ is to recognize, confess, and repent of the sin that He died for.

**November 18**

### Impart Grace

*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.*

**Ephesians 4:29**

### Focus on Christ

What do you think of when you hear the word *corrupt*? Do you think of crime, dishonesty, dirty politics, wickedness, or misguided principles? Would you think about the speech that comes from the mouth of a believer? What happens to your witness for Christ when your mouth speaks a corrupt word?

The word *corrupt* in the Bible means decayed or rotten. It can be in reference to decaying fruits and vegetables, dead animals, or even to a tree bearing bad fruit. This corruption that Paul taught about represents evil. That is why he made such a strong statement: "Do not let corrupt communication come out of your mouth."

## Gifts From God

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” (Proverbs 18:21). Jesus said that the words that He spoke were of Spirit and Life. The words that come from the Spirit of God bring life to the hearer. But the words that come from sinful flesh bring death. This death could mean a death of a relationship. It could put an innocent person in jeopardy or even cause a person to unjustly lose his job.

It seems that Christians take too lightly the words that they speak. The truth is that what comes out of your mouth proceeds from your heart. When you speak corrupt words, you are revealing your heart to everyone around you and are potentially becoming a stumbling block for those who may need Christ.

Christ desires words that are encouraging, protecting, and edifying to the hearer. You need the right language to proceed from your mouth so that it will impart grace to the hearer. This communication shows the Love of Christ and identifies you as a believer in Him. Take great care in what you say and even more care in making sure a pure heart is the source of your speech.

### Focus on Self

A heart that is focused on its own desires instead of Christ’s will not pay attention to the words that it speaks. The speech of someone not surrendered to Christ will elevate, manipulate, or control a person in order to receive personal gain. Self is not interested in edifying others. If you are truly walking with Christ, then you will not have to worry about corrupt communication. Just represent Christ well. Give Him your heart, and His Life will proceed from your mouth.

November 19

### Inner Conflict

*For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.*

**Romans 7:5**

### Focus on Christ

What is the purpose of God’s law? What does it mean to be in the flesh? To be in the flesh means to be without Christ. The purpose of God’s law is to help a person in the flesh to recognize his condition.

The human condition is universal. Every single human has the condition of sin. Because of this, Christ died for all. The trouble lies in the fact that even though everyone has sin, not everyone can see sin. How does God show you that you have a sinful heart?

The law of God is in effect to reveal human nature. Conviction of sin troubles the mind and heart and leads one toward a right relationship with Christ. This passage focuses on a carnal-minded person who has never known Christ.

When there is corruption in the mind, the truth of God brings conflict within a person. These sinful passions in our spirit are stirred up when the Holiness of God is used to measure the heart. At this point, the natural person has to make a decision whether to keep living by the flesh or to die to the flesh. If death is the choice, then life in Christ is the result.

Have you ever observed a person who is battling with God's law? This person is disturbed. Everything that he believed to be true is being challenged. This leaves him confused without explanation. God is not the author of confusion but will allow you to be confused in order to draw you to Him. As long as your thinking works for you, you do not need God. When you cannot even think straight, you begin to depend on the only One Who can help. God's law has the ability to confound a person's thinking in such a way that leaves them with a choice. They can either choose God and live in Christ or choose flesh and continue bearing fruit to death.

### Focus on Self

Self loves its sinful passions. It will always choose selfish ways over God's law. The Holy Spirit brings conviction to wrong ways by giving evidence of what is best. For the sinful person, this brings an inner conflict that cannot be resolved apart from submission to God. Submit and be fulfilled or resist and remain confused.

**November 20**

### Futility of the Mind

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...*

**Ephesians 4:17-18**

### Focus on Christ

How can you say that Christ is working in you if you look exactly like the people of the world? Can a person be walking with Christ and have blindness of heart? What would cause one's mind to have his understanding darkened? What could cause a darkened mind and a blinded heart to be illuminated?

Futility of the mind causes blindness of the heart. When your thinking is morally wrong, your heart will be weakened to the point it cannot see clearly. Many times you do not know when you are thinking wrong. People pride themselves on being right. This battle between who is right and who is wrong will kill any relationship—even your relationship with God. The difference is that if you will not listen to God, then you are always the one who is wrong because God is never wrong.

## Gifts From God

Paul wanted Christians to live different than the unconverted Gentiles. Their thinking was futile and unproductive because of their unwillingness to see the truth. Their blindness was the result of a hardness of heart that refused to bend to the Ways of God.

If you resist the Will of God too long, then He will allow you to live with futile thinking. How do you resolve this? Give in to God's Ways, and He will enlighten your mind. Christ is willing and able to teach you the truth if you will only submit to Him. Stop fighting to be right and begin seeking righteousness.

### Focus on Self

Self cannot see clearly. When your mind is focused only on yourself, you will walk as the Gentiles walk. The way to live a life in Christ is to deny self and live for Him. Without this self-denial, you will be blinded from the truth that is only found in obeying Christ. Obedience is the way to a life of peace and clarity of mind. Disobedience leads to futility of mind. If self always thinks it is right, then it will eventually come to the place where it can never discern what is right or wrong. Give up. Trust and obey!

November 21

### Be Holy

*...but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."*

1 Peter 1:15-16

### Focus on Christ

How do you become holy? Do you believe that because you are a believer you are automatically holy? How would you know what is holy or not?

Since God is Holy, those who believe and trust in Him should also be Holy. In church you may have heard the statement, "Come as you are." While you do need to come as you are, God does not want you to stay as you are. When a person is struggling with a sin and comes to God, His Purpose for his life is not to keep him there. His Purpose is to develop him in holiness, as He is holy. Holiness then becomes that person's protection.

God provided His Spirit to His people in order for them to learn about and develop in the image of His Son—Jesus. In Scripture, this is called the sanctification process. The beauty is that God will develop you into a new creation. The battle you face is being unable to produce holiness in your life. You must follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit which requires acknowledging what is not holy in your life and having a willingness to allow God to change you.

People model their lives after people they admire the most. If you have a low standard for life, then you probably model your life after someone with low standards. High standards are revealed in right conduct. You do not do wrong things because your heart is holy. God's



standard is not only high but also humanly impossible to reach. This is the reason God sent His Son.

Being holy in your conduct is not you trying to develop holiness but is connecting to the source of holiness. To follow Jesus is to follow after a holy heart. This requires surrender and willingness to yield to the Ways of God. How loving is God? He is so loving that He knew you would not be able to reach His standard and, thus, made a way for this to be possible. Do not ever think that God's goal is to keep you where you are. To pursue holiness is not difficult. If God is your Model for life, then you simply have to learn to be like Him by obeying His Word.

### Focus on Self

Self is not interested in right conduct. It is interested in pleasure. The only reason self pursues doing the right things consistently is that it is trying to impress on-lookers. God reads the heart and mind and knows the motives behind your conduct. He is looking for right conduct that flows out of a right relationship with His Son. Doing what Jesus says is the simplest and truest form of holy living.

## November 22

### Leaving a Legacy

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

#### 2 Timothy 2:2

### Focus on Christ

Do you possess knowledge that you believe is worth transferring to others? What would you be willing to do to invest in others? Would you put your time, efforts, and even finances into giving others your knowledge?

Christ expects you to make multiplying disciples. The Great Commission is to make disciples and teach them all the Ways of Christ. To invest in others requires a faithful follower of Christ. If you are to share these great truths of Christ with others, then you must practice these truths consistently. It is less likely for a student to carry on the teachings of Christ if his teacher is not living in the Ways of Christ.

Not only must you have a faithful teacher, but you must also have a faithful learner. Why would anyone try to pass on a legacy of life in Christ to someone who would not be faithful to keep sharing it with others? Great truths should not be trusted to a small character. When a faithful follower is found, it is easy to entrust great truths and assignments to that person. In fact, it is an honor, privilege, and joy to watch someone learn and then teach others.

The danger in not committing God's truth to faithful people is that a generation will be ignorant to the Ways of God. This is seen often in the Old Testament. When faithful people do not impart the

## Gifts From God

wisdom that God has taught them, that wisdom falls away. Much is at stake if believers are not faithful to teach others what God has taught them. Take seriously what you have learned and, with determination, seek out those who want to learn.

### Focus on Self

Self wants to leave a legacy for self. What good does that do anyone? Once you die people will forget much of what you have accomplished. Only eternal investments of spiritual significance will last and be remembered. People remember love but will not remember accomplishments. Be diligent in what you choose to commit to faithful people.

November 23

### A Soldier for Christ

*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*

2 Timothy 2:3-4

### Focus on Christ

Are you all in? Would you do anything to serve Christ in a war against evil? Are you willing to endure hardships for this war?

What does a good soldier of Christ look like? A soldier is focused on the task, always prepared, and unwilling to be drawn away from what must be done. The word used is *entangled* or not getting involved in civilian affairs. If a soldier is worried about things of the world instead of his assignment, then he will be ineffective.

You must keep your attention on the truth of Christ or you will give in to the interests of this world. It is easy to get pulled into materialism, success, advancements, and recognitions offered by the world. In fact, many people use the affairs of this life to keep them away from seeing the truth in their lives. When someone justifies the way he is by blaming circumstances, he is using the affairs of this life to stop him from seeing truth.

God is interested in the condition of the heart. It is not hard to be distracted from serving the Lord. The world offers many distractions that are pleasing to the human spirit. Sometimes these distractions can be so subtle that you do not even recognize it until you are deceived. To be a soldier of Christ is to guard your heart and mind by immersing yourself in God's Word.

When a soldier is in the middle of a battle, he is not interested in the cost of the electric bill. His focus is on the task at hand. Stay involved in the battle with Christ. Seek first the kingdom. This focus keeps you away from being entangled in the affairs of this life.

**Focus on Self**

Self is completely entangled in the affairs of this life. It is interested in everything that the world tends to offer. It moves from fad to fad and to the latest inventions of technology. In order to be an effective spiritual soldier, you must be focused on eternal things, instead of temporary, everyday affairs.

**November 24**

**Spirit of the Lord**

*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

**2 Corinthians 3:17**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you get nervous when you know you need to share Jesus with someone? Maybe it is because you don't think you have enough knowledge on the subject. Maybe it is because you think the person that you are sharing with might know more than you do. You may have a lack of courage when you are trying to share truth in your own strength, but the Spirit brings power and life.

Paul shared with the people that we have boldness of speech when we are led by the Spirit. He did not say that we need boldness of speech but that we have boldness of speech. "Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech..." (2 Corinthians 3:12). When you are led by your knowledge alone, you will question yourself and be afraid that you might make a mistake. There is no boldness in fear, and there is no fear in the Spirit of God.

When you are led by the Spirit of Christ, you will have a clear view of truth that results in a freedom and a courage to speak. Knowledge of a subject is not the same as having your eyes open to see the truth through the power of Christ's Spirit.

It is important to grasp an understanding regarding the meaning of freedom. Many think freedom means to do whatever you desire, but you must distinguish human desire from God's desire. When you walk in the Spirit, you can do whatever you want because you want what God wants.

The key to liberty is the Presence of the Spirit. There is no liberty to speak courageously when you are walking in your own flesh.

**Focus on Self**

Many misinterpret the meaning of liberty in Christ. When self is in charge, liberty means freedom *to* sin. The liberty that comes from the Spirit of God provides freedom *from* sin. This is different from doing whatever you desire in the flesh and still living in the Will of God. If living in sin was a freedom that God wanted you to have, then why did He send His Son to die for your sin? When you receive Christ as your Lord and Savior, the response in your heart should be to share Him with everyone. God is so gracious that He imparts His

## Gifts From God

Spirit on those who are willing to be advocates for the cause of Christ. When you follow the Spirit of God, you will have a clear view of truth and a freedom to speak truth without any restriction, fear, or hesitancy.

November 25

### From Darkness To Light

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

**2 Corinthians 4:6**

#### Focus on Christ

Did you know that without God's light you would not be able to see your sin? Often sin is left out of your thinking because it seems so negative. But do you realize that the revelation of sin is the work of God? You think you know what the work of God looks like. Usually your thinking does not include looking at your sin. When God begins to move in your heart, His Light will reveal the sin that separates you from seeing clearly.

The purpose of God's Light is to move your heart from sin to holiness. Light is symbolic of purity in the Bible. Darkness is symbolic of sin. These two do not mix. When the Light of Christ shines in your heart, it drives out darkness. The Light of God grabs your heart and makes things that were acceptable to you, unacceptable. When you move toward God (light), you will move away from sin (darkness).

How would you know that sin is your problem? Many fight against the idea that sin is the problem. Yet, the good news is that if sin is the problem, then the Light of God's Word will reveal it and lead you into freedom. Some say they have no sin, but the Scripture says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). If you have a real relationship with Christ, then His Light will reveal darkness to lead you into a deeper walk with Him. The purpose is redemption not condemnation.

What was the reason for Christ to reveal darkness in the Apostle Paul's life? Paul was on mission to preach and teach the truth. You cannot be a good representative of Christ with darkness in your heart and mind. Light enables you to see things as Christ sees them. If you do not understand Christ or His Ways, then darkness hinders your spiritual sight. God's light does not make you smarter, just more open to truth.

#### Focus on Self

Pride that comes from self blinds your spiritual sight. Sin keeps you separated from the Light of God. Self does not like to be told what is wrong but desires only to feel good. Feeling good has nothing to do with light. Sin makes you feel terrible; light brings you to peace. You must decide which you will choose: darkness or light. You cannot have both.

**November 26**

**Inner Treasure**

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.*

**2 Corinthians 4:7**

**Focus on Christ**

What makes a person strong? Is it their background? Is it that they have been taught by others to stay strong in the face of adversity? What is the source of inner strength?

Would you store a pound of gold in a cardboard box? If you did, then you certainly wouldn't think it was secure. While the box is of little value, the treasure within is priceless. Why would God put His Son Jesus as a treasure in a frail human being? It is certainly not because a human heart is a secure place for His Spirit. He does it to show the excellence of His Power. Paul mentioned to the Corinthians that God did this not only to show the power of God but also to show that the power was not of us. Many are not satisfied unless they can be seen as powerful. However, those who love God with all their hearts, souls, and minds, love it when Christ is seen as the power of their lives.

It is one thing to have power but another thing to have the excellence of power. The excellence of power in the Christian's life is Christ Himself. He is the Light of the Gospel that shines on all who observe a weak human vessel devoted to life in Christ. God so loved you that He put an eternal Spirit in you that will never decay, die, or weaken. You must never forget that the power is of God and not of you. This keeps you dependent on Him for the rest of your life.

Christ often uses the weakest and most feeble people to accomplish the greatest things in the kingdom of God. It is not strength but the faith inside that makes a person strong. Ministry is always stronger when people note, "How could such awesome things come through that weak person?" The answer is Christ and Him alone.

**Focus on Self**

The mind focused on self blocks the excellence of the power within an earthen vessel. When you live your life for you, people only see you. This is a major battle in the church. Many claim to believe in Christ but do not live for Him. When that happens the world only sees people doing religious works. When you live for Christ and allow the excellence of the power of God to shine through you, people see Christ which changes lives. Only God can change a life. Set your mind on Him and watch what the power within you can accomplish.

# Gifts From God

November 27

## Difficult but Not Defeated

*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed...*

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever felt like you would never get out of a difficult situation? Have you ever felt like your circumstances were hopeless? Usually these feelings are present because you are focusing on what you can do to change the circumstance. When you focus on your ability, you will be fearful and in despair. But when you allow God to work in your situation, you will experience that nothing is impossible with Him.

It may be that God brought you to an impossible situation so that you would turn to Him. If He brought you to it, then you will in fact feel hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down because there is nothing that you can do but trust in Him. Your ability will not serve you in these times. You must turn to Him. When you live for Christ, these times will happen. It is crucial that you cling to Christ. When life distresses with an impossible situation, remember that it is not impossible with God.

What does it mean to be hard-pressed? To be hard-pressed means to be crowded or troubled. Paul had trials press on him as a crowd may press on you. "For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears" (2 Corinthians 7:5). If you are troubled on every side, then you are troubled in every possible way. Though you may be troubled, you do not have to be distressed. To be distressed is to feel tightly closed in, or "hemmed in," a situation so that you cannot get relief.

What does it mean to be perplexed? Perplexed means to have no way out, to be in doubt, or to be at a loss mentally of what to do next. Human nature relies on self. In hard times, like these self is not sufficient. You must rely on something outside of yourself. You must rely on God. In fact, God can use these times to bring you to humility. Despair comes when you are at a complete loss. "But not in despair" means that you are not completely at loss. What do you rely on in times of trouble?

As a follower of Christ there will be persecution. While you may be persecuted, you will never be forsaken. God will never desert you even when it seems hopeless. This is the value of His treasure within you.

"Struck down" has the idea of being thrown down as in a wrestling match. With God you will not be destroyed. Remember that the Spirit of God Who lives within you cannot be crushed or broken down. Paul

writes this because you will feel these things in this world. However, what God put inside of you is out of this world. This is what will carry you through trying times. God alone is able to hold you and carry you through the troubles of life. Lean on Him at all times.

**Focus on Self**

Self will be in despair and full of doubt during these times of life. This is because self is not able to provide the power necessary to sustain or have real hope. Do you trust in yourself? If you do, then you will be crushed and move into despair when trials come. Rely on Christ, and He will enable you to live a victorious life no matter the circumstances.

**November 28**

**Avoid Angry People**

*Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go.*

**Proverbs 22:24**

**Focus on Christ**

Are any of your friends angry? Do any of your family members often act out of anger? Most people deny anger, but anger is obvious to those around it.

Many in the church focus on behavioral sins so much that they miss the danger in the most common sins. Jesus said, "...whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:22). Anger in the heart is like cancer to your soul and all souls around you. It seems fair to say that more people will be drawn away from God by someone who is angry and claiming to be a Christian than by someone who commits a behavioral sin. As a Christian, you must witness to others regarding your faith in Christ, but this does not mean that everyone will be a true friend. You should not spend such time with angry people that they begin to influence you. If you cannot influence them for Christ's sake, then avoid spending your time with them.

What are the qualities of a true friend? Trust is extremely important in a friendship. A true friend loves at all times. Servanthood is the character of a genuine friend. This person is not easily offended or given to arguing but is gentle and teachable.

Time with an angry person will rub off on you if you are not walking in the Spirit. The best way to avoid this is by walking with Christ and refusing to build a close relationship with an angry spirit. In fact, trying to be close to an angry person will either make him mad or cause you to be like him.

**Focus on Self**

Self doesn't necessarily want to be angry. Not everyone is a really furious person. However, if you challenge self's beliefs or values,



## Gifts From God

then you will reveal anger. Self without Christ is a person without true love. Self doesn't have much choice of how it will respond when challenged. It responds naturally in anger. While some repress their anger, others express it. Born-again believers have a new resource—the Love of Christ. This Love melts away the angry spirit and reveals how to love in the face of challenges. Love is a better way to live.

November 29

### Strength in Adversity

*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.*

**Proverbs 24:10**

#### Focus on Christ

Would you consider yourself a strong person? How do you hold up to difficult circumstances? Does your faith remain strong during trials? Are you successful as long as life is positive but fail when life becomes negative?

It seems that many who are happy in the good times sink the most when trials come. If you encounter adversity and your shoulders drop, your spirit becomes discouraged, your mind becomes negative, and your heart seems hopeless, then it is obvious that you are operating out of human strength. It is amazing how joyful a person can seem to be day after day, yet that same person fades into despair when one problem arises. When you observe this person you would not think he has a care in the world. Then something challenges his self-worth, finances, position, or even faith and he seems to faint away. Jesus spoke about this in the parable of the sower. He said, "But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles" (Matthew 13:20).

Proverbs 24:5 states, "...a wise man is strong." If adversity comes and crushes you to the point of despair, then your life is not filled with wisdom. Most likely you have been operating on simple knowledge. Wisdom comes from a relationship with Christ empowered by His Spirit. If your life is characterized by absorbing the Word of God into your mind on a consistent basis, then your strength will be increased. Human will-power and physical strength cannot overcome the complications of life, but Christ can.

#### Focus on Self

It is important to understand that to be strong in Christ, you must be weak in self. Self wants to be strong on its own. This will never allow the strength of God to work in your life. It is not wise to think that you are strong without Christ. When you step into spiritual battles without the wisdom and strength that only God provides, you will be destroyed. Many Christians desire big assignments. But big assignments require strong character. When you think too highly of yourself

and believe that you are entitled to a specific assignment from God, God will probably crush your dreams. His Purpose is to get you on to the right assignment. He will provide wisdom when you admit that you are weak and He is strong.

## November 30

### Born Again

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

**John 3:3**

#### Focus on Christ

What kind of person needs to be born again? Do some people need it while others don't? The fact is that every nation, tribe, male, female, adult, or child needs to be born again to enter the kingdom of God.

When Jesus said to Nicodemus that he must be born again He emphasized it with, "Most assuredly." Those words convey the idea that you must give your undivided attention to what is about to be expressed. Do not miss the importance of what Christ is about to say. More than anything, Christ wants you to know that eternal life begins with a born again experience.

You are first born physically into a new world. When you are born, you are introduced to life that brings light. This light only allows you to see the physical world. As you grow, you realize all the things you can do. Beyond this, you also need to realize you are a sinner born into a sinful world. You need to be born again to receive life in Christ. Life in Christ gives you light to see the spiritual world.

"As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one'" (Romans 3:10-12). This is why you need to be born again. You need a new birth that begins a life in Christ with a new light of understanding.

You cannot begin to understand spiritual truth without a born again experience. It is not enough to believe that Jesus died for your sins. Your heart, mind, and soul must realize the need for a Savior Who can save you from your sin and create in you something new and different. If there is no change in you, then you must be born again.

#### Focus on Self

At your physical birth, you are a natural person. This natural person is selfish at heart. The goal of life is to protect and build up self. Until there is a spiritual birth, there will be no other way to live out your life. When you are born again, you will then begin to desire to live in a way that exalts Christ and denies self.

# Gifts From God

December 1

## Anger and Kindness Do Not Mix

*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

Ephesians 4:31-32

### Focus on Christ

Can you be kind with a heart full of anger? Are angry people full of forgiveness? Would you characterize anger as tenderness?

Kindness and anger do not function together. Often people try to justify an angry heart. Seldom do these people consider kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness in their arguments. This Scripture passage requires you to get rid of all forms of anger.

Notice that you are to forgive as God forgave you for Christ's sake. Do you believe His forgiveness is based on love or anger and bitterness? These are opposites. There is no way to melt love and anger together to make kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness.

Instead of trying to find a way to make anger acceptable, why not spend your spiritual energy on being Christlike? The more intimate you are with Christ, the more tender you become. It is impossible to deepen your walk with Christ and continue to be full of anger, wrath, bitterness, and evil speaking. Give it up! Pursue love, kindness, and forgiveness. Then, you will not only look but also be more like Christ.

### Focus on Self

The nature of self is to be angry when things do not go its way. Self is incapable of producing a kind, tender, forgiving heart. Only God's Spirit can do that in a person. This is important to understand because, without Christ, this verse of Scripture is impossible to achieve. You cannot remove anger from your heart or produce God's Love in your heart. The way to develop in the Love of Christ is to hand your anger over to God and allow Him to replace it with His Love.

December 2

## God Gives the Increase

*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.*

1 Corinthians 3:6-7

### Focus on Christ

What is the most important part of seeing a plant grow? Is it water, soil, or sunshine? What do you need to produce a stalk of corn? You

need a kernel of corn. Can you create the seed? If you don't have a seed, then nothing else is required.

The process between planting a seed and growing a crop is completely dependent on God's provision. People cannot produce rain, sunshine, or soil. God provides everything that is needed. A farmer is dependent on the resources of God. This is the same process of developing spiritually. The person who sows has nothing to plant without God first working in the heart.

Though Paul planted the church at Corinth, he did not see himself as more important than the others who had part of the responsibility in helping the church. First Corinthians 3:4 states, "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" Paul rebuked the church at Corinth because they were missing the point that man cannot provide spiritual fruit. Only Christ can produce fruit. If you try to identify with anyone other than Christ regarding your spiritual life, then you are off target.

Only God can make something come to life. When you get your focus off of leaders and onto Christ, you will realize there is absolutely no comparison. Leaders cannot produce fruit or spiritual life of any kind. If Christ is your focus, then nothing is impossible.

### **Focus on Self**

Self wants to be known as the one who is supreme. This mindset is carnal and not from God. People who truly walk with God should be repulsed when others try to give them glory instead of giving glory to God. The only way to enter the kingdom of God is to rid your life of selfish thinking and place your mind on Christ. While self may seem to get ahead in this world, anything done apart from Christ is meaningless and not of God's kingdom.

## **December 3**

### **Living and Powerful**

*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

**Hebrews 4:12**

### **Focus on Christ**

Is the Word of God real to you? Do you think you can hide your thinking from God? Even though you know you cannot hide from God, it is natural to think that you can.

The Word of God is powerful and true. It is perfect without any mixture of error. Some people do not believe it is always true. If you do not believe all of God's Word, then it is not authoritative for you. Whether you believe it is true or not does not change the fact that it is living, powerful, and revealing.

## Gifts From God

God's Word reveals whether a heart is of disbelief or belief. If your life does not live up to the life you profess, then the truth of God's Word reveals your dishonesty. Notice that the Word is living. Jesus said that He was the Word. When you read the Scriptures, you are reading the truth from Jesus Himself. This is no ordinary book made up by a good writer's imagination.

When you believe this Word is living, perfect, and powerful, you will realize it always reveals truth. This Word reveals your fears, failures, misunderstandings, and sin. It is provided to help all believers live a confident life. Nothing can get to your real thoughts, intentions, and doubts quicker than the living Word. It penetrates the heart, gets beyond the obvious, and discerns whether you will believe or rebel.

### Focus on Self

Self tends to avoid God's Word because self does not desire to see its faults. In order to be more like Christ, self needs to fade away. This will never happen apart from the Word of God. God's Word has the power to reveal things about you that you do not even know. When you approach God's Word you must be willing to see things that are not in line with His standard. To self, this seems like a hindrance. If you live according to God's Word, then you will never be more free. The Truth sets you free.

December 4

### Redeem the Time

*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

**Ephesians 5:15-16**

### Focus on Christ

Do you use your time wisely? How do you decide what is most important? Are you making the most of your time and opportunities? Will those things you invest your life in give eternal benefits?

Christ wants you to walk carefully. If you are taking a physical walk, then you will pay attention to where you are going. In the same way, take notice of the direction your spiritual life is headed. Walk carefully by moving away from sinful pleasures and self-seeking. If you walk with intention to honor Christ, then you will avoid sinful temptations.

Everyone receives opportunities to grow in Christ. Maybe God provided a special mentor to you. Possibly an invitation came for you to join a life-changing Bible study. Whatever the opportunity, redeem the time and take advantage. Why? Because the opportunity may not come again. You cannot recreate lost moments of time. How foolish it would be to pass up these opportunities!

You can spend a great deal of your time on temporal things of this world that will not benefit you. Wouldn't it be better if you spent time on things that would guard and protect you? To be wise is to spend time with God and allow Him to direct your life. He is the only One

Who can protect you from evil. When you spend time with God, He will redeem your time and make it more efficient and effective.

When you think about how the days are evil, what is the first thing that comes to your mind? For many it would be horrible, evil circumstances. Do you know that evil is anything that tries to pull you away from your time with God. Maybe its a phone call right in the middle of your quiet time or another opportunity that seems like it might be from God but is actually a strategy to pull you away from what God desires for you. Evil comes in many forms. The truth is that if you do not spend time with God, then He will not redeem your time.

**Focus on Self**

When your heart is not in line with God’s heart, it is not difficult to pull you away from God’s agenda. The desires of a selfish heart do not line up with God. Evil will wreak havoc on you. The enemy will not try to distract you in areas that you do not care about. He will come at you where you have sinful desires. The only way to stand firm is to ask God to line up your will with His Will. When you desire what God desires, it is more difficult for evil to pull you away from God’s opportunities.

**December 5**

**Search Me, O God**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

**Psalm 139:23-24**

**Focus on Christ**

Do you really want to know what your heart is like? Are you loyal to God? Do you have enough confidence in how you are living to ask God to search your heart? If you ask God to search your heart, then He will reveal your ways.

David knew what his life had endured. He had been an innocent and godly shepherd boy before he became a king with a heart for God. Tragedy came into his life the moment he broke fellowship with God. He committed a sin that was felt in his family and relationships for the rest of his life. He understood the seriousness of sin and the devastating consequences. After being confronted by the prophet Nathan, he deeply repented and returned to a close relationship with God.

When David asked God to search his heart, he knew what that meant. His sin had crippled his emotions, sleep, and physical and mental health. David wanted God to see his loyal heart.

Do you want to show your loyalty to God? If you repent quickly after God shows you sin, then you show yourself to be loyal. Repentance shows a willingness to be vulnerable. Admit to sin and desire restoration. Then, you will discover life everlasting.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

When your mind is focused on self, you do not care about your wicked way. In fact, you desire that way. It is not until you are so miserable with what self has left behind that you turn to God and ask Him to show you your heart. This only comes from a person who is willing to change. Until you reach this point, you will be satisfied with going your own way. Self believes everything is someone else's fault. Until you can realize that no one but yourself is responsible for your sin, you will not seek help from God. Are you loyal to God?

December 6

## Trust in the Lord

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

## Focus on Christ

Have you learned to trust in the Lord for all your decision making? Sometimes it is easy to trust Him for decisions that do not have to be made immediately. A crisis moment will determine what or whom you turn to for answers.

The human perspective is never enough in decision making. Since the future is unknown, knowledge of the present can miss the mark. Only Christ living in you knows how to guide you for your future. You must learn not only to trust in Him with all your heart but also not to depend on your own understanding. While you should use common sense, knowledge, and wisdom from past experiences, you must not depend totally on yourself.

Human tendency is to lean on your own understanding. It is difficult to move from your understanding to trusting in the Lord as your only source of truth. If you do not think something is true, then you will not follow it. But what if it is true, and you do not know it? That is when you must have a source outside of yourself for wisdom. While godly people can give you good advice, you still need to rely on Christ and His Spirit to direct you for ultimate truth.

Acknowledging God means to take notice, direct your attention toward, and accept a truth as real. When you know that God's Ways are not your ways and that His Ways are always right, you will believe, trust, accept, and rely on His direction more than your own. Only when you put complete confidence in Christ will He direct your path. If you do not listen to God, then He will not direct your way.

## Focus on Self

As a human being, you are trained up by the world in which you live. This can bring a challenge to self, because self is used to relying on its own way. Because this is accepted by the world, Christians also seem to accept it. God's Way enlightens the mind and leads you out



of trouble. It takes humility to recognize that your way will only led you further into trouble. This requires admitting that you are helpless. There is a beautiful life in Christ that is waiting for all who will submit to His Ways and trade their understanding for His Wisdom.

**December 7**

**Jesus' Central Message**

*...and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

**Luke 24:47**

**Focus on Christ**

What do you think is the central message of Jesus? He spoke on many great subjects. Do you think His central message was love, grace, peace, or serving? What message is most needed today? What message is seldom preached or taught today?

Jesus knew exactly what message was most needed. He started his public ministry preaching what John the Baptist had introduced. His first message was about repentance of sin. After all, Matthew 1:21 states, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." That is the express purpose for why Jesus came. There is no salvation from sin without repentance.

Because some consider Jesus' message of repentance as negative, they refrain from sharing it. But if you want to be more like Jesus, then you must get acquainted with His central message. Because sin is negative and brings death, an answer for sin is needed. Repentance is the answer. Not only did Jesus begin His ministry with repentance, but He also ended His ministry on earth commanding His disciples to preach repentance for the remission of sins.

You cannot avoid the message of repentance and be actively pursuing the Gospel. Get familiar with His message, and you will experience the incredible change in your heart and mind that comes from a life of repentance.

**Focus on Self**

Self does not share a message that is unpopular for fear of not being liked by others. The message that Jesus spoke ultimately led Him to the cross. There will be people who are angry when they hear that their problem is sin. This can make you want to hold back on sharing. When this happens, you are alive to self. When you focus on Christ, you will not be able to hold back the message of repentance.

# Gifts From God

December 8

## Rich Toward God

*But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

Luke 12:20-21

### Focus on Christ

Have you made plans for what will happen to your earthly possessions when your life comes to an end? Are you prepared to meet God? While you may decide who receives the wealth you leave behind, you will not decide what happens to your soul. God alone makes that decision.

Jesus tells us that a man who prepares by accumulating wealth and possessions, without preparing his soul to meet God, is a fool. To be a fool means to be unwise, simple, foolish, and ignorant concerning spiritual things. Wisdom from the world will get you nowhere in the kingdom of God.

It would be awful to think you have it all together or to believe you have plenty of time to pay attention to your soul. God alone decides when it is time to meet Him. At that point, there is nothing you can do but face God. You are prepared as long as you know Jesus as Lord and Savior; it is too late for those who are unsure.

According to Christ, it is a tragedy to live your life as though everything on earth mattered. If you are not rich toward God, then nothing else really matters. If your life has been spent acquiring a house, a good bank account, and an adequate retirement but has little time for God, then you are poor spiritually. What does that mean? It means everything you have worked for will disappear at death, including eternal life. The sad truth is that you will experience eternal death.

Be rich toward God! Start spending time with Christ every day starting now. That is the only way to build up your spiritual bank account.

### Focus on Self

If you rely on the wisdom of this world, then you will work hard at laying up your treasure here and now. If you acquired lots of wealth, then you are successful according to the world. However, all these things that you accumulate on earth will one day perish. Wisdom that comes from above will teach you to spend time laying up your treasure in heaven. Heaven is eternity with Jesus. That is dependent on the choices that you make today and the rest of your life. Don't make foolish decisions by living for this world. Be wise and live for Christ! Does it sound better to be rich toward God or rich toward self?

**December 9**

**An Angry Spirit**

*Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.*

**Ecclesiastes 7:9**

**Focus on Christ**

What is your immediate response to being blocked from something you want? Do you quickly become angry? Would you say your first response is patience? Most people respond in anger instead of calmness when they are attacked. Is that the best approach?

A natural response is not necessarily a Spirit-filled response. Just because most people respond a certain way does not mean that it is God's Way. This passage makes it clear that anger rests within a fool. That means that it is not a work of the Spirit of God. Your fleshly works are no longer dominate when you are walking in the Spirit. If your response to injustice is anger, then it is important for you to understand what is happening in your spirit.

There is a connection between the sins of pride and anger. When your pride is wounded, your response tends to be anger. Often, a proud spirit is revealed through anger. Pride cannot stand someone else being right and finding out it is wrong. The unspiritual response of pride is anger. The result is that you discover your foolish thoughts and ways that reveal a wayward heart.

There is also a connection between the Spirit-filled fruit of humility and patience. Humility enables you to endure times of false accusations without acting as an angry fool. The humble in spirit will be prayerful in deliberating how to perform the right action. When guided by Christ's Spirit, you can stay calm and firm at the same time. This unique calmness results in making wise decisions that inspires confidence from others for your leadership. Would you rather follow an angry person or a calm, patient person?

**Focus on Self**

Self is full of pride. Pride is connected to anger. To focus on self is dangerous because it means anger is crouching at your door. If all you think about is how things will affect you, then you will not endure times of trials and testing. When you focus on what a test is doing to you, you become prey to an angry spirit. The opposite is true when you focus on Christ; the result, then, is a humble and patient heart. What would have happened if Christ focused on Himself when He endured the cross? The solution for sin would have been diminished. Christ's Mind is the goal of a Christian. When you have the Mind of Christ, you are protected from an angry spirit.

# Gifts From God

December 10

## Christ's Spirit Is Life and Peace

*For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

**Romans 8:6**

### Focus on Christ

When you think of your life, do you think about your mind? Have you ever thought that the health of your mind would effect your body? Do you recognize that your thought life is crucial to the condition of your spirit?

Paul begins with a powerful statement about a person's physical body and mind and how it is effected by sinful living. The person who pursues a sinful lifestyle believes that he will receive pleasure, but actually receives a life of misery. Living apart from God will never bring true peace and satisfaction.

How many people in their right mind would choose death over life and peace? If you thought that what you are pursuing would lead to death, then you would avoid it at all costs. If someone guaranteed you fullness of life and peace, then you would pursue it with all your heart.

This is what Jesus offers to you. He laid down His life so that you could have His Spirit living in you. His Spirit gives life and peace. This kind of life is opposite of what the world teaches. When you have the Mind of Christ, you have life and peace. Isn't that amazing?

### Focus on Self

Self does not see the need to plan for anything other than personal satisfaction. It has no way to measure out the impact of a life built on sinful desires. Christ is interested in your eternal life. He gave His life to provide peace and satisfaction for all eternity. Life and peace requires submitting to the Ways of God.

December 11

## Irresistible Power

*And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.*

**Acts 6:10**

### Focus on Christ

How persuasive are you? Can you convince people to do what you want them to do? When you speak, do others recognize the wisdom with which you speak?

The Jews believed that wisdom came from the knowledge of Scripture. In Acts chapter six, a young Christian named Stephen was known to be full of faith and power. The Word of God as well as the leader-

ship of the Holy Spirit were known to Stephen. Because of the power of the Spirit in Stephen's life, the Jews could not resist his wisdom. Paul was one of the leaders who opposed Stephen and consented to his death.

Later on after Paul's conversion, he clearly understood what happened with Stephen. Paul stated, "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

How familiar are you with the Word of God? Can you represent it well? Would others recognize your familiarity of the Scriptures when you speak? Do you have a knowledge of the Scripture? Knowledge alone does not provide power to speak the Word. The Holy Spirit is the One Who gives you the power to speak the Word.

The Jews knew the Word of God but denied that Jesus was the Messiah. When Stephen spoke the Word of God, he spoke with the power of the Holy Spirit. You must learn that persuasive words of human wisdom are not the same as the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

### Focus on Self

Self is puffed up when it thinks it knows more than anyone else. It prides itself in knowledge of a subject. When self makes an argument to prove its knowledge, it is not attractive to the listeners. When God speaks through one of His children, people understand that this knowledge is more than human wisdom. They recognize that there is something different about the way in which a child of God speaks. You are not responsible for convincing people of what is right. Rather, the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and reveals the Truth of God through one of His servants.

## December 12

### No Excuses

*If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.*

**John 15:22**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever found yourself in trouble for something that you did not know was wrong? When you found out it was wrong, how did you respond? Did you defend your action or accept that you were wrong? How do you handle correction?

Jesus came to save His people from their sin. During His public ministry, many fought against His teachings. Usually, when someone is fighting against Truth, it is because it does not line up with his own thinking. Jesus taught that sin is against God and offered a way of salvation. This was not what many wanted to hear.

## Gifts From God

It is one thing to commit a sin and not know it is sin, but it is another thing to commit a sin and know that it is sin. Once you hear a truth from God, you are responsible for that truth. If you hear truth and continue in your way, then you have no excuse. The world hated Jesus because He spoke the truth. Why would you think the world would love you for speaking the truth?

Sin existed before Jesus came to earth. People knew there were sin problems, but they only looked at it as the breaking of the law. Their understanding was to keep rules and regulations in order to avoid wrongness. But Jesus made it more personal. He made them face up to what was in their hearts. That is what He does for you. He makes sin personal so that He can redeem you. That is great news.

### Focus on Self

Self does not want to be wrong and is not interested in correction. Self easily sees the sin of others but tends to be blind to its heart. However, if you do not see your sin, then you will not see your need for a Savior. Further, if you do not see your need for a Savior, then you will never experience the redeeming love of Christ. It cost Christ His Life to provide a way of salvation. Thank Him for this incredible gift of love.

December 13

### Adopted By God

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

**Romans 8:14**

### Focus on Christ

How precious is a child to a parent? A child is the flesh and blood of the parents. This is a special relationship. How important is it to you to have loving parents?

When Paul wrote this to the Romans, he was introducing the concept of spiritual adoption. To be adopted was a special privilege. You would have to be wanted, loved, and chosen to be adopted. Once chosen, you could never change the fact that you were a child of that family.

In the same way, God chose you for Christ's sake. God pursued you. Once you become adopted into the family of God, you can never be un-adopted. Being a part of God's family holds great value. You become a part of a purpose to lead and guide others to peace with God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). When God reconciles your heart to Himself, you desire to be a peacemaker.

To be led by the Spirit is to live a life surrendered to God for His Purposes. To be led by the Spirit means to draw your attention away from the corruption of this world. When the Spirit leads you, He empowers you to live this kind of life.

Why would God desire to adopt someone who has sinned against Him? Would you want to adopt a child who has offended you? Your

adoption into God's family is not dependent on your ability to be perfect. Rather, it is dependent on how you receive His Son.

**Focus on Self**

Many people who have been adopted into families tend to struggle because they were not raised by their biological parents. Pride will cause you to believe that you deserve a normal childhood. Humility will cause you to accept the family that God provides. You are adopted into God's family. You never want to be ungrateful to God because He provided a way for you to be a part of His kingdom.

**December 14**

**God's Grace**

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...*

**Titus 3:4-5**

**Focus on Christ**

How good are you? Do you believe that any of your good deeds will help you to be accepted by God? How much would a person have to do to gain entrance into heaven?

Grace is God's kindness, love, and mercy that has nothing to do with your goodness. Many Christians connect their salvation to two things: good works and baptism. According to this Scripture, the kindness and Love of God did not appear to man because of good works. There is nothing that you can do to earn the Grace of God. God's Grace is a gift. He made this gift manifest in the Person of Jesus Christ. The only way to enter into the kingdom of God is faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The idea that people are by nature good, is flawed. People believe they are good according to their own standard. But when you look at God's standard, you find that no man, other than Jesus, is sinless. All mankind has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). Pride keeps your mind from accepting that you cannot earn your way into a right relationship with Christ. You must humble yourself and recognize that you have a great need, and there is only One Who can provide for that need.

*Washing of regeneration* does not mean baptism, for this word *washing* is only used here and in Ephesians 5:26. Baptism has nothing to do with regeneration. It is simply a picture of what happens *in* regeneration. Here the word means to take a bath, be cleansed. That is what salvation does for you. It cleanses you from sin. This happens by the renewing of the Holy Spirit. He convicts you of sin, cleanses you, and renews, causing you to be a new creation in Christ.



# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self thinks it is good. This thinking is a detriment to eternal destination. As long as self believes it can work its way into heaven, it will remain on the road to destruction. Life in Christ requires a person to think and know that Jesus alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can enter into heaven and see God the Father, except through the Grace of God provided through Jesus Christ.

December 15

## Death Has Been Defeated

*No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.*

**Ecclesiastes 8:8**

## Focus on Christ

Do you know when you will die? Is there anything you can do to find out the day and time? Do you know of people or organizations that are attempting to prolong life?

You have no part in deciding the day of your death. Only God decides the day when He will *retain your spirit*. While it is a sobering thought that you have no power over when you will die, it is also comforting to know that your life is in God's Hand.

Many people attempt to prolong life. Sciences are trying to slow down the aging process. Other groups are looking for the fountain of youth. The problem is that no person can decide the destiny of a human soul. People can only attempt to play God by changing His design and purpose for human life.

For the believer, the day of death is a victory. According to Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints." God is looking forward to a physical reunion with His children. For the Christian, to leave this earth is to be with the Lord. There is no greater destination than heaven. Instead of spending so much time trying to stop death, spend your time getting to know God. Wicked people live to gain power and wealth, but they cannot buy life.

How should you live if you do not know when God will require your soul? You must fight the good fight and live for God. Spend your time focusing on God instead of being fearful of death.

## Focus on Self

When you live for self, you try to live as long as you can on earth. This view should not be the way of a Christian. This life on earth is not the goal. Life with Christ in eternity is the goal and reward. Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

**December 16**

**Temptations Trials**

*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

**1 Corinthians 10:13**

**Focus on Christ**

What tempts you the most? Do your temptations come often? How much resistance do you have to your temptations? What is the purpose for temptation?

Common temptations can be overcome with willpower. There are many people who have overcome drinking alcohol without giving God a thought. If no one could overcome common temptations, then this world would be much worse. Humans would be like animals. On the other hand, this does not mean that some common temptations cannot overcome you. There are people who cannot stop drinking alcohol. Although something may be a common temptation to mankind, that common temptation may be your greatest weakness. That is when you need God's help. God will give you what you need to overcome these common temptations.

Christ will not give you power to overcome a temptation if you have no willingness to resist. There are times when you have no desire to overcome a temptation, but would rather give in to the pleasure. Christ will not help someone not interested in help. When you desire the temptation that is causing you problems, Christ will allow you to stay in the struggle. It is not until you are sick of yourself and of your sin that you will call out to God for help.

When a drowning person chooses not to grasp the life preserver, then the preserver has no effect. God will provide a way out. If you do not take the way out, then it will do you no good. You will not be tempted by things that you do not desire. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14).

Why would a person be drowning in temptation? They are drowning because they were tempted and followed their sinful desires. Now they need help. When you call out to God from a heart willing to change, Christ will faithfully rescue you. His Word and His Spirit are more powerful than human resistance. This power can potentially bring you to a place in your life where the desire for a particular sin is completely removed. A man who overcomes drinking alcohol by mere will power will not be as peaceful as a man who has overcome drinking alcohol by the power of God. This is because God removes the desire, and the battle to resist is no longer a struggle.

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Self

Self is always seeking pleasure in this world. The heart of self is constantly calling for desires to be fulfilled. Second Peter 1:4 states, "...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." If you want to escape the corruption of this world, then simply follow Christ and His commands.

December 17

## Put Off the Old

*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.*

**Colossians 3:8**

## Focus on Christ

What do others identify your life with? Is it kindness, mercy, love, or anger, wrath, and malice? When people encounter your life, what do they most likely see? Do you think people should learn how to be kind, or angry?

Paul writes to Christians urging them to put off certain non-Christian ways. The list he gives does not represent what you should learn from the Gospel of Jesus, but what are opposite of the Gospel. Many want to find a way to justify angry actions, but Paul instructed us to find a way to put off angry actions.

Notice the progression in the list. Anger is bad; wrath is worse; and malice is planned and intentional. The outcome of this spirit is blasphemy. This can mean speaking against both God and people in a derogatory way. An angry spirit also leads to filthy language. When you are upset the intents of the heart come out through speech and evil thoughts.

Believers do not want to live this way. True believers pursue the love and grace of God. The outcome is listed in Colossians 3:12-13, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another..." Isn't this the best way to live?

## Focus on Self

The nature of human nature is to defend and protect self. This usually stems from a heart of anger. Ephesians 2:3 states, "...and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others." But to follow God is to put away the nature of self and put on the nature of Christ.

**December 18**

**A Transformed Life**

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

**Romans 12:2**

**Focus on Christ**

How do you change your thinking? If you wanted to become a different personality, then how would you change your mind to match that new personality? It really is an impossible task unless God transforms you.

According to the Apostle Paul, the power of the Gospel completely transforms a person to become something that could never be created by one's ability to become better.

The word *mind* does not simply mean intellectual capabilities. It represents everything that makes up the soul. Transformation must take place in your mind, will, and emotions.

To change your character, you must be transformed in your thinking. Only Christ can accomplish this in you. You must have a new set of convictions that set you apart as a transformed person. This means you must no longer look and think like the world. Those who knew you before Christ will no longer recognize you as the same person. To say you believe is not enough; you must live out what you say you believe.

Though you become a new creation when you are transformed by the saving power of Christ, you do not stop growing and changing. Every day in Christ brings a new depth of understanding in His Love, His Will, and His Ways. As you learn to live as a transformed person, you will pursue and love the direction and purpose of the perfect Will of God.

**Focus on Self**

Self is completely conformed to the world. The world is attractive to a sinful heart. How then can one move away from self and toward Christ? Only through a renewing of the mind by the Word of God. Take your focus off of what you will lose and place it on what you will receive in Christ.

**December 19**

**Who Do You Want To Please?**

*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*

**Galatians 1:10**

# Gifts From God

## Focus on Christ

How different is your life from those who do not claim to know Christ? Before you came to know Christ, whom did you seek to please?

Paul had a significant life-change. Previously, he had sought to please men whom he respected and received instruction. After Christ commissioned him, everything changed.

You cannot please man and God at the same time. It is wise to choose to serve Christ. Do not have a divided allegiance. If you have been called to follow Christ, then nothing else satisfies you. There is no thrill or energy in accomplishing things that everyone else is doing. When God gives you an assignment, it is God-sized. That means it is extraordinary and unattainable without His help.

This is difficult for the human mind to accept because human tendency desires comfort. A God-sized assignment will not make you comfortable because it causes you to have to rely on God instead of yourself. When you seek to please God, you will have adversaries. The key is learning to walk with Christ even when situations are uncomfortable.

Therefore, it is important to ask yourself, "Do you seek to please men or God?" If you seek to please men, then it will be difficult for you to answer the call of God. If you seek to please God, then your answer will always be "Yes, Lord!"

## Focus on Self

When you seek to please self, you are pleasing man and not God. There will be many instances in which you will need to deny self and follow God. As you grow in your walk with Christ, you will begin to desire what He desires. To please Him will be pleasing to you.

December 20

## Spiritual Wisdom

*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"*

1 Corinthians 3:19

## Focus on Christ

What kind of wisdom do you desire? Do you want to be wise in the sciences, arts, languages, or mathematics? Maybe your interest is in history or finances. God wants you to always pursue truth. You need the right perspective when functioning in this world.

Paul knew that the wisdom of the world does not provide spiritual wisdom. While all truth is God's Truth, the wisdom of the world does not help you to understand the things of God. A person who is knowledgeable in mathematics will be able to solve problems related to math. But mathematics will not teach you how to walk in the Spirit.

Can you imagine trying to impress Christ with knowledge of astronomy or languages? This is foolishness to spiritual wisdom. While

the information may be important, it does not apply to spiritual knowledge. With all the knowledge in the world, mankind cannot solve an unknown virus, cease wars, or solve hunger. All of this knowledge is used by God to confound human wisdom.

God's Wisdom redeems a person's mind to see the most important perspectives on life. Spiritual wisdom helps you invest in eternal things such as love and true peace.

### Focus on Self

Self can gain knowledge from this world without Christ, but self will never be able to gain the wisdom that comes from God without building a relationship with Christ. This is one of the biggest road-blocks for a sinful heart. A heart full of pride wants to be able to do everything by itself. Have you ever heard a toddler say, "No, I can do it by myself"? A prideful heart is no different. In order to have spiritual wisdom, you must surrender to the leadership of Jesus Christ.

**December 21**

### Get to Know Christ

*And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you."*

**Matthew 24:4**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been deceived? Have you ever believed something to be true that was actually a lie? What would cause you to believe something that is not true?

Deception is a dangerous sin. Many people claim to speak truth when in fact they speak lies. Jesus warned His disciples about such people. Jesus told them about the beginning of the end times and He shared that many would claim to be Him.

How would you take heed to not be deceived? How would you know if a person who claimed to be Christ was not Christ? You must know the Truth. You must know the Person of Jesus.

Who is your best friend? Your best friend is probably a person you know well. If someone called you claiming to be your friend, then how would you know that it is your friend? You would know by his voice. You could ask questions that only your best friend would know.

Focus your attention on getting to know Christ through the Word of God. When you know God's Word and have His Spirit residing in you, it will be much harder for you to be deceived by a false teacher.

### Focus on Self

Self is easily deceived. When you flatter a person, that person will tend to accept the flattery whether it is true or not. People want to feel good about themselves. Christ wants you to be honest with yourself. If something in your life is off target, then Christ wants you to know

## Gifts From God

that. Don't deceive yourself into not knowing the truth because the truth will set you free. Deception keeps a person in bondage. Walk with Christ and live in His Word, and His Truth will keep you honest and free.

December 22

### Give and It Will Be Given

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation."*

**Malachi 3:8-9**

### Focus on Christ

What is there in your life that you have a difficult time giving to God? Is there anything you are not submitting to God?

Do you believe the words of Jesus? Luke 6:38 says, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

*Tithe* is a Hebrew word meaning one-tenth. Literally, a tithe is one-tenth of anything. There are dozens of places in the Old Testament where tithing is mentioned. First, in Genesis 14, Abraham meets a man by the name of Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a priest who blessed Abraham and then God. Then, Abraham gave a tithe of all he had as a voluntary act of submission to God (before the law was given). Second, four hundred years later, Leviticus 27 established that everything should be tithed: "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD" (Leviticus 27:30). Third, after forty more years, the children of Israel stood on the banks of the Jordan River in Deuteronomy 14:22-23. When Moses was about to die, the tithe was restated. Fourth, one thousand years later, God gave a warning to the people because they were robbing Him. God cursed them in Malachi 3 because they did not put Him first.

People often do not recognize refusing to tithe as disobedience to God. They tend to reason that they cannot afford to tithe, that it is not the right time, or that they need the money for their own needs. Refusal to obey God is serious to Him. Look at this warning: "I have cursed you because you have not put me first." Additionally, God challenges, "And try Me now in this..." (Malachi 3:10). Finally, God offers a purpose for giving the tithe: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house." God instructs His people to know that because they were robbing Him, they would end up with less.

Do you want to glorify God in all you do? When God is first in your giving, He will be first in every area of life. Giving should be regular, personal, and proportional. The more God blesses you, the more you



have to give. Grace always exceeds the law. In the Old Testament, we have a command. In the New Testament, we see the command become a model. What was a flat ten percent in the Old Testament becomes unlimited proportional giving in the New Testament. God promises to abundantly bless Christians who practice generous giving.

### Focus on Self

Self is not interested in giving but in receiving. When self is in charge, it believes that it has earned everything that it has. Therefore, no one can tell it what to do with its possessions. This is not godly thinking. God gave you life and everything that you have. To be a Christian is to realize that tithing is not a suggestion but a command. With that in mind, it is important to understand that when you have a heart of love for God, no one will need to tell you to tithe. God doesn't need your money, but He does desire your heart.

**December 23**

### The Demonstration of the Spirit's Power

*And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

**1 Corinthians 2:4-5**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever been asked to speak in front of a group of people? If so, then did you spend time preparing your speech? Has anyone ever asked you to lead a group or speak in your church? Did you prepare what you would say or spend time in the counsel of the Lord?

There are different venues in which a person may be asked to speak. It could be one on one, in front of a large group, or even time in prayer with God. The speech written about in this Scripture was probably in reference to Paul's private conversations. His preaching is referring to his public speaking to a larger group of people. Either way the purpose of his speaking was to focus on the truth of Jesus and Him crucified.

There are many ways in which to become an eloquent speaker. Many colleges offer courses in speech and debate. While these are effective regarding earthly topics, they are ineffective regarding spiritual truths. The goal when representing Christ is not to lead someone to faith in your ability to speak but to lead them to faith in Christ. Jesus said, "...do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say" (Luke 12:11-12). The prerequisite is to be up to date with God.

You don't capture the power of the Spirit, the Spirit captures you, dwells in you, teaches you, guides you, and leads you to know what to

## Gifts From God

say at the right time. The demonstration of His Power comes automatically as you walk in obedience to the teachings of Christ. In the Old Testament story of Jacob, there is a physical picture of what it looks like when a human heart is confronted by the Spirit of God. Jacob had a wrestling experience with God (see Genesis 32:24-26). When Jacob left that encounter, he was a changed man. When a person hears the truth of God's Word from God's Spirit, a wrestling begins in the heart. This wrestling is required to bring a heart from sin to holiness.

Jacob was the father of Joseph and part of the lineage of Jesus. The entire genealogy was developed by God. Without a change of heart in Jacob, the story we find in the Old Testament may look very different. Christians need to stop trying to make a name for themselves by speaking words that are not God's Words. Would you rather have clear, eloquent, persuasive human speech and wisdom or the Power of God? Paul chose the power of God. When people listened to Paul preach, they didn't hear a great speaker. "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Corinthians 10:10). When people heard Paul, they heard God instead of the wisdom of man. People trusting in Christ through Paul's preaching made it obvious that it was God's Power and not Paul's speech at work. Human logic, reasoning, programs, or campaigns are not to be the motivators for leading a person to Christ. The power of Christ will bring true spiritual results.

### Focus on Self

Worry over your words, and you will probably stumble over them. Intensify your focus on Christ, and His Spirit will make your words powerful as you relax in your conversations of Him. Self can accomplish many good human qualities but cannot create the power of the Spirit. Spirit-filled living is recognized as the demonstration of the power of the Spirit.

December 24

### The Hidden Wisdom

*However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.*

1 Corinthians 2:6-7

### Focus on Christ

Would you consider yourself to be mature? Does maturity mean someone's age? Is it possible to be mature in some areas of life and not in others? What type of maturity is Paul speaking of in this passage?

It is possible to be mature in some areas of life and not in others. You may be developed physically. You may have attained the knowl-

edge of this age. You may have had many life experiences that would qualify you to some people as being wise. While these are ways in which you may be considered mature, this is not the full development that will allow you to receive the hidden wisdom from God.

The story of Joseph is a great example to show that spiritual maturity is not dependent on physical age. Joseph was the son of Jacob. When the story of Joseph begins, Scripture reveals his age: "Joseph, being seventeen years old..." (Genesis 37:2). As the story continues, Scripture explains that Joseph had a dream (see Genesis 37:5). This dream described what God was going to do with Joseph's life in order to save a nation. Joseph decided to share this dream with his brothers who hated him. Often, when people read this story, they remark that it was immature of Joseph to tell his brothers the dream. Maybe it was. But the better take-away is that God revealed hidden wisdom to Joseph in a dream. God would not reveal a hidden wisdom to a person who is spiritually immature. Joseph may have been immature in regard to some areas of life, but he was not spiritually immature.

Would you rather be mature in the ways of the flesh or in the ways of the Spirit? You may have maturity when it comes to understanding the world, but do you have spiritual maturity? How is that attained? Spiritual maturity is attained by spending time in the Word of God, loving God with all your heart, and walking in the Ways of His Spirit. It requires a change of heart from sin to holiness and from following the world to walking in the Spirit of God. The hidden wisdom of God will not be entrusted to an immature and unyielding heart. If you desire to know the hidden wisdom of God, then focus on spiritual maturity. Give your heart to Christ!

### Focus on Self

Self would never consider that it could be immature. It looks at things from the perspective that others know less than it does. To have true wisdom, one must develop in the knowledge of God. It is impossible to have God's knowledge and wisdom apart from His Word. If you want to experience the hidden wisdom from God, then focus on spending time in His Word and living out His Ways.

**December 25**

### Divine vs. Human Judgment

*But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*

**1 Corinthians 2:15**

### Focus on Christ

What comes to your mind when you think of the word judgment? Is it negative or positive? What about conviction? What is the difference between judgment and conviction?

## Gifts From God

In the story of Joseph, Joseph's brothers are convicted of the wrong that they had done to Joseph. "Then they said to one another, 'We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us' " (Genesis 42:21). They were afraid of the judgment that was before them. They expected that they would receive what they deserved.

The brother's minds were focused on human judgment instead of divine judgment. There is a major difference between the two. God did not send Jesus to judge but to save. When you find yourself convicted of a sin, you have the opportunity to receive the salvation that Jesus offers. Joseph was a spiritual man who had a relationship with God. When the time came to reveal himself to his brothers, he offered them salvation instead of condemnation.

How do you judge spiritual things? It is possible for both the believer and non-believer to make harsh and critical judgments. Jesus addressed His disciples and warned against making one-sided judgments. A one-sided judgment means focusing on the wrongs of others without looking at your own wrongs. Jesus was not condemning a judgment of character. He even gave illustrations of knowing a good tree by examining the fruit. He was speaking more to the desire of seeing wrong in others without any care or concern for the individual.

Judgment by a spiritual person does not condemn and is not judgmental. A spiritual person sees wrongness and wants to help. This requires helping a person see the wrongness and teaching them what to do for redemptive corrections.

Human judgment is not the same as God's judgment. God is fair and just. Humans have limited information that is sometimes very biased. A human will judge based on whom they like or don't like. God's judgment is spiritual and will give justice to everyone by His standard and not by our attributes. Rarely will human judgment see any fault in itself. In this way, human judgment is one-sided. "For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:31-32).

Divine judgment comes in the life of a spiritual person as they follow the ways of God. A spiritual person has godly discernment that allows him or her to see things from God's perspective. Human judgment cannot see things accurately, but the Holy Spirit can see when a person needs correction. The Holy Spirit provides conviction of sin that leads to repentance. This is what Joseph offered his brothers and what Jesus offers you. You need only receive the gift.

### Focus on Self

Self is judgmental and cannot see its own problems. Humility provides a spiritually-minded person a full view of people's problems in order to help them. A spiritually humble person is a peacemaker who looks for a way to help others become rightly oriented to God. Only when you are hearing from God daily and examining your own life

by God's Word will you become qualified by God to rightly discern the truth.

**December 26**

**The Heart of God**

*For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*

**1 Corinthians 2:11**

**Focus on Christ**

How could you know what another person is thinking? Could you look at his behavior and know his thoughts? Are you able to see inside of a person?

The truth is that no one is able to know what another person is thinking. Even if someone shared his thoughts with you, there is always a possibility that he lies or withholds information. Many times people do not even know what they are thinking because they spend no time searching their hearts. The spirit in a man is the only true source of the thought of man. Your thoughts will drive your life whether you know what they are or not. God says: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8).

How then can you know God's thoughts? The only way is through His Spirit. By relying on the Spirit and the Word of God, you can know the Heart of God. This happened to Joseph when he found himself in charge of Potiphar's house. Joseph had been thrown in a pit by his brothers before eventually being taken down to Egypt. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man..." (Genesis 39:2). Potiphar made Joseph the overseer of his house (see Genesis 39). "And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, 'Lie with me'" (Genesis 39:7). Joseph continued to refuse. Joseph stated, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9).

What would many men do if they were in this same situation? The spirit of a man is sick with sin. If a man is following his sick heart, then he would probably lie with Potiphar's wife. Why was Joseph able to refuse? Joseph knew the Heart of God and loved Him. How did Joseph know God's Heart? The Spirit of God revealed it to him. Joseph's thoughts were focused on God because he had a relationship with Him.

There are many that think lying with Potiphar's wife was no big deal. You can see this concept on many television shows in which men are sleeping with married women and vice versa. If you watch long enough, then you will hear that they "just made a mistake." But according to God, they committed a sin against Him. We take for granted the fact that the only way in which we can even know that something is a sin is by the Spirit of God. This is the way in which

## Gifts From God

God protects you from temptation. Joseph loved God and knew His Heart because God showed him. This allowed him to flee the situation and not sin against God. Do you know the Heart of God? If not, then call on His Spirit and allow Him to teach you.

### Focus on Self

Self is interested in pleasure and rarely concerned about its consequences. That is how so many get into trouble. They don't consider their actions and what it might do to the direction of their lives. Joseph was more concerned with offending his God than in gaining personal pleasures. This healthy respect and fear of God kept him from making wrong decisions. He loved God more than he loved the world. That is a place each and every believer needs to come to in order to experience fullness of life.

December 27

### Place Your Hope in Jesus

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

1 Corinthians 2:12

### Focus on Christ

Where does your hope come from? Do you have hope, or are you hopeless? At times in our lives, we can look at our circumstances and not see a way out. This brings hopelessness. The problem is not that we are hopeless but that we are looking in the wrong place for hope. You will not find hope in circumstances. Hope only comes from your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Joseph's brothers found themselves in a hopeless situation. Because there was a famine in their land their father sent them to Egypt to obtain food. What they did not know was that Joseph (the brother they had thrown in a pit) was the governor over the land. When they arrived, they were face to face with Joseph. Joseph recognized them, but his brothers did not recognize him (see Genesis 42, 43). The dream that God gave Joseph many years before was coming true (see Genesis 37:5).

Joseph decided to test his brothers honesty about having a brother back home who did not come on the trip. His brothers were afraid because they had the spirit of the world. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). The brothers obeyed Joseph's command and returned with their youngest brother. As the story continues, the brothers realized that the governor was their brother Joseph. The brothers had guilt for what they had done to Joseph and were afraid of what he would do to them. Joseph responded, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day,

to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph had the Spirit of God. The very person who the brothers were afraid of was the one in position to save them.

Do you know the things that have been freely given to you by God? Or do you live by the spirit of the world? Would you recognize Jesus if He were standing in front of you? Just as God placed Joseph in a position to save his brothers, He placed Jesus in a position to save you. This is where your hope lies. When your life seems hopeless, look to Jesus. The world’s spirit leaves you afraid, but the Holy Spirit provides peace and joy in the midst of the difficulty. God has so much to give; you need to look to Him and receive.

### Focus on Self

If self is to have true hope, then it will need to look beyond its capabilities. The reason for looking beyond self, is that no one has all the answers to life. The great thing about looking to God for hope is that He can offer everything that pertains to life. Self has a false sense of security when it has a few successes in this world. Christ brings a true sense of security as you follow His Ways. His Ways are full of love, peace, and hope.

**December 28**

### Do you Believe?

*But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*

**1 Corinthians 2:10**

### Focus on Christ

Have you ever wondered about the deep things of God? Can you remember a time in your life when you had one of the most incredible encounters with the Living God? Have you ever had times in your life where you felt as though God was nowhere to be found?

Do you believe God? Did you catch that question? It is not do you believe *in* God, but do you *believe* God? The Holy Spirit provides the deep things of God to a heart that loves Him (see 1 Corinthians 2:9). Many people believe in God but do not take Him at His Word. If you do not take Him at His Word, then you do not believe Him and will not do what He says. This lack of belief and disobedience will find you wandering in the desert.

Throughout the Old Testament account of Joseph’s life, the Scripture states several times, “The Lord was with Joseph.” Do you think that the Lord was with Joseph because Joseph did not believe Him? At the beginning of the story of Joseph, God speaks to him in a dream. The events that took place after the dream was revealed had the potential to create unbelief. Joseph was placed in a pit by his brothers, falsely accused by his master’s wife, placed in prison, and forgotten about for years. Do you think this would cause you to begin to doubt God? It is evident that Joseph never stopped believing.



## Gifts From God

Ultimately the initial dream that his brothers would bow down to him came to pass. He was appointed governor and had the opportunity to save his family from famine.

If you receive a Word from God in which events do not line up to, then you may stop believing God. This keeps many believers at a surface relationship with the Lord. When you love God, you will take Him at His Word. Then, His Spirit will reveal deeper truth to your heart. Can you believe it? God desires for those who love Him to know the depths of His Heart. The question is do you believe Him.

### Focus on Self

Self tends to only believe what it can see. When you are focused on your circumstances and not on God's Word, you will only experience what this world can offer you. Joseph experienced the God Whom he believed in. You, too, can experience all the fullness of life when you move from believing in God to believing God.

December 29

### Love and Forgiveness

*But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

1 Corinthians 2:9

### Focus on Christ

Do you love God? What does it mean to love God with all your heart? Does it mean attending church on Sunday? Or does it mean attending a Bible Study? While these things certainly play a part in developing your faith, to love God with all your heart is to commit your life to Him.

Joseph's life was committed to the Lord. It is evident in his story that he had a love for God. The most beautiful picture of the love of God through the life of Joseph is found in Genesis 50. Joseph's brothers were concerned that "...Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." (Genesis 50:15). This is human thinking. Because they hated Joseph and did wrong to him, they believed he would repay them. But that is not God's Way.

Joseph's brothers sent messengers to Joseph to ask for forgiveness (see Genesis 50:17). "Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.'" (Genesis 50:19-20). God's plan included preparation to save the people from famine, including Joseph's brothers. The brothers experienced the Heart of God through Joseph.

Did you know that God has prepared a place for those who love Him? Even before you knew God, He sent His Son Jesus to "save many people alive." Jesus was not treated well on this earth, but He

loved God and pursued the purpose set out for Him. Before His death, Jesus told His disciples: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). There is no man on earth who has seen the place that Jesus is speaking about. This place is heaven, the place that God has prepared for those who love Him. It is not for those who deserve it, because no one deserves it, but is for those who love God.

Just as Joseph’s brothers did not deserve his forgiveness, you do not deserve the forgiveness through His Spirit. God’s Way is love and forgiveness. He has prepared a place and desires all to enter, but only those who receive His Son are allowed to enter. Do you live your life loving and forgiving others? If you do not love God, then you will not love others. Only the Spirit of God can provide you His love and forgiveness. When He does, your response to those who harm you will be the response of Joseph to his brothers.

**Focus on Self**

Self repays wrongness with wrongness. Self wants to be loved and not give love. These two wrong ways of thinking lead to a lonely end of life. If you want to live a life without loneliness, then learn to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul. Love makes loneliness disappear and helps you see life from God’s perspective. Joseph forgave knowing that what others meant for evil, God meant for good.

**December 30**

**A Humble Servant**

*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

**1 Corinthians 2:2**

**Focus on Christ**

Have you ever felt overwhelmed at the vast amount of information found in the Bible? There are so many different facets of Scripture that people can learn, but there is only one way in which to seek the Heart of God: through Jesus Christ.

It is sad to witness Christians arguing about the truth of God’s Word. It is also sad to witness anyone misinterpreting the truth of God’s Word. The problem is that most people do not seek the Spirit of God for direction and interpretation. It is only through Jesus Christ that the Spirit can be found. Many claim to know the Gospel but spend very little time developing in an understanding of what the Gospel means for their lives.

Paul was well-versed in Scripture and raised by religion. But when he addressed the church of Corinth, he said: “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” He didn’t come to the church to show off his speaking skills or all that he knew. Paul came to share the Gospel. Only the Spirit of God could provide the humility that Paul needed to deny self and elevate Christ.

## Gifts From God

The Scripture reveals this same humility in Joseph. While Joseph was in prison, two men also in prison had dreams. These dreams troubled the prisoners. When Joseph recognized they were troubled, he asked them, 'Why do you look so sad today?' And they said to him, 'We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.' So Joseph said to them, 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' (Genesis 40:7-8). Then, Joseph interpreted their dreams. Later, he interpreted the Pharaoh's dream and was promoted to governor of Egypt. Like Paul, Joseph exalted God and not himself. He didn't take credit for the interpretation of dreams. He knew it was from God. This quality of humility only comes from the Spirit of God.

Just as the interpretation of dreams came from God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ also came from God. Why, then, do so many Christians choose to move away from the story of the Gospel and focus on other forms of knowledge? It is because of the spirit of pride. Pride drives a person to want to be recognized for what he knows. But this is not the call of God to Christians. The call of God to Christians is to share the story of the Gospel of Christ which will only happen with the Spirit of humility. The only salvation that any person can obtain is the salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

### Focus on Self

Self is proud of its own knowledge. It seeks to become an expert in some area of life to exalt itself in front of others. Paul was brilliant as a Jewish scholar, but he wasn't interested in promoting his intellectual skills. To know Jesus Christ and Him crucified was enough for Paul. If you are to be a humble servant, then you must lay down your own accomplishments and be satisfied with having a relationship with Jesus.

December 31

### The Mind of Christ is Strength

*For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*

1 Corinthians 2:16

### Focus on Christ

Are you a long distance runner? Have you ever spent any time running? If you haven't, then you may have heard that a large portion of running is accomplished mentally and not physically. Humans can be defeated from thoughts in the mind. A person's will to run can serve him well to finish a physical race. What about when we are discussing the Will of God?

Every Christian is running a spiritual race. Much like a physical race, the mind plays a large portion of completing the spiritual race well. However, there is a major difference in the mind between a physical race and a spiritual race: your human mind will not provide you the strength needed to complete your spiritual race. The Mind of

Christ set on the Will of God is needed to endure and complete this kind of race. You will not accomplish this by your own willpower. Only the Spirit of God can transform your mind from a sinful mind to the Mind of Christ.

Joseph ran a spiritual race and much like Christ, Joseph was treated badly by his brothers. Near the end of Joseph's story, Scripture tells of Joseph's response to his brothers after years of being separated from them. He revealed that he was their brother and said, "Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5). Where was the mind of Joseph? Was it on self or was it on God?

Joseph's concern was not on what his brothers did to him but on the purpose of God's Will. This mindset can only come from the Spirit of God and is the only way for a Christian to have strength to run his spiritual race. Many years passed from the time that Joseph was placed in a pit by his brothers to the moment in which he saw them again. During this time, he experienced many challenges. What allowed him to receive the Mind of the Lord is that he obeyed and learned from the Spirit of God.

You will never know the Will of God without the Spirit of God. If you are trying to live the Christian life with your own will power, then you will fail. The strength needed to finish your race well lies in the Mind of Christ. When your mind is the same as your Lord's Mind, it will be strong. It will also be difficult to sway your mind from the Will of God. This Mind will protect you and guide you to an eternity spent in the Presence of God. This is much more valuable than setting your mind on revenge. Surrender your mind to God and allow Him to change it into the Mind of Christ. This will be your strength to finish the race set before you.

**Focus on Self**

Self is not interested in paying the price for being right. When others disagree with self, it does not have strong enough character to stay faithful in doing the right thing. No matter what difficulty came Joseph's way, he remained faithful to God's assignment. It takes a person of integrity with the Mind of Christ to be strong in difficult situations. Are you willing to be that kind of person?

