

GUARDIAN 2013

DEVOTIONAL LESSONS

1. Miracles

When you are young, you dream and you believe in miracles. One of the saddest things that can happen to a human being is, the sin and the world take away our faith that miracles can happen. Instead of believing that life can be great, we simply try to survive. God does big miracles but He also does small miracles. God raises the dead but He also provides wine at weddings. God knows about the whole universe and about every sparrow that falls to the ground. He knows about the number of hairs on our head. We gonna look at 3 places where Jesus raised the dead. And we are going to ask the question why God did miracle in these situations.

1. Desperation

Luke 7:11-19 tells us the story of a widow in Nain. Imagine what a widow would have gone through seeing her only hope (son) passing away. Over and over in the Bible God came when the people were desperate. God does not come to the comfortable and He comes disturb them. But God comes to the disturbed in order to comfort them. He came to the Israelites when they were in slavery, they cried out in pain. In the days of the Judges He came when the people cried out to Him. This is one of the keys to miracles. It is to be desperate. Today may be you are facing a problem. May be it's a tough situation. May be it's a health problem. May be it's a money problem. May be it's a relationship problem. And you see no hope; no way out. This is when God is ready to work. But you got to go to the city gate and meet Jesus. If he can't see you He won't touch you. Many other people in the city buried their dead but Jesus did not heal them. But this woman was desperate. And in our times of desperation it is then we should turn not to bitterness, hatred or sin but to God. When you think you are all alone, Jesus is sitting right next to you. He wants you to see Him. He wants you to find Him. And some of us we faced many tough times and still we don't look for Jesus. God does miracles when in our desperation we seek Him.

2. Courage and Faith

Mark 5:21-24,35-43 tells us the story of Jairus daughter. This man was the ruler of the synagogue. His 12-year-old little girl is dying. He was desperate. A crowd as usually was surrounding Jesus. And Jairus begged Jesus for help. Even though he was a religious leader, a pastor, he was willing to say, "I need help". Then what happened? Jesus helped a woman who interrupted Him. If we were Jairus, we would have felt very stressed out as Jesus was helping this woman. While Jesus was talking, the bad news came. Your daughter is dead, don't bother the teacher anymore. Those who have children cannot imagine the sadness they would feel if they heard that news. Jesus ignored what they said. See people tell you to stop bothering with Jesus, you got to ignore them. Jesus told them not to afraid but believe. Once again one sentence from Jesus Christ raised the dead. This is amazing. Jairus must have been so happy. But it took courage and it took faith and it took humility for him to talk to Jesus. What would people think of us if we do what we think is right? Often the right thing to do is not the popular thing to do. It pleases you to give in to the crowd than to stand by conviction.

3. Love

John 11 tells us the story of Lazarus. Jesus saw how troubled they were. He saw them crying. He saw also not only them crying He saw the friends the Jews would come and they also were crying. If you cry at someone's funeral that is not your family, that shows love. There was so much love there. Jesus saw that love and He wanted to do something. Look at some conversion stories in our ministries. Why our ministries grew - there was so much love. Oh, brother there were mistakes. You know parents love their children. That doesn't mean they don't make mistakes. We pray to God that we don't grow up always talking about the mistakes of our parents instead of the love of our parents. God does miracles because He sees the love in our lives.

Love is not easy. Much easier to love a stranger (beggar) than to love someone you know. The stranger never sinned against us. But wives, husbands, children, they've sinned and we have sinned against them. Much harder to love them. Very hard to love sinners and yet the Bible teaches when sinners can learn to love each other, the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus. Not by hatred, nor by division, not by condemnation but by our love, God's love is made evident to the world. You want to see miracles show some love. God looks for people who are filled with love so He can do some miracles. The human solution to problems is to get stressed out, to get selfish, to push people away and to work on the problem.

Miracles we want them. How can we have them? Jesus is enough. We need desperation to find them. We need courage, faith and humility to say I need help. Do not hesitate to talk about your life to someone who can guide you with scriptures. We need love. No matter how desperate your situation is you can always show love. Hard to love sinners but that's what Jesus did. Miracles, let's see them.

2. The Cost Of Being A Disciple

December 31st is a crucial date in the world where most of them take resolutions / decisions. We have also personally done this at the year end. Whether we complete it or not, taking resolutions is attached to our life. It is a good attachment, because we can be clear of what our desires are, what we wanted to become and the faith that we have towards it.... God will grant our desires. (Psa 37:4) Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Taking resolutions is like participating in a Marathon. Participation is good. To be a disciple the following are some that we got to take note of it.

1. Seek First His Kingdom.

(Luke 14:26) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

If we wanted to be Jesus disciple we got seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. Then we know and can be sure of what will happen to our lives.

2. Carry Your Cross.

(Luke 14:27) And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Cross may feel heavy, burdensome...but still we should not keep it down. There were people asking Jesus to come down from the cross. There will be people asking us to keep the cross down. We got to decide to carry it. Keeping it down cannot bring glory to God.

3. Keep Building Your Spiritual Life

(Luke 14:28-30) "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

We all decided to build our relationship with God when we got baptized. Stopping it in the middle is giving rooms for others to ridicule. If we are given an option to either destroy it or build it, we will choose to build it definitely not destroy it. If we don't build it, some parts may get destroyed (like if you keep the incomplete building idle for some time). So let us take efforts in building our spiritual life.

4. Give Up Everything.

(Luke 14:31-33) "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Can we think we can win war against God? It is better for us to surrender and be at the feet of God. What is something we are not able to give up? Let us decide to give up and see the fruits.

5. Salt With Saltiness

(Luke 14:34-35) "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

If we loose our edge being a disciple that means we loose saltiness, then we will be thrown out. This is a warning. Whatever situation we may be in God has the power to change and make us more salty again. Can people around you see you being salty?

In Luke 15, we can see the parable of lost sheep, lost coin and lost son. Let us make efforts in doing what is right. Let us not worry about the 99 good things that we have but let us find out that one good thing which we have lost (it may be sharing our faith, being joyful, self control, coming to meetings, reading the Bible.....) and then rejoice with it.

Satan's victory is for good people to do nothing. Remember there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

3. Five Principles Of Evangelism

Dictionary: Evangelism: 1) Zealous preaching and dissemination of the gospel, as through missionary work. 2) Militant zeal for a cause.

1. You're Going

(Mat 10:5-7) These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.'"

As You Go! The thing that stuck out to me as I began reading this passage was Jesus' decisiveness. First he tells them who to go to: the Jews. Second, he tells them who not to go to: the Gentiles. But most importantly he tells them that they are going! Notice with me the phrase, "As you are going." He does not say "if you go," or "when you go," but "as you go!" In other words, "You are going!" For any Christian evangelism is not an option: It is a command!

2. Meet People's Needs

(Mat 10:8) Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

More Than Just Preaching Notice that Jesus tells them to do more than preach, but they are also to meet people's needs. He tells them to do it freely. We must meet people's physical as well as spiritual needs. We cannot just tell people to get saved when they don't see you caring for them. It is hard to hear the gospel when you hide Jesus' love, instead you should reflect Jesus' love. We are meeting people's physical needs. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

3. God Will Meet Our Needs

(Mat 10:9-10) Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.

Jesus tells the disciples not to take anything extra with them. He did this in order for them to realize that He will meet their needs. 2 Cor. 5:7 - "We live by faith and not by sight." (Are you

worried that we don't have enough chairs in our church hall?) Our God Will Supply. There is no situation that God cannot supply the need. We need not worry that there are not enough funds for us to reach out to the lost, because our God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. In evangelism as in anything else, we walk by faith and not by sight. There is no need so big God cannot handle it.

4. Results Are Not Our Responsibility

(Mat 10:11-15) "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

"If They Don't Receive You", Jesus tells his disciples that if people don't receive them or the message to shake it off. He tells them this because it is not the messenger that they are rejecting it is the message. If they reject the message they reject Jesus and His offer of salvation. Remember that it is Jesus they are rejecting. Our job is to deliver the message. We are not responsible for how they accept our warning, but we are responsible to give them the warning.

5. There May Be Dangers

(Mat 10:16) I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

Like Sheep Among Wolves Notice the irony here: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, sends his flock among the wolves. So Jesus tells them to be as "shrewd as snakes." Snakes in ancient culture were looked on as being sly and cunning. But he also tells them to be as "innocent as doves." The word "innocent" means "unmixed," and indicates that the disciples are to be pure in morals and motive. We must be clever and creative in our efforts. But we must also be people of integrity. Evangelizing is not always easy, but it is our call.

4. God Sees Our Heart

1 Samuel 16:7 says that God looks at the heart and not at the outward appearance. This century job appointments depend on EQ (Emotion Quotient) rather than IQ (Intelligence Quotient). Your placement depends on how stable you are emotionally.

Our heart and our mind are two different sources of guidance for us from within. Our mind is the conscience which law and legalism whereas our heart is feeling and emotion. Our mind and our heart are always at war. A mentally healthy person's heart and the mind are at peace and agreeing

with each other. The mind is logical and cannot be changed whereas the heart is deceitful over everything. So what kind of a heart does God look for.

1. Healthy heart. Deuteronomy 6:5-8

A healthy heart loves God. It is emotionally bonded with God. It is in love with God like a boy and a girl who are in love with each other. A healthy heart will always want to have a great prayer time with God. It has a passion for God. It falls in love with God's Word again and again. It feels close to God. It is not ashamed to open up the inner most feeling, whether hate or compassion, to God. It enjoys singing to God. It is emotionally up and down only to God like David in the Psalms does. Eagle soars up always keeps altitude. Lesson: Keep your feelings flying high for God.

2. Earnest heart. Jeremiah 29:13

Bible says ask, seek and knock. Instead we complain, grumble and give up. We all have desires but we don't get it because we do not ask. (James 4). When we ask there is no specific prayer but a general prayer because the heart is not sincere. An earnest heart initiates to pray with each other. An earnest heart fellowships eagerly. An earnest heart always initiates to help with the needs in the church. Cock always crows in the morning sincerely no matter whether it had a bad yesterday. Lesson: Cocks don't have to be reminded of the basic things.

3. Ambitious heart. Psalms 119:11

An ambitious heart keeps the life pure provided the ambition is Godly. Jesus was ambitious to accomplish his mission of seeking and saving the lost. An ambitious heart does not build walls around the heart but it invites others to get in. What is the use of having a Mysore Palace, which we cannot see it? What is the use of having Taj-Mahal, which we cannot see it? As disciples we have a very beautiful heart. What is the use if we are not able to show it to others? Cat with a flick of the tail decides to ignore its master. No matter how close we want to get to the cat it will never get close to you. Lesson: Cats cannot be disciplined.

4. Repent-ful heart. Mt 5:8

A repent-ful heart loves challenges. It looks for challenges. It looks forward for input. It craves for spiritual food. It learns from all sources. It takes notes when others teach somebody. It makes notes, as someone gets disciplined by somebody else. It does not take things personally. It asks for challenges. It is willing to be open. A repentful heart is a soft heart. Pig when washed and scented always goes back to wallowing in the mud. Lesson: It has no conviction on its own.

5. Thankful heart. I Chronicles 28:9

A Thankful heart searches to find the things that God has done for it. A thankful heart is always ready to share good news. It considers every small thing that happens in its life and sees God behind it. It keeps a record of 'rights' God has done for it. Dog comes back and licks the master even if he kicks him out. Lesson: It does not keep a record of wrong.

The heart therefore has five necessities to be appreciated. 1) Healthy heart 2) Earnest heart 3) Ambitious heart 4) Repent-ful heart. 5) Thankful heart

5. Who Will Do

(Judg 1:1 NIV) After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked the LORD, Who will be the first to go up and fight for us against the Canaanites?

The good thing that Israelites did after the death of Joshua is asking advice from the Lord or in other words praying to the Lord. Today do we take to the Lord the needs in our ministry? The experiences, talents, gifts..., can take our life to some extent. If there is confusion of where we are heading towards it is better for us to kneel down and pray and ask God specifically like the Israelites. (Prov 3:5,6) Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. As disciples our focus is to (Col 3:1,2) set our hearts on things above., set our minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Three possible answers for the question Who will do?:

1. You Do

If this is the answer then we must be ready to do that. May be that should be in the higher priority. Like in the parable of the lost sheep, one lost soul is higher priority than taking care of the 99 sheep. There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than organizing retreats, camps, discipling groups, Sunday services, special services for the 99 in our ministries!! There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than attending retreats, camps, discipling groups, Sunday services, special services with the 99 in our ministries!! Different needs are there in different ministries, when God has put a burden in our heart, then that burden should be given higher priority.

(Judg 1:2 NIV) The LORD answered, Judah is to go; I have given the land into their hands. When we pray God will answer who will fulfill that need in our ministries. Everything in the world belongs to us as we belong to God. What are we known for as a Church? What are we known for as a disciple? God wanted us to pray for harvesters. Are we known for raising up harvesters or raising up funds? Funds are like the lands in Canaan which God has promised to give us. We need harvesters to capture them.

Few possible kind of excuses could be :

- (i). I am too busy. I have lot of other things to do.
- (ii). Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? - Moses (Exo.3:11)
- (iii). if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders. - Gideon (Judg. 6:13)
- (iv) Lord, what about him? - Peter (John 21:21) ...

2. Let Him Do

Imagine if Simeonites asked the question Who will do? and they in their mind wanted to lead, and God answering Judah to lead? When Judah called Simeonites(Judg 1:3) for help they helped them with all their heart. When God has chosen someone to do certain things in His Kingdom are we behind that someone? It takes heart and humility to think for someones responsibility and build them up. (Phil 2:3,4) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Even though David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, when the Lord told Solomon would build it, David was very grateful. He prepared most of the things for Solomon to build it.

Few possible kind of excuses could be :

- (i) It is your calling, you do it. I will do mine.
- (ii) I am hurt. I am not recognized. There is no trust.

..

3. No One

God told Moses, no one would enter the promised land except for Caleb and Joshua. If this is the answer then there should be some major repentance. Who knows God can show grace like in the days of Nineveh. Before any great restoration there was a time of fasting, praying and repentance. Like for example before Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem, Daniel prayed and fasted for the people of Israel,.. God expected Isaiah to preach until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant (Isa. 6:11)!!

Few possible kind of excuses could be :

- 1. We are too busy to see what is in Gods heart.
- 2. Let God do whatever in His mind.
- 3. We are content with our glory days or the present scenario.

(Heb 10:35-39) So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

6. Being Effective And Productive In Christ

Genesis 1:28 :- God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

This is the first commandment God gave to mankind. God wanted to see the whole world filled with his people. Hence in the earlier days that was the main focus for God to see his physical

children to fill the earth. Of course, it has been fulfilled now. We have around 600 crores of people around the world. Now God wants us to fill this earth with his spiritual children through Jesus Christ. (Math 28:18-20). As disciples God has given us this charge to fill this earth with true disciples. To accomplish it we need to stay strong in two important aspects of life. 1. Personal Growth 2. Personal Outreach

1. Personal Growth

As disciples God expects us to grow. How do we feel about your Christian life? Do we feel we have grown? As a disciple growth is not an option every Christian is expected to grow and bear fruit. What are the areas we must grow in?

(2 Pet 1:5-11) For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How are we doing, are we growing in these characters or are we diminishing in our spiritual lives. There is no other greater joy than seeing us change and grow. God is not pleased with those who shrink back. (Heb 10:38 NIV) But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." (Heb 12:1,2) .., let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...

2. Personal Outreach

It was incredible to see the victories, which God has given us since the Church planted. But its not over yet we must fulfill God's vision for us. As a kingdom we have grown in number but yet we are still a drop in an ocean. God has called and chosen with a purpose for this world. God wanted to fulfill His promises through us. If we don't do it we will be replaced. In which way are we reaching out to the lostness around us?

- (i) In our jobs / studies are we reflecting Christs love?
- (ii) Are we impacting people living around us?
- (iii) Will our children accept Jesus as Lord seeing our faith and life?
- (iv) How much faith we have that God can use us as a powerful instrument?

God wanted us to be the salt of the earth and light of world.

(Mat 5:13-16) "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

7. The Harvest Is Plenty

God has always proved that the harvest is plenty! He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." Luke 10:2. Jesus prayed that workers be sent and God being faithful did send the workers. We may wonder, "Who are the workers? Where are they coming from? Are we importing any one from abroad? No! we are the workers! We are the answered prayer of Jesus! In order for us to have a great harvest we need to understand three things.

1. Understand The Value Of Soul

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? –MARK 8:36. Jesus understands the value of soul. Because that is the only thing from the earth, that will reach the heaven! The soul is more valuable than the whole world. Sometime we don't understand the value so we run around with so many worldly ambitions, works, problems, yet fail to understand there is nothing more valuable in the world than saving souls.

Why?

- A. Because of its origin : Life is from God /we are made in his image. Gen. 1: 27 say that God created man in his own image
- b. Duration of existence : Every thing, other than our souls will perish. Matthew 25:46 says "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
- c. Cost of redemption : The cost paid for our souls is very high - blood of Jesus(1Peter 1:18-19)

That is why the Bible says in Proverbs 11:30 - The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

2. Understand The Value Of Relationships

Paul says in 1 Thes. 2:8, that he was delighted to share not only the gospel but also his life. Many people in the world are looking for a meaningful friendship. A loving caring disciple can definitely provide that. 1 Cor 9:19-23 says in order to win souls for Jesus we need to become all for all men / women. These are the few things you can do with them.

- A. Build a great friendship as you share the gospel
- b. Be hospitable. Share your meal with them. Food is a great entrance to peoples heart (especially men)
- c. Visit their homes. Jesus did
- d. Find out their obstacles and be patient with them

- e. Pray consistently for them. It helps you to remind yourself that God is in control of their lives not you
- f. Never give up! Remember love perseveres
- g. Involve other Christians who can be their friends

3. Understand The Value Of Building For God

As we build his kingdom we got to understand one thing! Whatever we do we need to do it for the glory of God. 1 Cor 10:39 says, “ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”. According to Jesus in John 15:8 we bear fruit for the glory of the father. Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness - Psalm 115:1. We work hard, do our follow ups, study the Bible with people, go to their house when they miss an appointment, be patient with them when they doubt us and don’t believe in God’s word .We do all this with one purpose -to Bring glory to God!

Secondly we need to be careful how we build 1 Cor. 3:10 says “But each one should be careful how he builds”. It is our conviction that the fruit comes from the Lord. But how you build in your ministry comes from your conviction. We need to build a house for the Lord that will stand the test of time!

- A. Answer their doubts
- b. Ask lots of questions
- c. Expect them to do the challenges after each study
- d. Pray with them!
- E. Teach them to evangelize!
- F. Challenge their weakness.

So let us have a great harvest in the coming months! We pray that the Lord of the Harvest will bless us as we do His work.

8. Create History In Our Movement

God’s modern day movement is historic. Your salvation is historic. Your call to be a disciple is historic. What you do will create history!

Last year has been memorable for our church with the great victories. God brought about and the struggles every one of us went through. It has been a year of learning to fear God, learning to be open, learning to meet the various needs of the church, learning to resolve our hearts, learning to bond in our relationships, learning to love the lost, learning to venture out into new areas, learning to take advice, learning to be humble, learning to be responsible, and learning to have fun. But importantly was a year of learning!! As disciples we cannot ever stop learning! Romans 15:4 (KJV) says “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

1. Restore Our Reliance On God’s Word

Isaiah 50:10 Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God.
Practicals:

- Decide what will be the plan of action in your Bible study. Have somebody who will hold you accountable.
- Distribute it through the whole year – with a plan everyday. Write down what you have learned in a scrap book.
- Teach it to make it your conviction

2. Restore Our Walk With God

Genesis 32:24-28 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome." –

Notice, how God dealt with Jacob! This is how God makes an Israel out of Jacob. This is how God makes a prince out of a con man. This is how God takes us as we are and makes us what we should be. Are you ready for this? This is a struggle until the breaking of day in your life.

3. Restore Our Love For The Lost

Souls baptized last year have stories to say and every story has a man/woman of God who made the difference. This year new pages can be written, new stories can be told, new dreams can be built if only we realize that God wants you as His instrument. Let us plan to be a fruitful vine for our God!

Together let us set out this year, to do what has never been done before in our lives. In the guts of our soul, we are all alike, fearing the same fears and desiring the same desires. None of us is an exception yet each of us can make a difference. That's the truth! It is a struggle until day break – but the day break will come!

9. Do You Want To Please God?

Yes, all of us wanted to do that. Sometimes! we give into pleasing ourselves more than God. But nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The following are **some tools to please God**

1. Faith

Heb 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Today, do we believe that God rewards us when we earnestly seek Him?

2. Obedience

2 Tim. 2:4 - No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer.

Is God our commanding officer in our life as a disciple?

3. Singing

Ps. 69:30,31 - I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs.

Keeping singing songs....

4. Giving

Heb. 13:16 - And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Is there any plan for us to do anything today?

5. Being Pure

Prov. 15:26- The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to Him. Rom. 8:8 - Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Let us decide to be pure in our thoughts.

6. Caring For Our Own Family

1 Tim.5:4 - But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

Are we caring for our immediate family?

Serving With RPJ : *Rom. 14:17,18 - For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of Righteousness, Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.*

How can we say we are pleasing God in every way?

1. By bearing fruit in every good work
2. By growing in the knowledge of God
3. Endurance b. Patience

4. By joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light.

Col. 1:10-12 - And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

2 Cor 5:9 - So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

10. The Potter

Gen. 2:7 the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. We see that we were formed from the dust of the earth. Our lifeless bodies were made from a lump of clay. God has given us life. Let us use our lives to the best for our maker.

Isa. 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

God is the potter and we are the clay. We will learn a few lessons from the potter.

1. The Potter Has A Plan For Our Life

Jeremiah 18:1-6. This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." 3 So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

In Vs.2-3 we see the picture of the potter at work on his clay. He is using the wheel to make pots etc. That is what God does with us. He is in constant work on our lives. When you take a close look at the clay, there is nothing attractive about it. Nothing but mud and water! However, when he touches it and uses it that ordinary piece of clay transforms into something valuable, pretty and honorable. It is the same with us. God does have a plan for our life, although we may look small, inferior, and insignificant. Nevertheless, when God starts his work on us we turn out to become something wonderful in the maker's hand. God has a plan for our lives. *Jer. 29:11 - A plan to prosper us and to give us a hope.* Let the potter begin his work on us. Remember we are in God's hand. Think about the areas where God has transformed us from nobody to somebody.

2. The Potter Always Shapes Us

Jer. 18:4-The potter takes a useless piece of clay and then makes it into a vessel, a vessel that looked good. How many of us have seen a potter at his work? He uses his hand to shape the clay. This clay then begins to get shape and soon a vessel, a pot a thing of value begins to evolve. God is always shaping us. He is making us beautiful, a vessel of honor. Rom. 9:21-The potter has the right to make his clay the way he wants it, each one of us he makes differently according to his desire. When you look at us, we are all so different, characters are different, we look different, talents are different but we are used for the glory of God. All of us are instruments used by God in various ways.

Today are you willing to be shaped? Many of us we refuse to be shaped. We have to understand that God has sovereign rights over us. We are his. When we refuse to be shaped, he adds pressure until we humble ourselves before him. That is what happened to Jonah. He refused to be shaped. God had to use pressure until he submitted to him. Various ways God uses to shape us. 1.Discipler, 2.D. Groups, 3.Tragedies, 4.Parents, 5.Situations. Think about different times where God used you to shape you and make you a better person. Challenge-don't refuse to be shaped by God.

3. The Potter Can Be Trusted.

Jer. 18:5,6 – God speaks to Jeremiah about the nation Israel, telling him he could do to learn what he does to clay. Our life is in God's hands. God's hands are the safest hands to be in. Isa. 49:15-16. Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16. See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

The greatest bond in the world is between mother and child at her breast, and yet we see time and again that relationship breaks. Children are mistreated, orphaned, punished, ill treated but when it comes to God we can rely on him and we can trust him, for he is not like our human fathers and mothers. God is different. He will never leave us or forsake us. Do you trust the potter with your life today? Many people have been damaged by 1.relationships, 2.sickness, 3.failures in life, 4.broken families, 5.death, 6.marriages.

Today we may have experienced some of these things, we may have had hard time trusting people for what they did to you, may be we are scared that this could happen to us again. The Good news is that the potter is different, when we're hurt he is hurt, when we cry he cries, he wants us to know that he is different, he can be trusted. It is time to go back to God. It is time to revive our relationship with him. If we have strayed away from him, it is time to get back make a decision to trust him with our life. Stop doubting and believe, when we allow God to work on us, to shape us and when we trust him in everything with our jobs, our marriages, our families and our lives he will make us into vessels of honor.

11. Being Spiritual

We have begun the year with great inspiration. There are always many things to do. With so much of work on our shoulders, if we don't remain spiritual, our work, rather than bringing joy can burden us.

The need of the hour is being spiritual. The following scripture depicts the quality of a spiritual disciple. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.- Ezra 7:10

A spiritual disciple is one who,

- devotes himself to learning
- determined to put it into practice
- desires to help others to learn

1. LEARNING

- Ps 119:73 - Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.
- Matt.11:29 - Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
- Heb. 5:11 - We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.

We need to learn from God's word through life changing Bible studies! He asked us to learn from Him. This means that in every situation we learn to ask what He would do and say .

Many times we feel like Martha running around yet not choosing to sit and learn from Jesus. In the end, we see ourselves frustrated and tense. When we learn from Jesus, He guarantees peace in our hearts. It is all about not how much we read but how much God has spoken to our heart.

2. PRACTICING

- James 1:25- But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it-- he will be blessed in what he does.
- II Thes.3:13 - And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.
- Gal 6:9 -Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

It is important to listen to what God's word says but it is much more important to obey it. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study by the effect it has on our daily lives. Let us make sure we practice what we've heard before the devil takes it away from our hearts. It is by obeying that we understand the truth (John 8:32) not by learning alone. As we prepare our hearts for different roles in our lives, let us make sure we remain in the word.

3. TEACHING

- 1 Tim. 4:13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.
- 2 Tim. 2:24-25 -And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to knowledge of the truth.

Teaching can only follow doing. Good teaching never promotes quarrels or foolish arguments. There are many who do not know the truth and many who are confused about it. If we are good teachers we will be able to help them turn from the error of their ways. The best way we can serve others is by teaching God's words in all its truth.

Let us equip our heart with God's word .It is time to go to him to seek his favor ! Because we know that we can do nothing without Him!

12. The Measure Of A Strong Church

The Bible describes the Church as a body, a family, a temple, a kingdom and a bride. Each and every family group is like a Church. Below is a study of how our family group should ideally be.

1. Church as a body.

(Col 1:18) And he is the head of the body, the Church; Can we say an organism and not an organization? Few things regarding the body.

- *(1 Cor 12:27) each one of you is a part of it.*
- *(1 Cor 12:25) parts should have equal concern for each other.*
- *(Rom 12:4) Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function. Each of us have different functions.*
- *(1 Cor 12:23,24) God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it.*

How each of us functions as a member of the body affects the strength of the congregation!

2. Church as a family.

(Eph 2:19) Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

(1 Tim 3:15) people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

- *(Gal 6:10) let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

- *(Heb 2:11) Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. Let us not be ashamed to call anyone brother or sister.*
- *(1 Tim 5:8) If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. As it is our responsibility to provide for our physical family, let us do the same for the family of believers. (meeting the needs of the Church)*
- *(Mat 12:25) every household divided against itself will not stand. Let us support and encourage one another.*

A willingness to get to know one another is very important for a healthy congregation. How each of us provides for the needs of the Church shows how healthy the congregation is!

3. Church as a temple.

(1 Cor 3:16) Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? The purpose of the Temple is to offer sacrifices. Today can we say spiritual sacrifices?

- *(Heb 13:15) let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.*
- *(Heb 13:16) And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*
- *(Rom 12:1,2) offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.*
- *(1 Cor 3:17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

How each of us offer spiritual sacrifices to God through our voices, body and service is a true measure of the congregation.

4. Church as a kingdom.

(Col 1:13) For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son.. Kingdom suggests a King. When there is a king there are subjects too. This calls for obedience and submission. Few things about the kingdom of God.

- *(Rom 14:17-19) For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*
- *(1 Cor 4:20) For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

How each person submits to the Lordship of Jesus Christ is a true measure of any congregation.

5. Church as a bride.

(Eph 5:25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Bride suggests Purity and Chastity.

□ *(Eph 5:26) cleansed by the washing with water through the word*

How each of us submits to God and His words reflects the purity of the congregation.

13. Righteousness, Peace and Joy

*Romans 14:13-18 - Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. [14] As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. [15] If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.[16] Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. [17] **For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, [18] because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.***

Sometimes, we can get a bit nit-picky with one another. We used to argue about small things which are not important and take crazy stands.

If we get this principle right, we're pleasing to God and approved by men. That's as good as it gets in the Kingdom--pleasing God and men. Some of us say, "God likes me, but nobody else can stand me". Others are more concerned about praise from men than from God. If we live the right way, it's possible to do both.

Paul says there are three keys to living this kind of life.

1. Righteousness.

This is a funny concept. It gets a reaction from everyone--never boring.

Acts 24:24-26 - Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. [25] As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." [26] At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

When Paul got a chance, he discoursed on righteousness, self-control and judgment. What do I discourse on when I have a few minutes? Sports, politics?. The judgment to come--now that's a conversation stopper. Righteousness always causes people to react.

How are we doing on our personal righteousness? The awkwardness that comes from

unrighteousness can kill us spiritually. Righteousness is where the joy comes from, the source of our zeal. How much does it cut us when we make even one mistake?

We can be righteous in nine areas, but that one area can pull us down. You may do everything well, but if you're not bold, you feel weak. It feels so great to be bold, because righteousness matters.

2. Peace

*Isaiah 32:17-20 - **The fruit of righteousness will be peace**; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.[18] My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest. [19] Though hail flattens the forest and the city is leveled completely, [20] how blessed you will be, sowing your seed by every stream, and letting your cattle and donkeys range free.*

The fruit of righteousness should be peace. That's its effect in our lives. The world doesn't really value righteousness very much. They don't care if you're disciplined, if you get up and pray. The one thing they are looking for, though, is peace. Most of the time they think money, sex, success is the key to peace.

When you really are righteous, the result should be peace. People will be drawn to our lives when they see the peace that passes understanding. As a disciple, we're not going to avoid suffering. God does help us, though, and give us peace in our lives.

Many times we get too worked up about righteousness, and lose the peace. How secure are we? How much do people look at us in awe? At the end of our lives, we'll still fall short, no matter how hard we try.

It mentions hail here in this passage. When we put God first, he always takes care of us.

3. Joy

*Luke 10:17-24 - The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." [18] He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. [19] I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. [20] However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but **rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**" [21] At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. [22] "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." [23] Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.[24] For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."*

This passage is interesting. The disciples are so fired up because they had a great day. Jesus

warns them, even at the high time, not to depend on circumstances for their joy. If we tie our joy to results, we go up and down.

We train people after a while to discern what kind of state we're in. "She's in a bad mood. Stay away from her . . ." This is why Jesus challenged them to tie their joy to their salvation. Some days the demons submit, and some days they don't. Jesus wants our joy to come from the permanent place, in heaven.

In the kingdom of God, there's one guarantee. We can get to heaven if we want to. We never know our career will succeed. We never know, when we will get married, to whom, what will happen even after we get married. Things happen, but one thing is for sure, we can be saved if we want to. Your boss can fire you, your spouse can leave you, but nobody can take your relationship with God.

Romans 14:18 anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

14. Time Management

Time is a creation of God. Time is God's currency, not ours. Time is free. You can't buy it, you can't sell it. We all have the same amount. Doesn't matter how old you are, what gender or race, we all are in the same situation

Why then, do some not have enough? We never have enough, but we routinely waste it. Everybody has their own time, but everybody wants others time! It's a precious resource, but often we don't know where it went. We are in charge of what we do with the time that God gives us.

Eccl. 3:1 - There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.

There must be a time for everything. But many times we are tempted to say, "we don't have time". God says there is time, but we say we don't have time. What can we say about this? If we really believe there's a time for everything, then our job is to figure out when it is. Three quick points on time management :

1. Make The Kingdom Of God The Top Priority

Mat 6:33,34 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Today we see many people are confused with different priorities. God should be number one in our lives. If we give what belongs to God, then with the rest God can do the best through us. The pagans run after the things of this world, as Christians if we seek His Kingdom, God fulfills all our other needs.

On a daily basis our time should be focused on the following : 1. Quiet Times, 2. Spouse, 3. Children, 4. Ministry, 5. Job and 6. Self.

Practically we have only 24 hours! Can we say this as an example :

Job : 12 hours max (includes travel to and fro)
Sleep : 8 hours max (medically minimum 6 hours is recommended)
Personal : 2 hours max (eating, daily duties....)
Total : 22 hours
Balance : 2 hours

Can we say everybody in general has 2 hours for Quiet Times and Ministry. With the list given above then family and children can be adjusted with the sacrifice made on our sleep and job. Lots of time is wasted on unproductive things, for ex. watching TV, Godless chatter.... How about taking a fast on not watching TV for a week, you may find more time spending with your family and friends/disciples!

2. Make It Your Ambition To Lead A Quiet Life

1 Th 4:11,12 - Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Many of us do not have time because our lives have become very complicated. The Bible advises Christians to lead a quiet, or in other words simple life. For ex. our forefathers did not have computers, cars, mobiles, gadgets.... so they had more time for their families. Those gadgets actually reduces the amount of time involved in different jobs. If we are disciplined we can make use of them for right priorities. Let us think of using the gadgets so that we can get more time to lead a quiet and simple life.

3. Make Plans

Isaiah 32:8 - But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands. God wants us to make plans. Something coming up? Plan it out in advance. Planning enables us to use our time according to priorities. Few scriptures from Proverbs :

Prov 14:22 - those who plan what is good find love and faithfulness.

Prov 16:3 - Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.

Prov 20:18 - Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.

Prov 21:5 - The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

Prov 12:5 - The plans of the righteous are just .

Time management is complex, but God is in charge and he can help us figure it out. Jesus didn't have a watch, didn't have a system and yet he knew the time for everything.

15. The Gatekeeper

Gatekeepers are one of the important groups of people in Old Testament times. In the book of Ezra and Nehemiah we can see this statement coming again and again - priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants. Gatekeepers are separated for the sake of the Law of God - (Neh 10:28) The rest of the people--priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters .

There were 4000 gatekeepers when Solomon became the king over Israel - (1 Chr 23:1-5). When the temple and the wall was rebuilt during Ezra and Nehemiah's time, there were more than a hundred gatekeepers (Ezra 2:42 , Neh. 7:45, Neh. 11:19)

We will see a passage from I Chronicles chapter 9. 1 Chron. 9:20-27 - In earlier times Phinehas son of Eleazar was in charge of the **gatekeepers**, and the Lord was with him. [21] Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was the **gatekeeper** at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.[22] Altogether, those chosen to be **gatekeepers** at the thresholds numbered 212. They were registered by genealogy in their villages. The **gatekeepers** had been assigned to their positions of trust by David and Samuel the seer. [23] They and their descendants were in charge of guarding the gates of the house of the Lord--the house called the Tent. [24] The **gatekeepers** were on the four sides: east, west, north and south. [25] Their brothers in their villages had to come from time to time and share their duties for seven-day periods. [26] But the four principal **gatekeepers**, who were Levites, were entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. [27] They would spend the night stationed around the house of God, because they had to guard it; and they had charge of the key for opening it each morning.

1. Hold The Key.

Imagine if you had been chosen personally by David and Samuel. They saw you, they knew you and they trusted you. You were part of the fellowship of Phineas. And you have given the key to the treasury, store room. You will be very careful of where you are keeping the key. You may be wearing the key on your shoulder. The very fact that you held that key was a testimony to your spirituality and integrity.

We are the gatekeeper to unlock the treasures of God. It's through our words, our actions, our lives that people in the world will be able to access God's treasures. Have you ever lost your keys? Imagine you are ready to leave for church on Sunday . . . tank is filled, tires are new, engine is tuned but you can't go anywhere without the key.

How are we holding the keys to the knowledge? Luke 11:52 "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering." The Pharisees took away the key, and hurt the faith of those who wanted to enter. They locked themselves out, but also blocked the way to thousands of genuine seekers.

People who want to be saved, may not be saved through us, if we fall short of God's standard in

our lives. We hold the keys for millions and millions of souls to access the treasures of God. God has given us the keys for the salvation of the billion in India. How responsible are we with the keys?

2. Guard The Treasure.

One of the main responsibility of a gatekeeper is guarding the treasury – which can include armor, gold, silver and other precious metals. The gatekeepers spent every night guarding the temple, and they opened it each morning. They performed God's service and the service of purification (Neh 12:44,25).

Today we can see God has given us responsibility to guard His treasures. Are we setting aside time to be a gatekeeper in God's Kingdom on a daily basis? Are we ready to guard what has already been entrusted to us? (2 Tim 1:14) Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you-- guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us .

Another way to guard is to make sure we are not giving ears to opposing ideas and godless chatter. (1 Tim 6:20,21) Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith .

3. Receive The Blessings

Let us see from the scriptures some blessings for the gatekeepers.

- They stayed along with ministering priests – (Neh 10:39) The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay. "We will not neglect the house of our God." Will we be ready to stay along with those who minister?
- Daily portions were given to them – (Neh 12:47) So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. Do we believe that God will bless our daily portions if we are gatekeepers to His kingdom.
- Gatekeepers are not bound to pay taxes - (Ezra 7:24) You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God. Do we believe that there will be special consideration if we are gatekeepers?

Today in the kingdom of God, we are priests, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants. We must all be involved in performing God's service.

16. God's Righteous Servant

Righteous is not about being right. It's all about being in the right relationship. In the original language, the concept of righteousness is fulfilling the duties of your relationship role.

- * Two criminals could be considered righteous in their relationships.
- * Parents need to raise their children without harshness.
- * Children need to be obedient and respectful.
- * Husbands and wives have different roles to fulfill.
- * Citizen and police officer have a certain relationship.

We need to put relationship over being right. Relationship needs to take precedence over being right. That's an important principle for all of us. As Christians, we understand what being right means. We can still be unrighteous in relationship, though. We'd like to be right and righteous at the same time. It's even harder to be wronged and righteous.

1. Right, but unrighteous

John 12:1-6 Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. [2] Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. [3] Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. [4] But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, [5] "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." [6] He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

Judas was an accountant / treasurer. He handled the money. Remember when Jesus called him in Mark 3? Did Jesus make a mistake; did he pick a bad egg when he chose Judas as an apostle? John 15:15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Even after Judas started going bad, Jesus still spoke this about him. Matthew 26:49-50 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. [50] Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. Jesus still called Judas "friend," even after he decided to betray Jesus. The relationship had already changed. Judas shifted from "friend" to "teacher" What happened? How did he make that transition from being chosen to being betrayer? Here are a few possibilities . . .

Was he in debt? He didn't have credit cards, but perhaps he could have had debts he couldn't pay. When you get in debt, it is one of the greatest traps that Satan can use to draw you away from God. Maybe Judas had a financial problem. Maybe he had a difference of opinion. Many times we have struggles with how money is spent. It's a difference of opinion, or we don't understand. The key is that when we don't give others the benefit of the doubt, we lose our trust.

Maybe he lost his outward focus. It says he didn't really care about the poor. Maybe he started caring more about himself than he cared about others. Whatever the cause, Judas was technically right but he lost the relationship.

When we think of relationships, we can think of God, Christians and the lost. We need to be close to all three. The lost is probably the hardest for some, God is middle and our peers are the easiest. If we are not close to our brothers, though, if we have not forgiven them, then we are not close to God.

2. Righteous, although wronged

Matthew 27:32-42. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. [33] They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). [34] There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. [35] When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. [36] And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. [37] Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the King of the Jews. [38] Two robbers were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. [39] Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads [40] and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" [41] In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. [42] "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.

Have you ever known you're right, and yet been unable to convince others? How do you feel when they mock you? Jesus didn't fight to be right, but sacrificed everything to save the relationship. 1 Peter 2:23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Sometimes we are right, but are we willing to give that up and be wronged for the sake of relationship. Jesus was our ultimate example, and he didn't choose to grasp his rights (Phil 2). 1 Cor. 6:7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

It's better to be wronged than to lose the relationship. Jesus was wronged, but he was righteous. Let's determine to be righteous in relationship, not just right in our judgments and actions. We need to see everything from a spiritual perspective. We need to see God's hand at work. We just need to be faithful to God till the end. If we can keep our relationships right, that's really all that matters.

17. Magic Of Motivation

Where there is motivation there we can see miracles! Many of us require motivation to do our duties. As disciples let us see how we can motivate one another.

1. Be Friends and Fellow-Workers

Philemon 1:1-3 - Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, [2] to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: [3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Most of us know the story about Philemon. Paul has been evangelistic in jail. Paul calls Philemon his friend and fellow-worker. He was a masterful motivator. He understood how to get people to do the right thing. Paul could do miracles, but he almost never used that ability to motivate.

Friendship and fellow-worker are the two components of proper relationships. Most of us tend to specialize in one or the other. If we judge our relationships purely in terms of friendship, we'll miss the point. We're fellow-workers as well. We can't forget. We're disciples by the grace of God. Some of us are the reverse. We understand fellow-worker, but we don't understand friendship.

We see people who don't have any friends. They're doing rotten, reading the Internet. If we put them in a place where they feel listened to, secure and loved, they do great. How many people in our ministry count us as one of their best friends? Is it awkward because everybody says it's you, or because nobody says it's you?

2. Be Positive

Philemon 1:4-7 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, [5] because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. [6] I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. [7] Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.

Even when we think we're being positive, we probably need to be more positive. Paul's going to come down on Philemon. He's a bit of a messed-up Christian. He had slaves, which may have been acceptable. Obviously, he treated his slaves poorly because Onesimus had run away in fear. Not only that, but Paul knows him well enough to know something else about him. Even when he hears his run-away slave is baptized, he probably won't respond too well.

Everybody has strengths and weaknesses. How much are we talking about others strengths? Are we known for encouraging others or always finding faults with others? When someone does some mistake, the immediate temptation is to rebuke them. Do we remember their strengths or do we remember we can also fall at times?

Look at how Paul talks to him. He builds him up, even perhaps beyond what is due. Notice how Paul's encouragement is specific and individual. To motivate others we need to be positive. Inspiring people to share their faith is so much more effective than rebuking them. When you figure out how to help people be motivated to share their faith. That's when people start to move.

3. Pull, Not Push

Philemon 1:8-19 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, [9] yet I appeal to you on the basis of love. I then, as Paul--an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- [10] I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. [11] Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. [12] I am sending him--who is my very heart--back to you. [13] I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. [14] But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. [15] Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good-- [16] no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. [17] So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. [18] If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.

Even at Pentecost, it says Peter used many other words to warn and plead. It's different when you feel pulled. Know how it is when our mother asks for something? Somebody comes to us asking you to do a favor for the Lord. How powerful is that? How do we respond when somebody orders us to obey? Rebellion, for most of us. Let us grow in the art of how to pull people to serve God.

4. Be Prepared to Pay Personally

Philemon 1:19-25 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back--not to mention that you owe me your very self. [20] I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. [21] Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. [22] And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. [23] Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. [24] And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. [25] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit .

Paul was prepared to pay back what Onesimus owed. People know whether we're prepared to sacrifice. (Phil 3:8)What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ . One of the best way to motivate others is to sharing their burdens. It seems as a loss but we will win in relationships – relationship with them and relationship with God. As a disciple we must be ready to have the attitude of 'go anywhere, do anything and give up everything'.

18. Enter The Kingdom

Hebrews 12:18-24. You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; [19] to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, [20] because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." [21] The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." [22] But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, [23] to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, [24] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel

God has called us and chosen us to a place which is described as

- Mount Zion
- Heavenly Jerusalem
- City of the living God
- Where thousands upon thousands of angels joyfully assemble
- The Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven
- Where God, the judge of all men is there
- Where the spirits of righteous men made perfect are there
- Where Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant is there
- Where sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel is there.

Imagine the scene that you have called by God to enter such a place. We may rejoice with trembling. It is absolutely the grace of God that can take us to heaven. We don't deserve it. (Isa 64:6) ...all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away . But still God has given us an opportunity to taste His kingdom. How are we entering into His Kingdom? Are we entering through the right entrance? Are we entering with right attitude? Are we helping others to enter such wonderful place?

1. Enter With Thanksgiving.

Psalm 100:4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name .

We need to enter with thanksgiving. Today when we go to God in prayer how do we enter? Can God see us with thanksgiving, gratefulness or with lot of complaints and grumbling? If we know that we are going to die tomorrow how would we feel? Would we be grateful for the life so far or would we be worrying?

(Phil 4:4-6) Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

2. Enter Through The Narrow Gate

Matthew 7:13-14 Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. [14] But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

We need to enter the right way. There are several entrances. Question isn't whether we enter, but where the entrance leads in the end. Many enter through one entrance that leads to destruction. Which road are we traveling? If we take a wrong route, most of the time, we may have to travel all the way back to enter through the right route. Are we one among many or one among few? Only a few find it. Let us make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

3. Enter With Humility

Matthew 18:3,4 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven .

We need to enter with humility, like a little child. One thing we can see in a child whether in good times or bad times they wanted to be with their parents, they reconcile themselves with their parents. Today do we reconcile with God on a daily basis. Are we humble in front of God?

James 4:6,7 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

For whom it is hard to enter

a. For rich man : Matthew 19:23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven .

b. For those who believe in their own righteousness : Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

c. For those who don't do the will of God : Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

d. For those who are wicked (sinful) : 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

e. For those who are hypocrites : Matthew 23:13 Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

f. For those who are not born of water and the Spirit : John 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

Acts 14:22 We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God. Let us preach the good news in our cities, win large number of disciples, strengthening them and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

19. Go Beyond The Miracle

It is easy to become so familiar with the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 that we overlook the miracle that Jesus offers us in the same circumstances 2,000 years later. (John 6:1-15.)

What you can learn from Jesus' miracle:

1. No problem is too big for God to solve.

When Jesus arrived at His destination, thousands of people were waiting for Him. They were hot, tired, and hungry. While Philip, one of the disciples, became anxious looking for solutions to the hunger problem, Jesus urged him to look for a Jesus-solution. Jesus wanted Philip to see that his problem may have been too big for him, but it wasn't too big for Jesus. Know where to turn - bring your problem to Jesus. Make sure you include God in your calculations.

2. No person is too small for Jesus to use.

Jesus used a little boy with five barley loaves and two small fishes. The boy gave all of his lunch to the Lord. He didn't hold back part of it and he ended up being fed as well. God asks you to give Him everything you are and have. There is no gift too small for Him to use. Transfer what you have to Jesus, no matter how small your "lunch." Jesus will accept what you have and will transform it for His purposes.

3. No hunger is too deep for Jesus to satisfy.

The miracle He did that day is significant, not because He fed 5,000, but because through it He

taught that He can meet the deeper, spiritual hunger of our hearts. Jesus told them, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of man shall give to you" (vs. 27). See beyond the temporary things of this world. Jesus is the one thing that endures, and the only thing that satisfies. Jesus is the bread of life, and if you will feed upon Him, you will live forever.

4. Seek Jesus.

What we all need is the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to hunger and thirst after Him, and when we do that we will find blessedness. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). You will never need anything else spiritually besides Jesus. Seek Jesus purposefully. Seek nothing more, and settle for nothing less - not a denomination, creed, church membership, or moral code.

5. Accept His invitation to the banquet.

All the people had to do was to sit down and enjoy the food. Jesus is the one who says Come and eat. Like each of those 5,000, you have the choice to say, No, thank you, I'm not hungry, and go away empty, or say, Jesus, You are what I need. You are what I hunger for. I want you.

Let us sit down at the table with the one who can turn a boy's lunch into a feast. Let us nourish our soul on Jesus and never go hungry again.

20. Talent Management

The Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). A master goes on a long journey and entrusts his possessions to three slaves. They are given five, two, and one talent respectively. (A talent was a measure of money in that culture.) The first two doubled their talents while the third buried his talent in the ground. The master represents Jesus in this story.

Few principles to learn from this parable :

1. God owns it all.

We simply are a steward, or manager, of God's possessions. Our role is to make sure we guard it and multiply it.

2. God entrusts possessions based on the ability to manage them.

The master apportioned his possessions to his servants each according to his ability. He considered that the servant who received five talents possessed better financial management skills than the other two servants did. God does the same thing. As we grow in faithfulness and develop our abilities, God promotes us to higher levels of responsibility in His kingdom.

Financial skills are learned. The servant with the greatest skills must have studied the financial markets, such as they existed at that time, in order to learn how to manage his lord's money

effectively. It is important to note that he developed these skills before he had any money to invest.

3. Appropriate risk-taking is pleasing to God.

The servants with the five and two talents went immediately and traded with them. Since they traded we can assume that they put their capital at risk - they did not place their money in investments where their principal was guaranteed. Their master praised their actions as well done and called them good and faithful servants. He was pleased that they took some risks to increase his level of wealth. The slave who buried his money and refused to take any risk is the one the master condemns as wicked, and lazy who didn't place his money in the bank so that he would have received his principal back with interest.

The level of risk you assume should correspond to your level of knowledge. People with little or no knowledge of the financial markets should stick with guaranteed investments. The master was pleased when two of his servants took the initiative to increase their knowledge of the financial markets to the point that they felt comfortable placing their capital at risk and trading with the money. The third servant was too lazy to study and increase the level of his ability.

The amount of capital you place at risk should correspond to your level of knowledge. The master doled out his assets according to each servant's level of knowledge. Don't begin your investing experience with your life savings. Put only a small percent of your capital at risk initially. Give yourself a chance to gain some experience and make mistakes before such mistakes could cripple you financially.

4. Learn through your failures.

The third servant made a poor investment choice as the result of his mind-set about his master. His fear of the master caused paralysis. He was unable to think logically and take bold action, so he buried his money in the ground. Many people live in a self-created dread of God's punishment for every mistake they make. But God said, Be strong and courageous, do not tremble or be dismayed, the Lord your God is with you wherever you go (Josh. 1:9). God lifts us by the hand when you fall and encourages us to try again. He is not upset when we make mistakes - He wants us to learn from them.

21. Have A Shepherd's Heart

(Luke 2:8-18) And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has

told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

1. Listen.

God speaks to those who have the time to listen. Are you too caught up in work, schedule, family, or leisure that you are not hearing what God wants to say to you? Maybe it's time to slow down and listen.

2. Let your joy show.

Can others tell that you are a joyful believer in Christ? Do your actions or language testify to what you believe?

3. Know what to look for.

Are you waiting for the proverbial "burning bush" in order to confirm your faith, or determine your belief? God typically speaks through less-flashy means: in mangers, in the lives of the poor and needy, in the mundane tasks of daily life. Don't overlook God.

4. Make Jesus the Master of your life.

Do you allow Him to rule your life, or are you ruled by your boss, your spouse, your children, or the almighty dollar?

5. Believe what you hear.

The shepherds believed what the angels had told them - and acted upon it. Do you believe what you read in God's Word? Do you believe His promises for your life?

6. Go!

Over your lifetime, and over this past year, have you moved closer to Christ in your understanding and love? It's time to move toward Christ. What will you do this coming year to become closer to your Savior?

7. Tell others.

The shepherds could not keep silent about the Messiah. They shared the Good News and others were impressed - not by their eloquence or delivery, but by the truth. Have you shared the Good News?

22. Being Faithful

(Mat 25:21 NIV) "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

Faithfulness is the basic, rudimentary, fundamental ingredient of character. We will not know God's blessing apart from faithfulness. What our nation needs are men who are: Faithful to Family - Remain faithful to your wife. Adultery is the ultimate act of unfaithfulness, but you don't have to commit the physical act of adultery to be unfaithful. Some have love affairs with their work, with sports, and other things. Also, your children need a dad who will be faithful. We have to keep our promises.

Faithful with Finances - Are we aware that God might be withholding a spiritual blessing from you because He's first tried you with money (Luke 16:11 NIV) So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? - Can we say true riches has spiritual power, insight into the Word of God, answered prayer, fellowship with Jesus Christ, and joy....?

Faithful to Friends - If we are asked to write letters to five people that we know that we could count on or that we consider to be a faithful man; would anybody write us a letter? Are we known as a faithful man?

Faithful to the Fellowship - This means to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that we got to be faithful to the fellowship. We need to be faithful in the house of God on a regular basis, bringing our prayers, tithes, Bibles, love, and influence.

Faithful to the Faith - We must be faithful to the Word of God. We should be know as people with convictions, knowing the great truths of the Word of God, standing for the faith. It is our responsibility as a dad to be faithful to the faith and to teach the young disciples what the Word of God says.

Reasons to be Faithful

We need to be faithful because Jesus Christ is faithful to us. Which of us has not sinned? Thank God for 1 John 1:9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. He's never failed to do it.

He's been faithful in temptation. Are you tempted? Thank God for 1 Cor 10:13. No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

He's faithful to keep us from falling. We don't stay saved by holding on to God. We're kept because He holds on to us. He preserves us faithful to the end. (1 Th 5:23-24) May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

How to be Faithful

1. Be faithful in the small things . If you'll be faithful in the small things, the big things will take care of themselves (Luke 16:10). The big things in life are made up of little acts, little words, and little thoughts. Use integrity in the small things.

2. Be faithful in the secret things. What you are in secret is what you are. What we do when are alone tells lot about our heart and life. Are we faithful to God when we are alone? Be faithful in the secret things.

3. Be faithful in the sacred things. Be faithful to meet with God. Do we know how we have faithfulness? Not by resolution, not by gritting your teeth, but by abiding in Him. Let us go to Him; be committed to Him; surrender to Him; yield to Him; and God will make us faithful.

23. Christian Citizenship

What does it mean to be a Christian in our country these days? It means, in a word, **to be like Christ** . God has called each of us to a standard by which we must live our lives - and that standard is truth and obedience. Though the tide of public opinion may sway and even storm at times against us, we must resolutely stand to be like Christ. The following are five responsibilities from the Word of God that all of us should have as Indian citizens.

1. Pray for government.

1 Timothy 2:1-3 : I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior.

When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, Nero was in power. This man lived in the very depths of depravity, and Paul exhorts us to "first of all" pray and offer thanksgiving for all men, including kings like Nero. Why? Because Proverbs 21:1 promises that, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases". God is in charge of the kings He has placed in authority over us! He can turn them whichever way He wills. The battle for godly government isn't won with upward fists of rebellion, but with downward, humble knees in prayer.

2. Pay for government.

Romans 13:1-7 : Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you

good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Just as we give our tithe, we are to pay our taxes. That's not just obeying the letter of the law, that is obeying the Master of the law. In Matthew 22:15-22, Jesus taught us to render unto the government that which it is due it, and render unto God that which is due Him. There wasn't an issue of whether the government was doing right by its people, but whether the people were doing right by their government. There's simply no loophole when it comes to paying taxes. Jesus did it, so must everyone.

3. Praise government.

1 Peter 2:17 : Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.

We are to give honor and respect to our government officials because honor is due. The men and women who hold public office do so, and only so, because God has allowed them to hold office. Psalm 4:5 says, "Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD." Sometimes, it is hard, and I would venture to say, impossible for us to honor someone in public office who has shown himself or herself unworthy, and yet that is precisely what God has called us to do. We are to offer a sacrifice of praise, not because we agree with their politics, but because it is honoring to our King to do so.

4. Preach to government.

Ephesians 4:15 : Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ .

We are to speak the truth to our governmental leaders. We dare not be silent because we are called to share the gospel with whomever and wherever God calls us. We need to tell every official that what is politically correct is sometimes morally wrong! It is Satan's strategy to keep good people silent in evil times. Our calling is not to rise in the polls of popularity, but to pursue holiness! Without stammer or stutter or hint of equivocation, we need to speak up in truth for God's glory!

5. Participate in government.

1 Peter 2:12 : (1 Pet 2:12 NIV) Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Daniel Webster said, "Whatever makes a man a good Christian, makes him a good citizen." Let us not let the world intimidate us into believing the lie that the phrase, "separation of church and

state" is a mandate for our eradication or worse, neutralization from governmental affairs! When we were saved, we weren't disenfranchised from the world. We were saved to impact the world for Jesus Christ. To bring glory to God with every moment of every day. The only hope for our country is Jesus Christ! Our mission is to pray for the Holy Spirit to call sinners to Himself and for us to have an impact in our home, our neighborhood, our workplace, our community, and even our nation for the glory of Jesus Christ.

24. Teach Us To Pray

Revelation 5:8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

At the center of John's description of heaven, these twenty-four elders are praying, holding a harp and what? Our prayers before God!

Luke 11:11:1 One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: "'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.'" Then he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' "Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

1. Believe

If we are to have great prayers, we must understand the Character of God. He is a Father who loves us deeply! He wants us to come to him, he comes running to us, he turns his ear to hear us and he listens! Jesus was asked to teach them to pray and he taught them about the character of God. Why? So they would pray. Jesus said, "when you pray" -- expecting them to pray.

Prayer is not just a matter of who you are when you pray. We can all put on the spirituality for a prayer time. The real question is who we are when we are not praying. It is not a matter of believing for one moment, but believing throughout our day! Jesus taught them to pray

specifically, as in Luke 11 when the man asked for "Three loaves of bread." If we are sitting around praying, "God, be with him," what is God supposed to do -- he is already there, by the man's side, but we are not really asking him to do anything!

2. Obey

Jesus specifically prayed, "Forgive us our sins." Jesus knew that working through conflict with other people is what forms the basis of relationships. We need to expect that conflict in our relationships and learn to forgive so that we really learn to be brothers/sisters. Too often we are asked to pray for someone, so we do. "Father help this man get better." We don't believe that God cares. We don't care about this person because we don't even know him. Are we honest about this? Do we wrestle through with our heart, admitting to God, "I don't really care." Then we can wrestle with our heart and let God change it. If we don't admit to God what is really in our hearts when we are praying, how can we change?

3. Love

Jesus has two characters in his illustration. The man and his "friend." Obviously, we are the man and God is described in this illustration as his "friend." There was a relationship expected when he asked for the bread. If we really love God and learn to love our neighbors we will pray for them. We will see the needs our friends have and we will turn to our friend who can meet them and talk about them! Who we pray for shows who we really love. Are we praying for everyone in our ministry? If we only go to God in times of trouble, we will be tempted to say, "God is not real." The truth is that our love for God was not real.

4. Dare

What else did Jesus teach in this parable? "because of the man's boldness he will get and give him what he needs." God is looking for boldness. Are we ready to be bold with God and actually get him to listen. Revelation 8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Silence in heaven for 1/2 hour!!! All of heaven focused together, incredible worship and what else? Our prayers! Are we filling up heaven with our prayers?

25. Are You Really A Disciple?

Acts 9:20-26 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. [21] All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" [22] Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. [23] After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, [24] but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. [25] But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a

basket through an opening in the wall. [26] When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple .

Imagine the service in Jerusalem that day. Thousands came together, meeting outside. There were always visitors at the church in Jerusalem. We know this from Acts 5. Lots of people would come out of curiosity, with no real intention of becoming Christians. They would often walk around and ask one another, "Are you a disciple?". One day, after the fellowship break, somebody screamed out, "Hey! It's Saul!". Mothers grabbed their kids, people fell over one another running for the exits. Saul shouted, "Hey! It's all right! I'm a disciple!" How could they really know? Saul had to prove to them that he was a disciple. How could they know for sure?

"I have quiet times. I go to midweek in Damascus. I took notes while Barnabas taught . . ." These guys asking if he was a disciple had scars on their backs. They remembered Stephen's death. Taking notes, going to church wasn't enough. "You can't just walk into your church and say you're a disciple. There's got to be proof". What if someone confronted you in the fellowship. "Are you really a disciple?" What would you say? Some people don't say this, but they think it all the time. Our kids watch us, and they wonder. "Is my father really a disciple?" "He never studies the Bible with anybody". "In the Church they talked about family devotionals. What's that?" "He never has quiet times". Our kids are thinking it. "Wait a minute! My dad, my mom . . . are they really disciples?" "May be a member of this church for six years!" Church membership doesn't matter.

Acts 9:27-30 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. [28] So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. [29] He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him. [30] When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

Barnabas came forward, and confirmed that Saul was really a disciple. He had met Jesus, and he confirmed his faith by his boldness in preaching the word. "He was fearless! He talked and argued with them . . . he baffled them! We had to sneak him out". What did Peter and the apostles have to say? "I guess he really is a disciple. Look at his life". The question needs to be posed to everyone . . . "Are you really a disciple?". Not, "Do you go to midweek service? Did you pay your contribution?" The real question is this: "Have you put your life on the line? Are you really a disciple?" God has and always will expect you to give up everything to follow him. The call has been the same throughout history--to lay our lives on the line. God doesn't care when your stock options mature. He doesn't care if you can afford a house. He doesn't care if it's more comfortable in the suburbs than in the city. He does care if you'll give up that job, move to another place, do anything to help the kingdom grow.

In Genesis 22, God called **Abraham** to kill his son. "You need to give up everything". He tested Abraham's heart. In Exodus 3, he gave the same challenge to **Moses**. "You need to go back to Egypt, where they want to kill you, and lead my people out". To **David**, he challenged him to be hunted like a dog by the king, to put his life on the line. In **Jeremiah** 1:17, God knew he was young, but he had to put it all on the line as well. **Daniel** got down on his knees to pray that day,

and knew they were coming to kill him. He had to put it all on the line. In Ezekiel 24:15, **Ezekiel** even had to give up his own wife. These aren't just stories, they're not just veggie tales. These are real people, real men. They had to make real choices, real decisions in their lives. Just like us. They had to wrestle through things emotionally. How do we think Abraham felt? What kind of family devotional do we have the night before we go to kill our son? Jeremiah was a real guy. He had real ambitions, a real job, a family, parents . . . His parents probably weren't proud of him walking around naked and preaching sermons. God always has and always will expect you to give up everything to follow him.

Maybe you're an older disciple, lost your drive, getting more comfortable, more worldly. You go ask Solomon about whether comfort is a big deal or not. Unfortunately, I don't know where to go to ask him. Is he in heaven or in hell? How about Asa? Demas? All we know is that he deserted Paul because he loved the world. We have to decide if we're going to be real disciples, or if we'll be deserters . This is an historic time. God is moving in unprecedented ways. The world is more connected, more in contact, smaller than ever because of technology. God wants the world to hear the gospel at a pace never before anticipated. He wants barriers crossed that have never been traversed, and the Spirit will release his fire. We have to be a disciple, though. Don't let it pass us by.

Maybe a better question is this: "When's the last time you really were a disciple?" "When's the last time you put it all on the line? That's it! No backdoors, no recourse . . ." That's the excitement of a disciple. When's the last time you had it? So many of us have fallen away from being disciples. The joy, the excitement . . . We come to church, we sit in the seats, but we've lost that edge, and we know it. 2 Peter 1:8-9 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Have we forgotten what it was like to be a brand new disciple? We couldn't go to sleep, we were so excited. We felt that God had a great dream for us, and we were so excited we couldn't sleep. That's what disciples feel. When's the last time we had our heart converted like that? We get baptized one time for the forgiveness of sins, but our heart's had to be converted over and over.

Three simple points to call us back to the standard of being real disciples:

1. Do We Really Have a Purpose?

Mark 1:16-18 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. [17] "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." [18] At once they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus didn't call them to salvation, to forgiveness, to heaven, to relationships. He called them to their purpose. "I'll make you into something, and you'll have a purpose". When Jesus called Saul, he didn't call him to any of these things either, but to a purpose. "You're persecuting me, you're kicking against the goads. Need to get on my side". "Go to see Ananias, and he'll tell you what to do. I'm calling you to a purpose". So many of us have lost that purpose in the church. We're here for different reasons. On a fundamental level, our motivations for being in the church are off. We

come to church looking to be entertained, rather than looking to be equipped. We want to learn how to make a date, rather than how to make a disciple. We look for an emotional boost, rather than looking for a baptism.

Everything we have is to allow us to live out our purpose. Why do we have our job? Our wife, our family, our home, our roommates--all to make us a better **disciple-maker**. Everything in our lives has been given by God to help us bring people to God. Marriage isn't just for fun, it's not an end in itself. It's to help us be more effective. This is even why we go through the hard times we go through. It's all part of God's plan. God wanted us to be more intense, more focused in our efforts to make more disciples. Why are some of us struggling financially, even physically in our families? God wants to help us to become better, more effective disciple-makers. When we love our purpose, all these challenges fit into place . It all makes sense. When we don't love our purpose, these things all bother us, frustrate us, make us bitter.

1 Cor 2 says we all have the mind of Christ. Why don't we feel more of the things that he felt? It's simple. We don't do the things that he did. If we did more like him, we'd feel more like him. Imagine Jesus spitting in a man's eyes and restoring his sight. What an exciting thing! Jesus got to experience the joy of changing lives every single day. Every day he healed . . . He gave hope, he forgave sins, he healed the broken, crushed and guilty. Imagine those eyes of gratitude. "Wow! I can't believe you care that much". That's what Jesus felt every day, and we get to have those experiences as disciples. We get to study the Bible with people. We break out the Kingdom study which is exciting. We get to reveal God's plan, study Light and Darkness with them. Suddenly, it's all clear. We get to see their eyes open, get baptized, come out of the water, and start over. That's what disciples do. That's what Jesus did. More of us need to get our hands wet.

We'll move anywhere when we love our purpose. We'll love giving as well. "Just let us know the need, and we'll meet it. Whatever is needed, just tell us". When we love our purpose, we love discipling. We won't avoid it--we'll desire it. When we love our purpose, we love openness. We love being open. 1 John 1--need to come into the light voluntarily. When we get open, God can work in our life and fix anything in our past. When we get into the light, then and only then God can really use us. When's the last time we opened up somebody's eyes? When's the last time we led the study? Let us share our life, get our own hands wet, and we'll feel the joy of Jesus.

2. Do We Really Have a Vision?

The Antioch Church was the first to reach out to Gentiles, the first to give money for the needy in Jerusalem. Their leadership group was so diverse, with people from all races and generations. They were the first to have the vision of the world being evangelized, to send people out. To really be a disciple, we've got to have a vision of what God's doing in our time right now. In the first century, there were only 300 million people in the world. Paul used his own technology. He wrote letters, put on his shoes and walked down the road. Now, there are more than seven billion people in the world, and we have awesome technology. Eph 1:22 says that God put everything under Jesus' feet for the church. That includes the Internet. With technology, we can reach people at a rate never-before matched. Countries that we can't get Bibles into can receive the message electronically.

Do we have a vision as a disciple? Do we have a vision for God using us?

3. Do You Really Want to Kick Against the Goads?

Acts 26:14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

It's hard to kick against the goads. We get really worn out, really tired. It's hard to be unbelieving in the midst of everybody else seeing unbelievable things. We've felt it when we were too tired to have those family devotionals. We've felt it when we decide not to heed the call to go to missions. We've felt it when we decide to buy that house so far away from the disciples. We felt the wind, we felt the "whoosh" of the kingdom blowing by. The kingdom isn't too far beyond us. We just have to decide to be a disciple again. All we have to do is to stop kicking against the goads. It just isn't that hard. A simple decision.

Let us ask ourself : "Am I really a disciple? When was the last time I was a disciple?" "How am I kicking against the goads? Do I really have a purpose? Do I really share my faith?" "Do I love studying the Bible with people? Do I love opening eyes? Do I have the vision?" "Am I excited about God's destiny for my life? Am I in the throes of it? What sin is holding me back?"

God wants to unleash the Holy Spirit in each of our lives. He wants the passion back, the joy back. He wants the excitement in our eyes, the spring in our step, the zeal in our hearts.

26. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

Ephes. 4:1-6 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2] Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

At times in our lives we can get softer, lose convictions, can abandon the faith. Unless we constantly call ourselves back to God and his Word, we will fail to be God's movement. We need to be strong on the basics. God can use us when we have His words in our heart.

1. As Disciples We Got to Be Rooted in the Word of God

As disciples we need to have that "just say the word" heart. Whatever the Bible says is what we'll do. We've got to accept God's word, be rooted in it, and root out the denominational heart. The denominational heart produces attitudes and not action, a more comfortable view. It's so easy to say, "That bothers me. That upsets me. That offends me".

1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

We always need to ask "What does the Bible say?" It's not a matter of who is right, but of what is right.

Matthew 22:29 Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.

Are we rooted in the Bible? Are we taking a nibble here and a nibble there at the word or are we taking a full-course meal of the word, rooted and established, listening to every word?

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Jesus came to preach God's word, God's message and not his own. We need to preach God's message, not our own brand of discipleship, our own version. What helped Jesus in the hour of temptation was turning to the strength of the Scriptures. Many of us turn to emotions; we turn to our feelings when we are struggling. That leads us to compromise the scriptures. We got to be rooted in the word. We need to be prepared in season and out of season.

2. As disciples We Got To Be Riveted on Being One

John 17:11 - I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one .

John 17:21 - that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:23 - I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus was all about oneness. He was riveted on being one. How about us?

John 14:6 - Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is the way, the truth, the life. He never had a problem with oneness. He stood on it

Acts 4:12 - Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

There's only one way to God. Jesus was riveted on oneness

Matthew 12:30 - "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

One Lord, one faith, one body, one baptism?.. We want our choices. One leaves us no choices, no alternatives. We feel limited. People love to have it their way. We want our choices. We don't want just one. We can have our choices on burgers or coffee, but not with God. One is all we need. Are we riveted on oneness?

As disciples we got to be rooted in the word of God, and riveted on being one. We only need one master. Jesus is Lord of our life, Lord of our schedule. He is everything we need, and we need to give Him everything. Jesus is Lord of our doctrine. Jesus needs to be Lord of our family, Lord of our job. Everything is His.

3. As disciples We Got To Be Resolved To Let The World Know

Jesus was resolved to let the world know about His father. We need to be resolved as well. We don't have to be in confusion. We don't have to be lost in a sea of many doctrines.

Ephes. 3:10 - His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

We are the manifold wisdom of God. Can we believe that? If we entered the kingdom of God, we are God's dream, His manifold wisdom, and His church. And we need to get this message all throughout the world. If we are not converting people in the world then the world is converting us towards it.

God's kingdom is unbelievable. God wants to fill us with His spirit and His word, and use us to change the world even this coming year.

27. Be Convinced, Be Determined And Do The Conquering

Isaiah 30:21 : Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

What is God whispering to you today?

1. Don't be condemned, be convinced

We all sin, and every sermon we hear makes us feel more and more condemned. We think that God will never answer our prayers because of what we did. We think we deserve a special-needs child because of what we did.

Romans 8:1-2 : Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, [2] because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

The Holy Spirit came so we would never feel condemned again.

Romans 8:5-11 : Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. [6] The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; [7] the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. [8] Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. [9] You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.

We have Jesus' spirit living in us. If we are controlled by the Spirit, our mind is filled with life and peace. Are we convinced that the Spirit of God lives in us.

2. Don't be defeated, be determined

Romans 8:28 : And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

God has called us. God has chosen us. God loves us. God has called us according to His purpose. Whatever happening in our lives, God works for the good because He loves us. We need to be determined in our calling. We got to surrender and be submissive to God's plan. God has plans to prosper us and not to harm us (Jer. 29:11). Plans to give us hope and a future.

3. Don't be conquered, but do the conquering

Romans 8:37-39 : No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. [38] For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, [39] neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Win small, win early and win often. Failure is not fatal, because God forgives. There have been times that we've been hateful. God forgives and we move on. We've been bitter, yet failure isn't fatal. God forgives us, and we move on. We mess up our marriage and our family. It's not fatal. God forgives. Let's move on. In everything, our family, job, ministry... we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nothing is impossible for God. Let us dream to fulfil God's purpose of His calling in our lives.

28. Remembering The Day Of The Lord

2 Peter 3:10-13 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. [11] Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives [12] as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. [13] But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The Bible says that when the Lord comes back, everything will be destroyed. The Bible says that everything will be burned with fire. We look down, and everything on earth is gone. Our certificates, our achievements, medals, our savings, everything will be destroyed with fire. If that's where it's all going, what kind of lives should we live?

Ever go to the beach and make a sand castle? The first high tide comes in and just wipes it out. We think, "I won't work so hard next time". It's just not that much fun when we know it's all going to be destroyed in a few minutes. Maybe we've been saving up for retirement. It's all gone. Everything. Know what's the only thing that will be left? Us and God

What kind of people should we be, now that we know it's all going to be destroyed?

1. Grow as You Go

2 Peter 1:5-11 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; [6] and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; [7] and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. [8] For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. [10] Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, [11] and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This passage tells us we need to continue to grow, in increasing measure, to make it. How much are we growing spiritually? It's a funny thing in the church. People get up to preach and ask, "Are you fired up?" If your first answer isn't good enough, they ask again and again. That's man made fire. The older disciples say "Amen" to that. There are some disciples that are always fired up. We don't have to ask--it's obvious. We know who the fired-up disciples are? They're the ones who are changing. It says here that if you have these qualities in increasing measure, you'll never fall.

How is our faith? Can we say that it has increased since the time we got baptized? Are we good-hearted person? Are we inclined to do right? How about just being a good person, having a good heart about things. Are we growing in our Bible knowledge? Are we serious about growing in your knowledge? Are we moaning about getting up in the morning. Just that extra 20 minutes can change the denominational Quiet Time completely. Is our eyes fixed on television or on visions for God's Kingdom. One of the reasons we don't change is that we discourage others from challenging us. Do we avoid challenges, or cherish them? We need to grow in our perseverance. Are we the kind of person that everybody wants to be around? Some of us are just not that encouraging to be around. This point is called "Grow as You Go." Could be called "Grow Or Go"

2 Peter 3:17-18 Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. [18]

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. We can fall from our position. The way we avoid it is to grow as we go.

2. Remember to Remember

Did you ever forget something? When we get older, either it gets worse or we notice it more. Ever go into a room for something and we can't remember what it was? It seems like the Israelites in the old testament just couldn't remember anything. 2 Peter is all about remembering. We need to remember to remember.

2 Peter 1:12-15 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. [13] I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, [14] because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. [15] And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. What's Peter saying here? "I know you know this stuff, but I'm going to remind you to remember" Why? So even when I'm dead and gone, you'll remember the important things

2 Peter 3:1-2 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. [2] I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. Peter wanted to stimulate them to wholesome thinking. We've got to remember to remember. What should we remember?

a. Who we were : 2 Peter 1:9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. When we forget who we were, it really causes problems in our life spiritually.

1 Cor. 1:26-29 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. [28] He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, [29] so that no one may boast before him. One of the problems we have sometimes is we forget who we were before we came into the kingdom. We've been in the kingdom for a while, and all of a sudden we think we know everything. We're ready to vote on what should be taught, whether we should have a campaign. Paul says we need to remember who we were before we came into the kingdom.

1 Cor. 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders [10] nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. This is what most of us were. We're all in here. But look what's happened to us. If we can just remember where we came from, we'll stay on course. It's so sad to see someone come

into the kingdom, and then forget what the world is like. They forget the shallowness, the selfishness, the loneliness, the emptiness out there.

b. Who God is : Sometimes we forget who God is. 2 Peter 3:3-7 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. [4] They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." [5] But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. [6] By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. [7] By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. There are a lot of people around who think we're stupid, to wait for Jesus for 2000 years The same thing happened in the first century. It's amazing. Look at what Peter says . . . They "deliberately forget." That's what anybody who leaves the Lord has to do. We have to remember to remember, or we'll deliberately forget.

c. What time it is : 2 Peter 3:8-9 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. [9] The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. It is like when we hit the next millennium, it's really only the third day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise. He wanted everyone to come to repentance. Being Lord's servants in this time, are we in line with the Lord's plan.

3. When We're Down, Let us not Doubt the Deliverer

2 Peter 2:4-10 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; [5] if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; [6] if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; [7] and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men [8] (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)-- [9] if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. [10] This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.

This passage says that God even strikes the angels down when they get out of line. Let us not doubt the deliverer. Lot was troubled in his soul, just like we are today. He saw it all. God saved him and burned up the world around him. Why do we doubt the deliverer?

We can't speed God's coming if we doubt the deliverer. Maybe we're trying to help somebody become a Christian, and nothing is paying off. Let us not doubt the deliverer. We can always see God delivering people.

It's all going to go up in a blaze of fire. Let's be sure to grow, or one day we'll go. Let us remember the Day of the Lord.

29. Tested By Fire

Life gives us many tests. The Bible also talks of tests we must face personally in our own lives. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 13:5, test yourselves and examine your faith. He also says in 1 Corinthians 3:13 that fire will test the quality of each man's work. We need to understand that God's Word tests us. The book of Daniel is about a young man who has been held in captivity and is living in Babylon under the king Nebuchadnezzar. Certainly Daniel is the hero of the book of Daniel but we are not going to talk about Daniel today. Instead we are going to talk about his three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

1. The Blink Test

Daniel 3:12-18. What we see happening here is Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego standing in opposition to the king. The king is trying to apply pressure to make them give in. This is the first test that we are going to look at today and it's called the Blink Test. Many children play the game of a staring contest. The first one who blinks is out of the game and the other one wins. Now, this is what happens in the world.

We take a stand for God and Satan tries to stare us down. We take a stand in the world and Satan tries to get us to back down. Very often in our spiritual lives we get into a staring contest with Satan. Satan is trying to get us to blink but we must stand firm and not give in. How do we do when Satan tries to get us to back down? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were being challenged by the king of the land. The king said he would throw them into the blazing furnace unless they bowed down and worshipped his god. Yet, these ordinary Christians, these ordinary men of God did not give in. We need to be willing to stand our ground and stare down Satan. No matter what comes our way we must stand firm. Even when we are threatened and challenged by the world we need to stand firm.

Especially in v18 they say something that's very profound. Although they hope that God will rescue them from the fire, they say even if God doesn't rescue them, they would never give in to the king. Does our faith depend upon God working things out the way we think He should? Is our faith strong only when things happen our way at work, at school, in relationships or are we willing to stare down temptation no matter what happens? Have we blinked, do we give in to the pressure?

2. The Vision Test

Daniel 3: 19-25 - this is the second test. The Vision Test. The first test dealt with our eyes but the second test deals with everybody else's eyes. It's not what we see but what others see about us. When King Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace what did he see? Did he see three men bound up and burning in the fire? No, he did not. He saw three men unbound and walking in the fire. Then he saw a fourth person and he said that fourth person looks like a son of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar saw something and it made him think about God. The second test - the Vision test - is what people see when they see us. In this story it was just three men who got a whole nation to see God. It's not about the numbers but it is about what people see when they see

our life. Do people see Jesus in us today? When we go through trouble and difficulty and hardship, is that when Christ comes out in us? Let us make our light shine and let people see Jesus in our lives. It is the most powerful testimony we can give.

3. The Smell Test

Daniel 3: 26-27. Not only did they pass the Blink test and the Vision test but they also passed the Smell test. As they came out of the fire, their clothes were not burnt, their hair was not singed and, the Bible says, they did not even smell like smoke. That's a hard thing to do. Here's the point we need to read into this verse in terms of the Smell test. God expects us to pass through this world not only by not being burnt up by the world but in fact there should not even be a scent of the world in our lives. It's not good enough just not to get burnt up and survive the fire but we must come true and not even smell like smoke. This is very similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 5 in the sermon on the mount. Jesus said it's not good enough to not murder but we should not even hate. Jesus said it's not good enough not to commit adultery but we should not even to lust at a woman. Jesus said it's not good enough to not retaliate in anger but we should actually turn the other cheek. And for us disciples, it's not good enough to just come to church on Sunday but in fact we need to be committed to all the activities of the church, Christ's body. In the religious world we say it's not good enough to just believe in Jesus but we need to be ready to do what he says in his Word.

Are we getting by with the minimum. Are we saying, 'I'm okay because I didn't get burned by the fire'? In fact we come out smelling like smoke. It's time for us to raise our level of expectation. It's time for us to purify our lives and be strong in the Lord. It's time for us to be open and honest about what's going on in our hearts and not just try to cover things up. In the world we have ways of covering up smell. We pass out breath mints to one another. We put on deodorants in the morning. Those are all good things in terms of our hygiene but we shouldn't do that in terms of covering our lives. Are we hiding and trying to cover it up instead of getting honest and passing the smell test?

It is inspiring to read about our brothers Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Not necessarily great leaders of their day in the church but men who were wholly and completely committed to God. They passed the Blink test, they passed the Vision test, they passed the Smell test. Consequently, these ordinary, average men of God affected a King and a whole kingdom. Daniel 3:28. These men were tested by fire and they passed the test. Let us stand firm in our faith and be ready for the test of fire.

30. The Plan Of Salvation

In the beginning of Genesis everything is so good and beautiful in the Garden of Eden and man is having a great fellowship with God but in the beginning of Exodus we see pain, suffering, difficulty. In Genesis 2 and 3 we all know what happens. Man falls into sin and for the first time sin enters into the relationship between man and God. That destroyed everything and from that time man has been disobeying, rebellious, we've been making wrong choices. And that's how we landed up in Exodus chapter 1 - a point of slavery. It's because of our own wrong choice and our own disobedience and rebellion against God.

1. God's plan for salvation is justification - Exodus 2:23-25. The Bible says here that Israel was going through so much pain, they cried out in their slavery. It doesn't say they cried out to God but it says God heard their cries. In v25 it says, 'So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them'. This is the beginning of Salvation. God looks at mankind and his heart is moved. He sees man in a state of lost-ness, he sees man completely fallen away from him and, the Bible says, God was concerned, his heart was moved. We've got to understand, brothers and sisters, that salvation begins with God, in God's heart. It is God who feels for us. It is God who reaches out to us. It is God who comes up with a plan. Let's look at chapter 3:7-9. We see here how God sees their suffering and he says in v8, 'I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptian'. That is the beginning of salvation. God coming down to man. God coming down to save man. If God doesn't have a heart of compassion, we are all lost for eternity. If God doesn't reach out to man, man is lost in his sin. This shows the heart of God - how he feels for his creation. He created man but man disobeyed and gone away but he feels for man and remembers the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He remembers all that he has done for man and comes up with a new plan.

Today, we are saved by the blood of Jesus and we've got to remember our salvation, not because we are worthy, not because we are good people. No, we are slaves and in slavery. God decided to reach out to us. God rescued us and it is God who promises to restore us and it is God who has plans for us. This is a gift from God and it is by his amazing grace that we are saved. Justification is in the name of Jesus. It is Jesus' blood that cleanses us and justifies us and that's why we can stand before God. We cannot go and defend ourselves before God. We cannot show our righteousness before God. It is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us.

Many times I hear people say, 'God is on my side'. We've got to be careful about what we say. Is God really on our side? Why should God be on man's side? It's not that way, brothers and sisters. We need to be on God's side. We better be on God's side. We should be on the side of the truth. The truth is not on our side. The truth doesn't listen to us - we need to listen to the truth. Some of us think we can fold God and keep him in our pockets and say, 'God is with me. Everything will happen the way I want it to'. No, we need to submit to God's plan. God is great and we need to submit to his way. He's not going to submit to our way. Justification is by the arm of God. By the blood of Jesus each one of us is justified.

2. Sanctification - We are justified, we are saved by the grace of God but then, we have not yet reached the Promised Land. That's where we must remember we are on a journey. From the day of our baptism, from the day of our salvation it is a journey and that journey is called sanctification. We are being renewed and purified and saved. Let's turn to Exodus 13. We see God did mighty acts of judgement and incredible miracles and they crossed over the Red Sea and they begin a journey. Just before they crossed the sea we see in Exodus 13:17-18. The shortest route from Goshen (where the Israelites were staying) to the Promised Land Canaan takes around 14 days i.e. two weeks. But you know what? God did not take them through that route but, instead took them round a much longer route which ultimately took them 40 years to reach the Promised Land. That's why we should remember our Christian life is a journey. The day we are baptized is not the day we step into heaven. We still have a long life to live and we have so many tests that are going to come our way, so many crises that are going to come, so many problems

that are going to come. How we respond to all of them will show where we are going to land up ultimately.

Man is very impatient. We want to reach heaven immediately. God is very patient. He doesn't mind seeing us cry because he knows we will change. The change is more important than the pain, which will be for a short time. Suffering is good for us. Suffering will always bring us closer to God if we respond in the right way. The longer route is always the better route. Short cuts never work. The world loves short cuts. The world wants instant money - instant coffee, instant noodles. But as Christians God is not 'instant'. God definitely calls us to salvation, he saves us but we are still living in the promise. We still have a long way to go.

Let's continue to read Exodus 13: 20-22. We see that though we go through a longer route there is good news. The good news is that though we are going through the longer route, God is going to be with us. He is travelling with us. It says the Presence of God was with them. There was a cloud in the daytime and a fire in the night to guide them. In the same way, as Christians, God has allowed the Holy Spirit to dwell in us to guide us. So, though the route is longer, though the journey is difficult, God has given us his Spirit to guide us and help us to reach the Promised Land. Our goal as Christians is to be like Christ. That is our journey. From the day of baptism we are picked up at whatever point we are, to become like Christ so that when he comes we will be just like him. That process is called sanctification. That process is how the Holy Spirit works in our lives, works in our hearts and transforms us to the original image that God created us - the image of Christ. That's where we have to be faithful, that's where we have to cooperate with God, that's where we have to submit to the Holy Spirit and allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives by denying ourselves, taking up our cross and being like Christ.

3. Glorification - First justification - God justifies us, the blood of Jesus redeems us and we are saved. Secondly, sanctification - the Holy Spirit continues to work in our lives from the day we are baptized till we die. And thirdly, glorifications where we are glorified to be like Christ. For the Israelites, in Exodus, their glorification was the Promised Land. That was their destiny. For us, reaching heaven is our glorification. One day where we can see God, where our faith can become sight. Now we are all living by faith but one day our faith will become sight. Before they stepped into the Promised Land, the Israelites had to cross the Jordan river. They started their journey by crossing the Red Sea (i.e. our baptism) and then the Jordan river symbolizes our death. As Jesus said, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. In the same way unless we die physically, we will never resurrect. God has given us an incredible opportunity to live forever, to live for eternity. But for that, we definitely have to be baptized and then, when we die and we will spiritually resurrect. But we need to be reminded that we are heading for the Promised Land.

The world is so scared of death. Death is the end of everything in the world. But for Christians death is the beginning, where we start a new life. The everlasting life that God has promised, we begin to experience after we die. That thought should make us very courageous. It is only when we are worldly we are sad by the world's affairs, we are controlled by the world's affairs. But if we are focussed on the Promised Land, this world is just a journey that we are passing through. This is not our home. This is just a time- being passage that we are going through. Some of us live like we're never going to die and then we die as though we had never lived. But a Christian

is not like that. A Christian knows he is going to die and rejoices because tomorrow starts his real life. After death, he sees God and he is looking forward to that. So, let us live as strangers because we know that we don't belong to this land forever. This is just a wilderness we are passing through. Our land is beyond this. We have a better country, a better life, a better future, a better hope, and a better resurrection.

God has incredible plans for us and he has promised incredible things to us. The plan of salvation, we see, starts from God, from his heart. It is God who makes the first move, it is God who makes the plan, it is God who sends the word, it is God who sends the man, it is God who does everything. Secondly, sanctification where we are in a process of transformation. Our goal is to be like Christ. God starts from whatever point we are at and our goal is to be like Christ. For that we've got to repent of our old sinful ways and continue to walk in the light. Thirdly glorification where our goal is to reach the Promised Land. Our destiny is the Promised Land, heaven, which we reach after we die. We have crossed the Red Sea but we still have the Jordan river to cross. Let us continue to persevere, to remain in the faith, to live life to the full, to be faithful to God so that one day we can make it to the promised land. It is, as we sing, "Tis grace has brought me safe thus far and grace will lead me home'.

31. Teamwork

There's a saying that goes 'Coming together is beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success'. As a church, as a family, there is no one greater or smaller - it's just that each one of us has different roles to play. What is the role that we play in God's family? No matter who we are - teen or preteen or single or married, widow, pioneer (been a disciple for 10 years or more) - we have a role to play in God's kingdom. If only a few of us in the family are working hard then soon we won't feel like this is our family. Then instead of being a part of the family we'll start finding faults with our family. Let us take a bird as an example and scripture as foundation and learn something about teamwork this morning.

There's this bird called 'goose' which we all would have seen. Wild geese fly thousands of kilometers, time and again. That's how God has made the wild goose. How these birds work together as a team is very much like what the scriptures call us to. Generally, in fellowship we have this problem called the 'somebody' problem. There are a lot of needs in the church. For example when we think about who is going to do the ushering, the answer is 'somebody' will do it. Who's going to help out in KKC? 'Somebody' will do it. Everybody is thinking about 'somebody' and at the end of the day nobody is doing what we are supposed to do. We all need to have an attitude of 'what can I do for God's kingdom, for God's family?' That will make a big difference in the way we come together and work together for God's kingdom.

1. Fly Together

If we've looked up at the sky and seen geese flying we would have noticed that they fly in one particular pattern. They fly in a 'V' pattern. We may think whatever pattern they fly it doesn't make a difference. Research has found that there is incredible scientific reason for the way these geese fly in 'V' formation. Amazingly, it has been found that where one bird flying alone can fly, say, 10 kilometers birds flying together in 'V' formation can get up to 71% extra strength to fly.

That means they can cross at least 70km together if they fly as a group. And because they have to cross thousands of kilometers, geese have to stick to the 'V' formation to get to their destination. If a goose falls out of the 'V' pattern, it has to get back quickly into the "V" otherwise the flock won't make it. And they take advantage of each other's flying skills to make their destination. Isn't it amazing that if they tried to accomplish this on their own they would never be able to make it? They will reach their destination only if they fly together.

Mark 3:14-15 He appointed twelve--designating them apostles --that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.

Even as Jesus was starting his mission in this world, he found a team for himself so that they could be with him and do the work that he wanted them to do. When Jesus left the world - as we see in Acts 1 - he didn't leave individual, scattered disciples. The fact is he left a group of committed disciples to do His work. We live as a family is God's plan. Though being a Christian is a personal commitment, for the journey of Christian life we need a Christian fellowship. At times we can think, 'Why should I be in a Christian fellowship? If I'm alone I can do whatever I want. There will be no pressure of 'giving''. At times even smiling can be hard work. We've got to smile at all the disciples, give them a hug, say 'hello' - at times we can feel that we want to be away from all these things, that we want to be alone. 'If I come in, I have to adjust, I have to commit, I have to answer a lot of questions'. A lot of things can go through our minds and sometimes we just want to be alone and not be part of a fellowship. Many times we don't realize how much we have progressed in our Christian lives, how much we have been built up, how much we have received just being in God's family. The strength of the Christian fellowship has carried us a long way in our Christian journey. The goose that falls out of the group feels the pressure around it and it feels the desperation to get back into the group immediately. In the same way, if we fall out of this Christian fellowship - probably being spiritual will take some time - it's time to fall back into the fellowship because that's where we will find the strength (second to strength received from God) to move on in our Christian lives. The more we delay the harder it will be to catch up to the fellowship.

The question we need to ask ourselves is are we flying alone? Are we grateful for how much God's fellowship has enriched us as an individual. It's an incredible thing to have God's family and without this family Christian journey is going to be very challenging. Philippians 2:2 talks about being like-minded and one in spirit. Corinthians 1:10 talks about not allowing division but being perfectly united in mind and thought. What makes geese fly together is that they all know they all have only one destination. When we got baptized we were all like-minded. We all wanted to go to heaven, we all wanted to help people to become disciples, and we wanted to help one another to become like Jesus. If we lose this purpose and mission in our lives it will be very hard to fly together. The reason why many times we get frustrated to be part of the fellowship and continue to be in God's family is that our purpose and mission has changed. And when that changes you will definitely feel the frustration because the rest of God's family is flying towards a particular destination that God wants it to. We can have differences in other areas but we cannot have differences in purpose and mission. Otherwise eventually we will fall out of God's fellowship. There is incredible strength in all of us flying together.

2. Share With Others

These geese fly together in 'V' pattern and after two kilometers suddenly the goose at the tip of the "V" will do a somersault and goes behind while another goose takes its place at the tip of the formation. Why? Because the bird at the tip of the 'V' faces a lot of pressure and it cannot face it for a long time because it will get burnt out. So from time to time this bird at the tip is replaced by others that take the pressure of moving the flock forward. The amazing thing is that while they are flying we can hear them crying 'honk, honk' which is actually the birds at the back encouraging the one at the tip saying, 'you can do it, you can do it, keep flying'. Like we say, 'come on, bro. You can do it, bro'. Well, if only a few people are going to be doing everything in the church soon they'll get burnt out. Soon they'll get discouraged and we'll be saying, 'Bro, why are you so discouraged. You used to be so fired up!' If only a few people are going to be doing everything in the church, they'll soon get discouraged. Their families will be hurting. Their health is going to hurt, everything is going to hurt. Family is God's design for us to share with one another what God has given us. Sometimes we don't want to ask, 'Bro what's happening with this situation' because we'll be made responsible for it. So we come with, 'Hi, bro. Awesome, bro' and just go off. We can't do that. We can't build a great church like that unless we share what we have. Sharing should not be restricted to money. There are so many things God has given to us that we can share with one another.

2 Corinthians 7:7 talks about how we must share in the sufferings of other people but let's read Matthew 25:40. The Bible says that whatever we do we do for Jesus. When the church was small there were not many needs. But when the church grows bigger and bigger a lot of needs arise. Whenever a need arises God has already provided the help that is needed within the church itself. Each one of us is unique in the way we are. And I believe that each one of us here has unique talents which are destined for specific service in God's kingdom. The different ministries we can get involved in, KKC Ministry, Pre-teens Ministry, Teens Ministry, Campus Ministry, Youth Ministry?? The church is going to be even more awesome when we all put together our talents on the altar of God to serve God.

3. Care for each other

Going back to the geese, if one of the birds falls sick or is shot down, immediately two other geese split away from the flying flock and travel down alongside the one that is falling and sit beside it until it either gets better or dies. If it dies, the two geese fly back up to join the flock but if the goose gets better they help it to fly back to join the rest. Geese understand that they must stand by each other in times of need. I believe that we need to stand by each other. Today if somebody is going through a hard time tomorrow may be our turn. We've got to stand by each other. We cannot just fly on our own. One day we'll be shot or fall sick. We must stand by each other in good times and bad times. When the church was going through some hard times in the past few years how was our attitude? Were we standing by the church saying, 'I'm here to serve'? There may be differences but we can always sit down and talk and sort it out. But what is our attitude? Are we going to stand by the church and help or are we going to draw back and blame people for different things that are happening?

There was a group of travelers who were travelling through a cold region. One of them fell down unable to go further. No one wanted to help this man because they felt he would hamper their

progress and finally they also would not be able to make it. One man felt compassion for the fallen and decided to carry him as far as he could even though he knew it was going to be difficult. When they reached their destination the man realized that no one else who had traveled with him had made it. Amazingly, the cold which had killed all those who traveled alone had done nothing to him because by carrying the sick man their combined body warmth had kept both of them alive and strong to reach their destination. Everyone who traveled alone could not reach their destination. We have a cold world outside. The only way we're going to make our journey in that cold world is if we carry each other in times of struggle. The way to make it is not on our own because we'll be lost and killed in this cold world. The only way is to carry each other in good times or bad and that way we'll see our journey's end. The geese understand that they need the group because if one goose falls out the group may struggle a little bit but it will still go on. In the same way, if we are struggling today and if we fall out, we are going to be the loser and not the church. The church will move on. God will strengthen the church but don't forget we have a role to play as much as the church has a role to play in our life.

So let's fly together. Let's share with each other. Let's care for others. Let's learn from God's creation - the goose. One day we'll all be together in heaven. Let's work as a team, let's build this church, let's bring glory to God.

32. Do We Have The Heart For The Weak?

A heart for the weak - is a need in almost every family group / church. Often, we're a long way from the new converts, and a long way from the weak as well. Why would Jesus, day after day with his disciples, spend time with the sick and afflicted? He was trying to instill in them a heart for the weak. Programs and events are great, but . . . we really need a change of heart. We need to start loving the weak.

1 Cor. 12:14-20 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. [15] If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. [17] If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? [18] But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. [19] If they were all one part, where would the body be? [20] As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Back in 1 Cor 11, Paul challenged them because they were divided in their communion service. God created the body the way he wanted it, and the pieces are different. Human groups don't tolerate differences. They're based on common interests. People are very cliquish, and they only want to associate with a few like-minded friends.

We must understand that there is division in our churches because of who we like to fellowship. At the end of the service, who is left standing by himself or herself, all alone in the corner? These are the people that need to go to spiritual recovery. There's a danger of neglect here.

1 Cor. 12:21-26 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to

the feet, "I don't need you!" [22] On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, [23] and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, [24] while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, [25] so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. [26] If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Sadly, the suffering and honoring don't usually alternate day after day. Typically, one part gets honored day after day, and the other suffers day after day. Can the part of the body that's not suffering feel the suffering of the part that is?

God designed the church. The parts are put together by God. When it comes to the strong, we all agree. When it comes to the weak, though, we're not so sure. He chose the weak for a purpose. As much as the strong give the church structure, the weak give the church heart. If we don't have any weakness in the church, it won't be the church of the living God.

1. Accept the Weak

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

This is a challenging passage. Accept him whose faith is weak. This tends to tick us off.

Romans 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

We hate failure. There is division in the church because the strong don't connect with the weak. We don't want to get involved with failure in people's lives. We build a clique of the strong around us.

Romans 15:2-3 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3] For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

Our weak brothers and sisters face insult every day. We can avoid insult because we're sharp. They can't. They get dumped on in the world, and then they get dumped on in the church. Jesus took the insults that were dumped on them, and he took them on himself.

Romans 15:4-7 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7] Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

We must accept the weak. This is a heart issue. They are our brothers and sisters. Many fell away

simply because they are weak. We who are strong are to fulfill this command. The weak can't fulfill it themselves. It begins with us, simply by accepting the weak. There is weak in any church. That's a fact. Don't resent it, don't fight it. The talented people give the church its structure, but . . . the weak give the church its heart. Are we really people after God's own heart.

2. Understand the Weak

As we're trying to inspire the strong, often we just don't understand the weak. We have to be able to inspire the strong, but still relate to the weak at the same time.

2 Cor. 11:21-33 To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that! What anyone else dares to boast about--I am speaking as a fool--I also dare to boast about. [22] Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. [23] Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. [24] Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. [25] Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, [26] I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. [27] I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. [28] Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? [30] If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. [31] The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. [32] In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. [33] But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

After a long list of his accomplishments, Paul could have alienated his brothers and sisters. Instead, he seizes the opportunity to relate to the weak, to make a connection with them. They all knew that Paul was supposed to preach to kings. At his first opportunity, though, he ran away. He shares that to identify with the weak.

To understand the weak, all we have to do is understand ourselves.

Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

We can be confused by being surrounded by strong people all the time. What is taught in the church by people watching our example? Is it Biblical?

What makes a person weak? Sometimes, it's just lack of knowledge. Other times, an overactive conscience makes people weak. Guilt feelings. Religious people particularly struggle with legalism and guilt feelings. Weak character after years of compromise can also make somebody

weak. Physical handicaps or abnormalities make people weak. Lack of acceptance. Difficult life situations make people weak. Non-christian parents, children.

Bottom-line, every young Christian is weak because of all these things.

1 Cor. 3:1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ.

Infants in Christ are weak, they're worldly. Here's the poster child for spiritual recovery:

John 5:1-9 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. [2] Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. [3] Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. [4] [5] One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. [6] When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" [7] "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." [8] Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." [9] At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath

This guy is weak, he's lying by the pool waiting for somebody to help him. Too often, we challenge people like this. "What's your problem?" The weak won't help themselves. God has called on the strong to help the weak. Some people are rebellious, but others lack the faith to change. That's different. Weak people need somebody to help them with their faith.

3. Help the Weak

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

Anybody, no matter how weak, can please God if he or she has faith.

Hebrews 11:32-40 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, [33] who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. [35] Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. [36] Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. [37] They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- [38] the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. [39] These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. [40] God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

vs 34 says their "weakness was turned to strength." We've learned that if we neglect the weak, they'll eventually fall away and leave. We've also learned that the body of Christ will always have some weak. If we take the weak and make them strong, where will the new weakness come from? New converts! God will have no other option except to bless us with new disciples. But if you don't strengthen your weak, they'll fall away and more strong will become weak. If we move the weak to being strong, the church will grow.

33. There Are Many Rooms

John 14:1-4 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. [4] You know the way to the place where I am going."

In John 14:2, it says there are many rooms in the father's house. In verse 6, it says the only way to the father is through Jesus. That's the bottom line. Jesus wants us to get to the father. Who is going to heaven from this generation? Jesus wants as many as possible to get there.

1. Focus On The Father's House

Luke 14:21-23 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' [22] " 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' [23] "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'

God wants his house to be full. He doesn't really care about the level of effort. The number of hours, the response of the people--that's not what it's all about. In the end, the focus must be on who is going to the father's house.

How many rooms are there in God's house? There are many rooms, millions, billions. Maybe we've already gone out into the city, but the house still isn't full. Keep going, go again, and go to new areas to make sure that our father's house is full. The shepherd's focus isn't on the 99, but on the one lost sheep. Likewise with the coin. God doesn't want a single sheep to be lost. That's his heart. Not for many, but to make heaven full.

How do we measure our ministry? What's our expectation for our ministry? What do we expect from the brothers and sisters in our ministry? Did we forget the original call of every town, every village? If we have that call as the guiding light of every plan we make, every decision we make, eventually we will reach the entire world. We need to bring back the focus on our father's house. That's what will inspire the next generation.

When we think about making our family group grow, it can be a challenging task. How do we

make our family group grow? We're all in different situations. We have different challenges. We see massive numbers. That can be incredibly exhilarating, but can also be overwhelming. We need God, we need his miracles and his encouragement. Do we have the conviction, the courage to grow our family group? That's what inspires people.

2. Focus on The Son's Heart

a. A heart filled with love.

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

b. A heart to call everyone in our ministry as friends.

John 15:12-17 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. [13] Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command. [15] I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. [16] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. [17] This is my command: Love each other.

c. A heart to be united.

John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [21] that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

d. A heart to help others do greater things

John 14:12-14 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. [13] And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. [14] You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

3. Focus on The Spirits Power

2 Tim 1:7-9 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time...

The spirit changes us and use us. The Spirit makes us powerful. How powerful are we today? What is the power of the Holy Spirit?

a. Resurrection Power

Rom 8:10-11 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

b. Divine Power

2 Pet 1:3,4 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

34. The Church That Jesus Died For

Imagine God looking down two thousand years ago, while Jesus knelt and prayed. Everyone had rejected Jesus, and God looked and saw the crowd. They were coming to arrest Jesus, full of false accusers with no one to defend him. God saw his son lowered into a black hole, spit on and mocked by sinners. He was tortured, nailed to a wooden cross, then God gave him the cup of our sins.

As Jesus drank it, he cried out to God, "Why have you left me here to die?" He was shattered with pain, and God himself was split in two at that time.

A few short days later, in a burst of blinding light, Jesus was raised from the dead. As his followers were praying, a blinding sheet of light came down upon them. Tongues of fire anointed them, they went out into the temple courts and preached. 3,000 were baptized, and the church that Jesus died for was born.

What is the church that Jesus died for?

1. A Church Led by God

All through the Old Testament, the Scriptures teach that the battle is God's. God sent the mission team leader, Jesus Christ, and he guides its steps. In Acts 1, 2, 3 they were praying. The church is persecuted in Acts 4. What do they do? Pray to be more bold, not for the persecution to end.

Read the sermons of the early church. They're full of God. They didn't preach so much about what men needed to do, but about what God is. Let's look at the early Jerusalem church, and learn a few things from them.

Acts 6:1-8 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. [2] So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It

would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. [3] Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them [4] and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." [5] This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. [6] They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. [7] So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. [8] Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

The number of disciples was increasing. The church had a problem. Our churches always have problems. There's one thing that's not right in this situation, though. That's to get distracted. There's no valid excuse to neglect the ministry of the Word and prayer. Is our church led by problems, or is it led by God? Stephen is chosen here not to lead an awesome ministry, but to feed the widows.

A church led by God is humble. It's also a church where miracles happen. Every convert is a miracle. Within a few weeks, they change everything. They break up with years-old relationships, tell you their deepest secrets . . . get baptized and change their whole life, all within a few weeks of friendship. Every single conversion is a miracle, which means we really need God. There are miracles all around you waiting to happen. They'll only happen if we allow God to lead the situation instead of we taking over.

2. A Church Led by Heroes

If God leads the church and he's a hero, then we need to be heroes as well. Every time God sends a prophet, materialistic people always reject him.

Acts 7:54-8:3 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. [55] But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. [56] "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." [57] At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, [58] dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. [59] While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." [60] Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. [8:1] And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. [2] Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. [3] But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

What a hero. The church that Jesus died for was led by heroes full of love. Stephen dies and everybody's heart was broken. Are you a hero today, or is that in the past?

If we're devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word, we'll be fruitful. I am a sinful man. d long time.

3. A Church Led to Conquest

Rev. 6:2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

Acts 8:4-5 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. [5] Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.

Acts 11:19-21 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. [20] Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. [21] The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

This church was outwardly focused. They were going all over the place. Who cares? If it's in the Bible, let's do it. That's the attitude we all need to have.

Acts 22:19-21 " 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. [20] And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' [21] "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

These brothers never stopped preaching the Word, publicly and from house to house. They filled Jerusalem with the teaching, turned the entire world upside down.

That's the church that Jesus died for. If people see it, they'll join it. People like the church that Jesus died for. A song goes like this?. "If I die, let me die in the service of the Lord." Our intensity level makes all the difference. Let it slip slightly . . . After 20 or 30 years, it could make the difference between life and death. It doesn't just affect the numbers, but it affects everybody's attitude.

We can't be the church that Jesus died for by ourselves, but God can do it. Let's be the church that Jesus died for.

35. Are We Afraid?

Matthew 25:24,25 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

Why was he afraid? Perhaps he thought he would be judged with the same expectations as the

first two. Ever feel we have to compete with people that are way more awesome than we are? Maybe he had a bad relationship with the master. Relationship problems produce insecurity. Even when our marriages get strained, we lose confidence and stop leading our families spiritually. Maybe he even had a bad relationship with his dad. Many of us can relate to that as well.

1. Attitude

The man says the master harvests where he has not sown, and gathers where he has not scattered. That's because the first two servants brought more back than they had been given at first. This is not completely untrue, but the third servant's conclusion is inaccurate and unfair. He withdrew from the Master's expectations, became quiet and gave up. Didn't even try.

Let's look at some other passages . . .

John 6:7-9 Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" [8] Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, [9] "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" You can either be a Philip or an Andrew. At least Andrew was willing to do what he could.

What about the women who gave the two small copper coins? Look at her attitude . . . Mark 12:44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

What about David and Saul? We have read the contrast between their responses to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:32-37.

Every passage in the Bible can be looked in different ways. You've heard of the cup that's half full / half empty. That doesn't change our heart, though, not unless we really want it to change. Some of us have been around a long time. What are some of our fears? The best days are behind, not ahead. Not sure who's lost and saved. How's our life when we're dwelling on these fears? We're miserable! Not happy, not victorious.

There are two viewpoints, but we have to deliberately choose between the two each time. We either have to choose (a) God is out to get me, or (b) God is out for my good

If we choose incorrectly, according to Matthew 25 we will lose our salvation. If we deliberately decide to choose the faithful attitude, though, we can be the blessed servant. This is what all of us want, but we have to face it first. If we change our attitudes, we can change our destiny and that of everybody around us.

2. Action

The wicked servant in this parable acted out of fear, and it led him to the wrong decision. The master represents God, and his comments show his perspective on the servant's heart. He didn't call him "misguided, confused or overwhelmed." This is a moral issue. What happened to this servant was the product of a choice he made. That's important. The other guys may have been afraid, but their fear motivated them to work hard.

The first servant went at once and put his money to work. In the English language it's rendered "talent" In the original language, it's really talking about money. It's our field of expertise We know what it takes to put money to work. It takes effort, education and risks. This servant realized it was going to take a lot of work, and he just didn't want to do it

Why was he called "wicked?" What was so wicked about what he did? He failed to fulfill the righteous requirements of his relationship with the Master. How about thinking that he hid the money hoping the other two guys would fail. When the master came back, he would be the one that looked good in the end. He thought he was being smart by putting the money away while the others failed

Faith is like that one talent this man had. To put our faith to work, we have to take risks. We're going to risk our reputation when we take a stand for the Christian faith. We'll risk the trust of our family, people's friendship toward us, even our job. We might face physical risks, and like this man we hide that one talent in the ground. Our fear causes us to hide because we don't want the risk, we don't want to get hurt.

The church is described as a family. That teaches us about relationships. It's the body. That teaches us about the unity we need to forge, even though we're different. The church is the kingdom of God. This highlights our destiny and purpose.

Romans 7:22-23 For in my inner being I delight in God's law; [23] but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

1 Tim. 1:18 Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight,

Philip. 2:25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

2 Tim. 2:3-4 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. [4] No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer.

Rev. 12:7 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.

Rev. 12:17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Rev. 19:11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.

The church is a nation at war. Perhaps the activity that best describes us is war. War reshapes the character of nations. War changes societies and cultures. War has casualties. War involves casualties, though.

What do we do with the wounded in war? Criticize them for getting shot or maimed? We take them home, we bind them up and we hope they can go back to their lives. When we're out there with fellow soldiers, we don't worry about our rapport and bonding times. When we're out there with a fellow soldier, we hope that soldier is alert and guarding our back. The battlefield shapes those relationships. Maybe we didn't know each other before the war. War makes the soldiers buddies, it makes them depend on each other, calls them higher.

When we look at our problems that way, it gives us a different perspective. We'd all be afraid in war, but it moves us to follow our training, to execute, to overcome. War can redefine the nature of our relationships. It's not just about getting along We need to be able to count on one another, or we may get shot down. The enemy is cruel. He won't hold back. He's powerful and vicious.

When we see the situations around us, they're casualties of war. People have been shot down We can't let that crush our ideals. We're at war. It needs to motivate us to move forward, to act and not to hold back

We have a choice. Let us look in our heart and see what we fear. Then let us ask ourself whether we're going to hide the talent of faith, or watch it multiply.

The best formula to be prosperous and successful. (Josh 1:6-9) "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

36. A Call To Persevere?

God calls us to persevere. Matthew 24:30 "*He who stands firm to the end will be saved*". The Bible is full of stories of men and women who persevere. *James 5:11* we can see Job's perseverance.

In order to survive our life, in order to survive our faith, in order to survive all the temptations and trials of this world we've got to learn to persevere, go through tough times and learn to handle it with God on our side. We are at different situations in our life today. Maybe we are struggling in family relationships - with our spouse or with our children or with our in-laws or

we are in a family situation which is very challenging and we are feeling "How long?". Maybe we're thinking about our job - we have a very challenging job where our Boss doesn't understand us. Maybe we have a challenge with our finances, we have a lot of debts and we don't know how we're going to come out of this. And we may think that it is doubtful whether, living, we would ever be able to clear our debts. Or maybe we feel like a failure - whatever we try fails. That's how we're feeling now - " I tried doing good it didn't last long, I tried to be close to somebody that also I get hurt, I tried to stay faithful to God that also didn't seem to help, I tried my best with my spouse (I've been loving, I'm forgiving, I'm patient, I'm trying to endure through all the challenges) but it doesn't work. The Bible encourages us to persevere.

Romans 5:3-5 - We need to rejoice in our suffering ! Whatever sufferings we are going through, that we are enduring now - we've got to rejoice in our sufferings. Why? Suffering produces perseverance. That's how we grow in perseverance. Every single suffering we endure or go through, it teaches us to persevere, we become more strong in our perseverance. And what does perseverance produce? Character. That's how when we persevere, when we endure through hard times what does it show about us? It proves our character. And character produces Hope. That's the only way we can last and survive in this world otherwise we won't be able to survive. And when we go through suffering and we persevere, it proves our character and we have hope. And when we have hope we can give hope to others. That is why we need to persevere.

James 1: 1-4- we ought to consider it pure joy when we go through many kinds of trial. Because all this tests our faith. And testing of our faith develops perseverance - the ability to endure, to stay in there, to hold on and not give up. Perseverance must finish it's work that whenever we go through trials and persecutions and suffering we must go on persevering, it must be completed. It says, " so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything".

God is calling us to persevere. All of us, at different times we are tempted to give up. Every one of us at some time has thought of giving up. If we find studies difficult, we want to give up studies, when we find our job difficult - we want to give up. When we find a relationship difficult, we want to give it up. When we find our relationship with our children hard - we want to give up sometimes. When we find staying faithful difficult, we want to give up being faithful. The Bible says we need to persevere. Whatever we start we must learn to finish. The Bible promises that whatever suffering we are going through, God will not give us more than what we can handle. So if we are going through difficult times, God believes we can handle it. We may think, " God this is so hard, get me out of here" and God says, " Persevere". Let us never give up our faith in God.

Sometimes we don't know whether we are persevering or not persevering. We don't know where we are at. Hebrews 10 was written to the Hebrew Christians. Those Christians were going through some really hard times - their faith in Jesus was really tested. It had to be explained to them that Jesus IS Lord. The writer had to explain why Jesus is who he is. The Hebrew Christians were slowly giving up their faith.

Hebrews 10: 32-39. Here the writer is telling the brothers and sisters that they have got to persevere and not shrink back, to be the ones who believe and are saved. He's reminding them of the earlier days. When they had just received the light, when they had just been baptized. He

reminds them about how they had stood firm through all the persecutions they had received. He reminds them that they had "stood their ground". He reminds them that they were publicly exposed and insulted. They had stood side by side with those who had been insulted. They had sympathized with those in prison, joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property because they had believed they had more lasting property with God. The writer urges them to remember the confidence and faith they had in the beginning and pleads with them not to throw that away. That is what he's telling the Christians to do.

Hebrews 10:19-25 - Here the writer is reminding them that they have the chance to go to the most holy place regularly any time they want, which the Jews could not do - their priests can go only one time a year. But now because of Jesus they can go to the Most Holy place anytime to get their guilty conscience cleared. He reminds them that what they have now is so much more greater than what they had in the past. He's reminding the Jewish Christians who had been faithful all these years to do certain things. In verses 22-25 the verses start with "let us". When we are strong in the faith we keep doing all these things. When we stop persevering, when we stop holding on, when we are not fully in the faith, we can look at ourselves and ask "where am I in the eyes of God". What happens when we stop persevering?

Signs Of People Who Stop Persevering

1. Not drawing near to God.

That's what happens isn't it when we are discouraged, when we're down, when we feel like life is over, when we're in sin, when we're guilty, when we feel "what's the point"? What's the first thing that happens? We stop drawing near to God. What is the writer saying - "*let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance full of faith* " When we're losing faith and we're lacking perseverance we're not fully assured, our faith is not full, we have a lot of doubts and we stop drawing near to God.

2. Not holding to the hope we profess unswervingly.

"*you must hold unswervingly to the hope you profess because he who has promised is faithful* ". We keep swaying in our faith. What is the hope we profess? That all of us will make it to heaven one day. When we start wavering in that belief - is that going to happen or not going to happen. Is heaven really there - no one has seen it. Am I wise or foolish to hold on to some concept called heaven? We struggle to hold on to that incredible promise we have.

3. Not giving in our Christian duty.

"*Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds* ". When we get discouraged and don't believe that whatever we're holding on to is right and true, we stop giving in our Christian duty, we hold back in our Christian responsibilities. What are our Christian responsibilities? Towards our brothers and sisters, toward the people of the world, giving, encouraging, teaching, helping, correcting. All the Christian responsibilities loving, sharing all that we hold back because we don't believe we are going to make a difference. We feel no one is going to change because we are doing something - "I can't change myself so how in the world

can I change somebody else?" We get so disillusioned we don't want to persevere in the right things as God calls us to.

4. Getting into the habit of missing meetings.

We should not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another and all the more as we see the Day approaching . The fourth sign is that we get into the habit of missing meetings. Once in a while we miss meetings for some reason. But when we get into the habit of missing meetings it means we don't believe in it anymore. It is a sign that we've stopped persevering in something good that the Bible calls us to do. That's the fourth sign that we stop persevering in being together because we want to be alone. Isn't that what we want to do when we are discouraged or troubled in our hearts do we want to be with people? We are like "leave alone, don't disturb me". What does the Bible say? Let us not give up the habit of meeting together. It also tells us to encourage one another. That's a powerful thing. Why do we meet together? To encourage each other,, to spend time with each other, to pray for each other, to instruct each other, to confess to each other, to reach out to one another. That is why we meet together - to encourage one another. If we don't do this we will stop persevering.

5. Not wanting to repent, completely giving up

The fifth sign is in v26 - *"if we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left but only a fearful expectation of judgement and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God "*. We know, this is a sign of complete rejection meaning we completely give up. What do we do? Deliberately keep on sinning - that means we don't care about your faith anymore, we don't care about God anymore or our Christian life. We feel it's of no use. Deliberately keep on sinning. Basically we decide not to repent of our sin, we know we are keeping on doing something wrong and we just don't decide to give up that sin because in our heart we're not ready to. Not wanting to repent is a sign of not wanting to persevere.

First we stop drawing near to God, then we lose our unswerving hope - our strong faith in Christ and in his teachings and his expectations - and stop holding on to it. The third thing we stop being totally devoted to is our Christian duty. Then we lose our joy of being together, meeting together and we don't think it's important anymore. Finally, the last stage - we deliberately keep on sinning, unrepentant sin. We know the amazing thing is that though we struggle to persevere, God is a God who never gives up. He always perseveres with us.

2 Timothy 2:10-13 - "if we endure we will also reign with him" - when we reach heaven one day. If we are faithless, God will always remain faithful. God will never stop persevering with each one of us. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing or whatever we're doing that we are not supposed to be doing, whatever situation we're in, Jesus is always faithful to us - He'll never give up on us. We need to persevere. Call of the Bible, call for our life is for us to persevere.

37. Remember The Poor

I. God's concern for the poor

In this section we are not yet concerned with what the believer should think or do for the poor, but with God's thoughts. Though we often forget poverty and oppression, it is clear from the Bible that they are always on God's mind.

(Isa 25:4 NIV) You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall

(Psa 10:14 NIV) But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

(Isa 41:17 NIV) "The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

Lesson: I think it's fair to say that our attitudes toward the poor are mostly Uneasiness and fear. They're dangerous and different. Sometimes there's a suspicion that their condition is their own fault, that they're simply lazy or inferior. Some are more kind-hearted, but prefer not to look at the poor too closely; it's depressing, and they're surely not fun people to be with.

These attitudes are a world away from God's attitudes, as described in these verses. Neediness arouses compassion in God-- and God responds in ACTION.

We may think: "Of course God loves the poor; he loves everybody." But it's not so simple as that; God's character is presented as a model for our own. If God values the poor, we have to think about what that means for us.

II. God's commands concerning the poor

This section collects some specific commands from Old and New Testaments on serving the poor.

(Deu 26:12 NIV) When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

(Isa 58:6 NIV) "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

(Luke 3:11 NIV) John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Lesson: The message here is really very simple: help the needy. It's not hard to understand; it's just hard to do.

And the message is continuous. It's in the Prophets and Psalms; it's in the Gospels; it's in the Epistles. How many churches emphasize serving the poor as much as the Bible itself does? Won't the world BE A BETTER PLACE if all believers followed these commands?

Another thing to note about these verses is the lack of excuses. None of them add "...once a year"

or "...when you feel you can" or "...if they're moral " or ". We have plenty of reasons (I'm sure you can think of a dozen) why we can't go out and feed the hungry, why we have to turn away the needy borrower-- and God help us. But all those reasons belong to our sinful human nature, not to God. God just wants those needy people helped.

III. God's Blessings on those who serve the poor

Serving poor may be The Right Thing To Do; but the Bible also associates it with material and spiritual reward. Here we'll look at the benefits promised to those who serve the poor; in the next section we'll examine the consequences of not doing so.

(Prov 22:9 NIV) A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

(Jer 22:16 NIV) He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the LORD.

(Prov 19:17 NIV) He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.

(Isa 58:10 NIV) and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

(Luke 14:12-14 NIV) Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Lessons ; We are susceptible to religious quacks who promise riches to those who believe in God because we all need money. We like to hear such messages and preachings..

We do find promises of reward in the Bible-- to those who serve the poor. God's making a very simple proposal here: "You help the poor, and I'll repay it."

Jesus promises treasure in heaven. Jesus is asking us to go way past our comfort level in giving things away. And in not getting them back. God doesn't want to hear excuses; he specifically commands us to help the stranger, the beggar, the sick. Jesus' command on dinner parties couldn't be clearer: the people you need to help are not the people like you, the people you like, the people who can repay you.

Can you give too much? We believe in moderate giving in all things. Unfortunately, we get this idea from the wisdom of the world, not the Bible. Jesus asks for immoderate giving.

IV. Consequences of not serving the poor

As there are blessings for those who serve the poor, there are consequences for those who oppress them... or who simply ignore them.

(Ezek 16:49 NIV) "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.

(Jer 5:28 NIV) and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor.

(Luke 16:19-15 NIV) "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

Lessons ; Many So called Spiritual Leaders worry what might happen to our country , Youth, if Movies and advertisements promote sexual immorality. Now, the sexual morality the Bible tells us to be worried about is our own, more than others. A more serious worry is what will happen to us, our churches, our nation, if we don't serve the poor.

Obviously, adding to the misery of the poor is bad-- exploiting workers, oppressing immigrants, robbing the needy. But it doesn't stop there. Merely ignoring the poor is a crime. Sodom wasn't destroyed because of sexual immorality; it was destroyed because it "had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease" and it "did not help the poor and needy".

There isn't the least suggestion that the rich man being punished in hell was responsible for Lazarus's condition... except in the most general sense: he was responsible as a fellow human being, as a man who was aware of the one suffering at his door and did nothing to help.

"Pleading the cause" of the poor, being their advocate and defender, is simply something a righteous person does. Are you someone who, when others are silent, advocates for the poor in your company, your church, your nation, your office ?

Let us Help the Poor and Bring Glory to GOD.

38. Our Life

Our life is not about us but about God. Our life -we love, don't we! Every one sees their life as precious. When we start thinking we go to the beginning. Why were we created - why did God create me!

1. Created To Have Relationship With God

Genesis: 1: 26-27 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Here we see God creating the world. He created everything, but he thought that the world is still not complete. Then he goes to create a very special being that is the mankind why did he create him! To rule the whole creation! Do you all agree with this? That's what we are doing right now. The mankind has taken over the earth. But why did He create man? Only to be a man to control the earth or something else? If that's the only reason He could have created a monster to control the whole earth. So we see the big difference, God created us in his own image, in his own godly nature. He created us to love him and have a good relationship. It's the same relationship we have with our children.

We love our children very much and we expect our children to love us. If they don't love us and achieve every thing in the world, our heart will be broken. There is a spot God has put in every one of us living in this earth. It will not be filled by anything except with love and relationship with God. Today are we fulfilling the primary purpose, why we are created? Are we seeking God! Do we desire to have that relationship with God?

We all want to have eternal life. What is eternal life!

John 17:3 -Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Knowing God is eternal life. Start knowing about God now and not after we die. But the process starts here. How do we know God? By studying the Bible. Bible is God's love letter for us. It tells us how much God will love us. To have that relationship with God we need to start what God is. If we have to have good relationship with our friend, we need to know who he is, appreciate his great qualities then automatically we will have great relationship with him. That's why we need to take personal responsibility to study and see what Gods qualities are.

2. Called To Live In The Light

1 Peter 2: 9 - But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Bible says God called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. Why did God call us into his kingdom? What does it mean to us? As disciples God called us out of darkness to have a fellowship in light. Today being in the light are we the one who fellowships in light are we still wandering in the darkness. The darkness is nothing but our sinful life. We became disciples but are we still walking in darkness?

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Is our light visible? Is our light shining before men so that God is glorified? We need to let our light shine.

Luke 11:34,35 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.

3. Chosen To Glorify God

John 15: 8-16 - This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Jesus said you did not choose me I chose you. We are chosen to be in his kingdom. We are Gods children. We are chosen to glorify God's name. How are we going to glorify God. Bible says by bearing fruit.

John 12:23-28 - Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

From this scripture, we can see glory means sacrificing our life. God chose us so that we live a sacrificial life. Many of us when we go through sacrificial time we become very emotional, get bad attitude and start complaining. But that's the time we have to control self and glorify God. That's what Jesus did, before going to the cross it was a very difficult time, at that time he said let your name be glorified in heaven. There is a voice yes, my son I will glorify you I will glorify you again. When you have dream to do great things for God we might have to do lot of sacrifice in our life, that's the way we glorify God.

We have to understand the life is not about us, it is about God. God has created us to have relationship with Him. He called us to live in the light and let the light shine. He chose us to glorify His name.

39. Dare To Be Different

The world calls us to be like them and do what they say. We spend most of the time with the people of the world. And if we are not careful, the world and the values of the world can easily influence us. God calls us to be different. God gave us a new name 'Christians' when we became Christians, to be different from our old name. He redeemed us by buying us from Satans family, he bought with his blood and he brought us in to His family.

1. Dare to trust God.

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

We can see that Noah dared to trust God when nobody else was trusting God those times. Noah was warned about the flood. Till then the mankind has not seen the flood the way God said to Noah. God told him to build an ark and Noah did. He built an ark, according to the instruction given by God himself because he feared God.

We also think about saving our family, our ministry, the lost.... Noah's faith and his trust in God made big difference in saving his family. Our faith and trust in God plays a major role in helping our family, our ministry and the lost to make it to heaven. We need to fear God like how Noah did.

Gen 6:5-9 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.

Noah was a very different man comparing to rest of the men who lived with him. Think about our lives without God, what is every inclination of our thought lead us to. It leads to evil; without God our hearts will always be directing to evil. And when our thoughts are filled with evil our actions will also follow our heart. Noah dared to be different in his time. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time and he walked with God. Today we have to look at our life and see how we are living our Christian life. Are we different from the rest of the world and the neighbors? Would we find favor in Gods eyes because of our faith in God? It took lot of faith for Noah to build an ark, nobody could ever seen an ark like that. It takes lot of faith to be obedient when nobody is obedient; it takes lot of faith to share our faith to people when nobody else is doing it.

2 Pet 2:5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others;

Noah was known as preacher of righteousness. He was not actually going around preaching, speaking or talking to everybody. Noah's life became a message - by his life, by the way he lived, the way he spoke. More than preaching he lived a life that is example to others, his life became a message. When we look at our daily life, is there any difference in our old and new life. If not, it's time to change now. It takes a little decision. So we got to dare to be different.

Noah dared to be different to trust in God. Dare to trust God, trusting God means believing in him that he is going to take care of our life believing with all your heart, with out any doubt trusting God.

2. Dare to be consistent.

Job 1:1-5 In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.

Job was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters he had a big family. He had to raise up ten children in a Godly way. Each of his sons would hold the feast in turns. What would Job do when the feast was over he would get his children and purify them before God. Here we see the father is concerned about the purity of his children. He felt that deeply because he feared God and he shunned evil. Early in the morning, he would sacrifice burnt offering for each of them. Job knows the only way that they are going to be spiritually alive is by the power of God. This was Jobs regular custom.

We can see some thing different about Job here, he was consistent. He was consistent in the way he felt for his family and his children's spiritual well being. We get emotional, fired up for sometime and then again we go back to our mediocrity. That's not the way Job lived his life. We can be consistent if we decide to be consistent.

Noah and Job were just ordinary men who decided to live extraordinary life. We got to be daring to be different. We have to really love God with all our mind, with all our soul and strength because that is the greatest commandment. Each one of us has to decide to love our God with all our heart, with all our mind with all our soul and all our strength. Let's believe that God can change our hearts, our ministries and our families.

Lets take away all the doubt, worries and burden that we are carrying. Let's leave every thing and believe that God the Jehovah, God who created the whole universe has the power to change every one and change our ministries / families. Let's all dare to be different.

40. Get Ready To Cross The Jordan River

1. Prepare for testing

Deuteronomy 8:1-5 Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the LORD promised on oath to your forefathers. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

Here we see that Moses was preparing the people to go forward. He feels responsible to prepare the people of God to get ready. Moses explains and teaches and really talks to the people if they are not getting ready they may not cross the Jordan River. It's encouraging seeing how much God really loves us. V5 As a father disciplines the son the Lord disciplines us V6 God is like a dad carrying us every day. How it will be if God say I am going to drop you man, you don't obey me I will drop you, God is always carrying us. When He carries us He is going to discipline us. Let us prepare for testing, it is good for us. God promised us many years ago testing will come but when it comes let us be ready.

Why testing comes? 1. To change our character. As we were growing we learn lot of other characters from the world like jealousy, selfishness, greed, pride, immorality. God said I want to change you so that you can become like me. 2. Testing comes to humble us. Vs2 God wants to teach from day one to till the day we die that we should depend on God. 3. Testing comes to make us spiritually taught. We were grown up in a very comfortable situation; some of us are spoiled. God is not sentimental. He loves us so much but He is not sentimental. . When God told them to move to Kadesh Barnea they were not willing to go, God said I am going to teach them some discipline. God made them to take a spiritual journey, which should have taken 11 days. But He took them 40 years to reach Kadesh Barnea. People didn't know where it was, for 40 years they were wandering in the desert. God did this to humble them and test them. God can lead us in good times and tough times. He loves us so much but if we go away from him He will discipline us. He will discipline us and still take care of us. When He carries, we will get some spanking, still He will carry us, He will not drop us.

2. Victory by Gods grace

Deuteronomy 9:1-6 Hear, O Israel. You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. The people are strong and tall--Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: "Who can stand up against the Anakites?" But be assured today that the LORD your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the LORD has promised you. After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, "The

LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness." No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Get ready, Anakites who are powerful than you are going to attack you. Sometimes our enemies are stronger and greater than us. God said listen I will give you victory. God wants to give us victory not because we are righteous and our good deeds, but because their wickedness. God said listen don't think you are somebody. He wants us to be sober. He wants us to understand his grace, our sinful nature. God wants us to have sober heart.

3. Desire God not the World

Deuteronomy 8:10-13 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

God says I am going to give you every thing , I increase and even multiply every thing you have. One condition, we should make sure that we thank God and be grateful to Him. We need to make sure that we do not forget Him. Who gave all these things, we got every thing not because of our good look and our great deeds. Let us not forget to pray, let us take time to pray and meditate on Him. Let us delight in God. God is going to fulfill what's in our heart. We all have desires don't we, we may not admit and be open about it , every one of us have desires in our heart.

4. Don't follow sin

Deuteronomy 8:19-20 If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

Bible says if we continue to forget and leave Him and if we go towards other foreign gods, and if we worship some thing else and bow down to that, it is not going to be a good ending. It's talking about the sins of our heart. Our sins have to be dealt with every day. Worries, discouragement self pity all these can take us out of God. Let us have Quiet times every single day and thank God every single day.

5. Praise him and enjoy life

Deuteronomy 8:10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

When we are eaten and satisfied, let us praise the Lord. When we have great blessing and when we are satisfied, we need to praise the Lord. Life is hard some times, let us have fun. We got to enjoy the relationship with one another.

41. Do You Want To Know Christ?

James 1: 2 - 4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Mature means fit or fully grown and developed; perfect complete, whole, maturity in goodness. When can a disciple say I am fully-grown in Christ?

Phil 3:7-16 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Paul expresses his desire to know Christ. He gave up every thing to follow Christ, his goal is to know and be like Christ and to experience what He experienced, which made him happy. Not that he has reached there forgetting everything from the past, what is behind. He had a lot to remember he wanted to know the joy of knowing Christ like Stephen. Paul had to make bigger sacrifices to know Christ and be like him.

Every thing he did he consider rubbish. That's how he considered all that he achieved in the past. Let us check ourselves and ask where do we stand in knowing Christ? Paul was probably in Rome under house arrest. Probably 30 years he has been a Christian, he was on a mission suffering in many ways. Bad attitudes towards him, spat on, beaten up etc. but he considered everything rubbish in compared to knowing Christ.

Some of us are 5 yrs or 10 yrs as Christians and we have built on Christ life on the word of God being the foundation. Paul was a Christian for 30 yrs, even after that he was still starving to know God. Some of us have stopped growing, but we are good at being critics of the church. We

need to be humble - the way we serve people. Coming to church on time, involving in others life, studying the Bible helps us to know Christ better. How can we fall in love with God, our goal should be more than before. Mature people don't consider their past achievement or any thing to boast about. We have to keep a record of all the little good we see. But we get involved in church politics; we have opinions about every Christian. We should be growing, but we stay in one spot and analyze the past. We have two things to grow in Christ. (a) We need to have faith (b) We need to grow in our beliefs

1. We need to have Faith

Heb 5:11-14 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Where is our faith on? Just going to church or growing from within. Jewish Christians had problem not maturing and growing. They should be ready to teach others but they were refusing to go beyond their old practices and traditions and old beliefs. They refused to grow but got mixed up in many doctrines. In fact they should be teaching others how to love Christ better. But they were being taught the basics again.

Solid food is for the mature but they were demanding milk. When we don't grow in our Christian life, we desire milk. We get used to being taught basic things again and again. Come to meetings, bring your Bible, don't sleep in church... We struggle to digest simple teachings and crave for milk. We tried to feed solid food and we spit it and ask for milk. The mature are the ones who are able to distinguish good from evil and know the right and wrong choices.

2. We need to grow in our beliefs.

Eph 4:14-16 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

When children grow they no longer be infants, when our faith grows we will no longer be swayed left and right by others teaching. We should see the Holy Spirit working in the Church.

Galatians 5: 22-25 If we have the spirit these are the fruits that will be evident in our life. Love, joy, peace, unity, patience, bearing with each other, kindness towards one another helping the poor, serving, goodness no jealousy or envy or evil or bad intentions. Faithfulness in spite of persecution or even travelling long distance to visit the church and fellowship the brothers. Gentleness- no longer hatred or division, self-control, hard-line in being pure, no immorality. If

these characters are seen in our relationship we have the Holy Spirit. If the church has these things then we all are led by the Spirit.

1 Cor 13:11-13 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

We should leave childish ways behind, we don't have all the answer to the life, and we have to keep growing and mature.

1 Pet 2:1-3 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Let us crave for pure spiritual milk, we need to reach Christ, so let us keep growing, craving to attain maturity. Salvation is a gift given to us. It is already ours, all we need to do is to understand and experience it and grow up in salvation. The Lord is good... always.

42. How Can We Sleep?

It was approximately from 785 to 760 BC when the book of Jonah was written. Of course the author was Jonah himself, son of Amittai. The purpose of this book can be to show the extend of God's love, His grace, the message of salvation for all people. The setting is around the king Jeroboam II. And during his time Assyria was most deadly enemy. And Israel was conquered by them in 722 BC and Jonah preaches to Nineveh, in 785 Bc and his ministry ends in 753.

The world seems to be filled with over flowing violence hatred and corruption. Reading, hearing or perhaps even experiencing this tragedy will help us to understand the necessity of God. We may even have vengeance to people who are violent. And some time's violent people are beyond redemption. If we are told to take the gospel to the worst offenders how would we respond? And that's the task given by God to Jonah, Assyria a great evil empire one of the most deadly enemy of Israel. So when God told him to go and preach to the city of wickedness he could not handle, he in fact ran the opposite direction. God stopped him and he came back, obeyed and preached the word. People repented and God's judgement stopped.

Jonah 1:1-17 Niniveh was an important city in Assyria, capital city soon in 50 years. The prophet Nahum talks little bit more about the details of the sin of Nineveh. Nahum 1: 9 plotting evil against God. Nahum 2:12 exploiting the helpless, they were cruel in war and Nahum 3:4 talks about adultery, witchcraft and many other things. And so God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he was focused on running away from God. He is in the ship and God sends a big storm and then a violent storm that the ship would break up. All the sailors were shaking and they were afraid suddenly they cried out to their own gods but Jonah was deep down under taking a nice nap.

Can we relate to that when things are all going bad, he was having a nice sleep? The captain of the ship came down and said "Listen Jonah, how can you sleep? Call upon your God."

Sometimes God will rock and shake our boat, if we don't wake up then He will bring rain and storm and all those things to wake you up but still he couldn't see it. God sends the message, then the wind, then the storm, then the captain, how can we still sleep? Do we know that God works the same way in our life. When we start slowly go in the opposite direction, suddenly things started rocking and shaking. What kind of storm are we in today. Is our boat rocking because of finances, is our family splitting, is it because there is no job?

1. Look again to God's holy temple

Jonah 2:1-6 Later we see that Jonah accepted his fault I am the one, I was wrong, now throw me out. See he was not broken before God, so God had another plan to break him. So God designed a big fish and God was in control of the fish. God will allow some discipline in our life; the discipline is under control. This fish decided not to eat this man, this is the only food the fish decided to gulp it down, no chewing nothing, God is in control. He stayed inside for 3 days and 3 nights. Imagine the seen inside the fish. There was no power there was pitch dark, darkness driven away, there were all kinds of junk seafood and water, there was no bed to lie down, we are not sure whether he was standing in the fish or sitting. He went through discipline. God was still working even though he was inside the fish for 3 days. In his distress he called upon God, he prayed and he decided to go back to the Lord. Even though there was lot of things around him he decided to focus on the Lord.

After three days God commanded the fish to vomit him out. This whale vomited every thing out. Jonah with all kinds of smell and mess on him he fell into the land. But when he repented God picked him up and dropped him back in Nineveh. Jonah its time to get back to the business Jonah, that was special treatment from the Lord.

2. Get the right attitude

Jonah 4 : 1- 11 Later we see Jonah fulfills Gods mission he went and preached the word, Ninevites believed in God. Chapter 3 says they declared a fast, they put on sackcloth and really worshipped the Lord, and there was repentance in that city. Great things were happening and God was pleased and He stopped the judgement, which He kept for them before. When we change and our attitude changes, God works powerfully. We see in chapter: 4 after all great things happened Jonah got upset with the Lord, because the city was not destroyed. Jonah got upset, he got concerned about the wrong things in life. He got concerned about the sun and the shade, all these things started distracting him. Some times small things can take away our joy, small thing can get us. God said listen don't be like this ... don't think about yourself think about the people.

True happiness is when we are concerned about people, when we think about them. That's Gods heart, He is concern about every one in the world. He wants us to show the love and concern to other people. That brings happiness to our hearts.

God saved the sailors when they pleaded for mercy, God saved Jonah when he prayed out of the fish, God saved the people on Nineveh when they responded to Jonah's preaching. God will

answer the prayers of any one who call on Him. God will always work, He will send the wind, the storm, the fish, the people. He leads us by any thing to wake us up. We can be saved when we hear Gods word. If we respond in obedience Gods mercy will be shown on us and we will not be punished. Lets do what ever He asked us to do and go wherever He leads us. Let us bring glory to God.

43. My Grace Is Sufficient For You

- In the beginning when Adam and Eve sinned and they were banished from the Garden of Eden, they wer so filled with guilt but God said, 'My grace' is sufficient for you.
- We know that God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a child but Abraham lied and Sarah did not believe - they laughed and they felt so guilty about their lives but God said, 'My grace is sufficient for you' and he blessed them.
- When Moses killed the Egyptian he felt so guilty that he fled to the desert region and there, when he was tired and weary from running he heard the voice of God telling him, 'My Grace is sufficient for you'.
- Joseph was sold as a slave and jailed for the crime he did not do and in the midst of all the pain and the fear he was going through he cried out to God and he could hear the voice of God from heaven, 'My Grace is sufficient for you'.

Today in our lives we may go through many difficulties and challenges. We may feel weak and powerless but we can hear a voice from heaven even today. God is looking at all of us and God is willing to say to all of us, 'My Grace is sufficient for you'.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Here Paul is praying to God about some thorn in his flesh. We don't exactly know what it is, but when he was going through a tough time, when he was going through some challenges in his life, when he felt weak he prayed to God and he could hear the voice of Jesus saying, 'My Grace is sufficient for you'. And Jesus also tells him, '...my power is made perfect in weakness'. Today, in our lives we all have challenges to face, we have struggles. Sometimes we feel weak and powerless but the Bible says that when we are feeling weak God's power is made perfect through our weakness because He can heal us and He is able to bless us to get back our strength.

When we look at God, he is willing to shower his grace on us. He's willing to say, 'My grace is sufficient for you' and when we value that grace, our lives can change. When we got baptized we looked at our heart. We didn't look at others, we looked at our sins and we went to God. We were broken by the cross of Christ, we were moved by God's love and we surrendered to God. And God looked at us and said, 'My Grace is sufficient for you'. We felt that that was enough for us. 'My sins are forgiven and that's enough for me. I've received salvation and that's enough for me'. Life was very simple. But now... Let's look at our own hearts. Is the grace of God sufficient for

us or are we looking for something else? Are we searching for something that we may not get? The reason for that is that we've stopped valuing the grace of God.

1. Let us value the grace of God

2 Cor 6:1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

Today have we received God's grace in vain? How can we say whether we have received it in vain or whether we are valuing it? To see what we'll be doing if we value the grace of God and what we'll do if we show contempt.

Roman 6:1-5. What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

But the question is, are we willing to change? Are we fighting? Are we willing to renew the new self we got when we were baptized? Are we willing to recommit to God? If we are not fighting against sin, that means we are not valuing the grace of God. When we keep sinning we are not valuing the grace of God - we are showing contempt for the grace of God. But how should we show value for the grace of God? How can God's grace be sufficient for us?

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

God's grace teaches us to live a self-controlled, upright and godly life. We must lead a self-controlled life. Is it easy for Satan to get you or is he really struggling to trap you into sin? Is Satan walking in and out, whenever he pleases? Or are we leading a self-controlled life?

Romans 2:4-6 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

2. Let us be gracious towards one another

One thing when it comes to grace is that we want to be so gracious to ourselves and our mistakes. When somebody else makes a mistake, sometimes we have no grace.

Ephesians 4:32. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

We must learn to forgive one another as Christ Jesus forgave us. That is a very important virtue of grace. When we are gracious towards one another, forgiveness is a part of it. Accepting one another is also a part of it, respecting one another, valuing one another.

For us to be united with God, God was willing to be gracious to us, he was willing to forgive us, accept us, respect us, value us and receive us as his own child. If we want to be united with our wives or with our children we should show grace to them. We are so often in the spot where we are so gracious to our own anger, our own mistakes. When others make a mistake we take the rod of judgement and point out a hundred things which are not right with them.

Colossians 4:6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

That is how our speech should be - full of grace. It's not just with others but also with our family members. Let us be gracious to one another. God has given us his grace freely.

Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

We need to freely give to others what God has freely given to us. We must not forget that there are so many people in and around the city, in and around our house, our neighborhood, our office who don't know about the grace of God. It's very important for us to help them receive that grace which we have received.

We need to think about our lives. Are we willing to point people towards God? Are we willing to let others receive the grace of God? God looks at all of us and says, 'My grace is sufficient for you'. Let us be content with our God Almighty. Let us love God with all our heart, with all our soul and with our entire mind. Let us love our neighbors as ourselves, let us love others more than ourselves. As we continue the journey, let us understand the grace of God is sufficient for us. Let us value the grace of God and let us be gracious to one another.

44. Are We Eager....?

1. Eager to do good

Luke 16:1-8. This is a very strange parable. The manager was a slave who ran the master's estate. The master was an absentee landlord; he was never around to see what the slave was doing. Since the landlord was not around, the manager took full advantage of the landlord's absence. Now we also see that the debtors who owed money to the manager were also not good. Back then, the rent used to be paid, not in cash but in kind. Generally it was agreed upon that you paid part of the produce as rent. In the meanwhile, the manager suddenly finds out that he's going to lose his job. So he called all the debtors and said, 'let's settle accounts and I will put a bill which is less than what you owe'. Now the debtors were obviously happy because they had to pay less than they owed and so they were happy to settle the amount. This didn't just happen in the times of Jesus, it happens even today. If you go to a shop to buy something the shopkeepers will always ask how much they should bill for. That is because you can make some commission also,

out of the whole deal. Now the master gets to know the entire plan of the manager but instead of being shocked at the behavior of the manager he actually commends him. 'Good job, man. You've got a good brain after all. I didn't know you were so smart'. The manager is actually commended for his crookedness.

Jesus says, 'if only the people of the light could be as shrewd as the people of the world'. People in the world are very shrewd. That's why sometimes we are taken advantage of as disciples by people. We come into the church with a lot of trust and we trust anybody and everybody. We can see disciples lending money to disciples. It really messes up people's hearts when they feel like they can get money from someone. Especially when the person doesn't pay you back. So many times the relationship between disciples gets strained because money is owed. May be we should lend only so much which will not give us a bad attitude even if the person doesn't pay us back.

If only a man could give as much attention to the things that concern his soul as much as the things that concern his family, his wealth, friends or other things he'll be a better man. Studies have revealed that the average man spends 20 times the amount of time, money and effort on pleasure, hobbies, sports and other things than on godly things and church related activities. Our Christianity could be so much more effective if we spent so much more of our time, effort and energy into things that concern Jesus Christ. Today, how eager are we to do what is right? How eager are we to read our Bibles every morning? How eager are we to share our faith? How eager are we to give our monthly contribution? How eager are we to visit someone who is sick? Or to encourage someone who is in need?

2. Eager to make friends

Luke 16:9-12. V9 talks about using our worldly wealth to win friends for ourselves. Wealth consists not of what we keep with ourselves but of what is given away. So many people leave behind wealth after they pass away. There are great people who leave their wealth to hospitals or charity or some deserving students. These are great things to do with your wealth. Wealth and possessions are in themselves not sin but there is a great responsibility attached to how we use them. We've got to use it to serve God and his people. Use it for hospitality. Open the doors of your home for family group meetings. Use it for KKC, for the work of children in the church, so that they grow to become great disciples. V10 says that those who can be trusted with little can also be trusted with more. A promotion is given to a worker who does well with the few responsibilities he's given. The boss is happy and gives him more responsibilities, promotes him. Gives him more salary but also gives him more responsibilities. Jesus is trying to say that all the things you have on earth are not yours - they are given to you for you to take care of them. We are not going to be able to take them with us. Material possessions are lent to you. We are put as manager over those things to take care of those things so that we could use them wisely to win more and more friends for God and His kingdom. Our value is not measured by our valuables. According to God, the most valuable things in life are not things.

Proverbs 23:4-5. Here the bible says we have to show restraint when we acquire wealth because all of a sudden it can fly off. It has happened with so many people. The things we possess can only give us temporary happiness. Things never change and because they don't change and grow, eventually we get bored of everything we possess. That's why the market always has to be

updated. They have to bring in newer things, updated versions because the previous things are not making people happy anymore. First we had the VCP, then it became VCR , then VCD and DVD. We don't know what the next three letters are going to be. All the wealth a man has stored up can be lost because of a number of uncontrollable factors. We should invest in people because people always grow. Our friends will grow. We never get tired of our old friends because they keep changing and become mature. Let us invest in people and we'll always be satisfied. Let us invest in our spouse, in our marriage, in our children - they will be grateful. Let us invest in the church, in the people in the church, they will always satisfy. Let us invest in God, he will always satisfy. Once we use these temporary things God has given us on this earth and we do a good job with it, God decides to give us things in heaven that are permanent. The reward for work well done on earth is not a three-day holiday package in Ooty. It is more work to be done. He will say, 'Good job you've done with some things so I'll give you more to do and I trust you will do a good job with that'. Let's use the things God has given us to win friends for his kingdom.

3. Eager to serve the Master

Luke 16:13. No slave can have two masters. Back in Jesus' time a master owned a slave exclusively. Nowadays we can have two jobs. We can have one job and then we can have another part time job in the evening. But a slave would have no spare time, no energy, no anything of his own. Whatever the master decided, that's all he could do.

Luke 13:6-9. This is a parable that sometimes gets people upset with Jesus. Uselessness will bring about our end. The very concept of evolution is to produce useful things and what is useful will keep going and growing from strength to strength but what is useless gets eliminated. Nothing which only takes out can survive. What was the fig tree doing? It was drawing strength from the soil, sunlight from up, water and all the required nutrition. After getting all the nutrients what did it produce? Nothing. Took out a lot but gave out nothing. There are two types of people in the world today. Those who take out more than they put in. And those who put in more than they give out. When we work we get a salary. But we don't do enough for the company and we desire an increase in salary, we get fired. The boss is not going to put up with someone who only wants to take from the company and not give back anything to the company.

The Gospel is the message of a second chance. He looks at us and he wants us to produce fruit for God. We cannot say, 'I will take from the Church but I will not give anything in return'. We will be eliminated - not because someone else will do it but God himself will eliminate us. The church needs will always keep growing. Serving God can never be a part time affair nor can it be a spare time job like the way we can do another job. Serving God has to be whole hearted. Not just if we have the time. Not just if we feel like doing something good. Not just a 'Ok-I-have-nothing-better-to-do-I'll-help-out-the-church'. Either we belong to the Master completely or we don't belong to Him at all. We have to decide how we want to serve God. Sometimes we think there are only two categories - Saved and Unsaved. But there's a category far worse ie 'Saved but Unspiritual' where we are just content to be saved but we do nothing about God or his kingdom. In the early days the slaves would be branded with a red-hot iron. This would reveal the ownership - this slave belongs to me. There is a deposit that God has given us - the Holy Spirit.

Let's be eager to do good. The opportunity to do right comes rarely. Let us grab that opportunity

with both hands when it comes. Let us not regret once it has gone. Let's be eager to make friends. Let's use whatever God has given us. It's not how much we have as how big our heart is. It's not how small the house is, it's how big our heart is. We can do great things for God if we have the right attitude. Let's be eager to serve the Master as we are slaves to Jesus Christ.

45. Keeping Our Hearts Close To God

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

How can we keep our hearts close to God. None better than David could be quoted for having such concern especially when he prayed for that in Psalm 139:23-24

1. A Heart of Patience

1 Sam 22:1-5 David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him. From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?" So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold. But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

David went through suffering one after the other. From Naioth to Ramah to Nob, to Gath, to Adullam, to Mizpah, to Judah, David was trying to save his life from the hands of Saul. Verse 3 talks about David's attitude towards those situations. As a disciple when we go through problems it is very easy to become negative, unlike David who patiently waited to learn what God would do.

Are we going through tough time? Probably God is allowing us to learn what He would do. Apostle Paul had similar convictions when he wrote Romans 12:12 to be patient in affliction.

2. A Heart of Loyalty

1 Sam 22:6-16 Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul, spear in hand, was seated under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing around him. Saul said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today." But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine." Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. Saul said, "Listen now,

son of Ahitub." "Yes, my lord," he answered. Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?" Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair." But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and your father's whole family."

Saul was burning in anger against David because he thought the men of Benjamin were conspiring against him. When Saul came to know that the priesthood of Nob, Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his whole family had helped David, he became furious. In Verse 14, Ahimelech while answering the king boldly admired David's loyalty, being more than that of the king's son-in-law, captain of Saul's bodyguard and the highly respected in Saul's household.

Today would God call you the most loyal disciple?

3. A Heart of Care

1 Sam 22:17-23 Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me." But the king's officials were not willing to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD. The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep. But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David. He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. Then David said to Abiathar: "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family. Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me."

When Doeg struck the priests of Nob, Abiathar son of Ahimelech escaped and fled to join David. When David heard about what happened, he stepped forward to take responsibility for all that occurred. David could have avoided the responsibility. But he faced it because he had a caring heart.

Many times as a disciple we fail to take responsibility for even small things. But we need to open our eyes to realize the tremendous responsibility we have in saving the lost. That could be accomplished only when we decide to have a caring heart.

Let us ask God earnestly to give us a heart of patience, loyalty and care.

46. Are We Really Free?

Paul was a man who was in chains many days of his life and yet he knew freedom more than anyone else did. We're going to learn from his letters what it means to live free.

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Christ has set us free, do we enjoy the freedom? Let us not be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

1. A free man will have nothing to hide

1 Corinthians 4:1-5. So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Paul was a man who had nothing to hide. How do we make sure our salvation is secure? Have nothing to hide. Paul is not concerned about who judges him on earth. He doesn't even judge himself. He says, "The Lord will judge me".

In 1977 two young men committed a bad crime. They went into an elderly woman's house and attacked her with sticks and a knife. For many years the police could not solve this crime. Finally they closed the file and forgot it totally. In 1994 a man went to the police station and said, "I committed that crime". Why was he surrendering himself now when everything had been forgotten? A few years after he committed the crime, this man learnt about Jesus Christ and it changed his life. After a struggle with himself, he mustered up the courage to surrender to the police. The man was imprisoned. His body maybe imprisoned but his soul has been set free from the burden of sin. He no longer carries the guilt and burden of sin.

And that's exactly what Paul did. He was against the 1st Century Christians, he almost gave approval to stone to death an innocent man - Stephen. And then when he changed, the small community of Christians did not want to accept Paul because they knew him as a murderer. Confession has the power of liberating us. Once a sin is confessed, it no longer enslaves us. We don't have to worry about when are we going to be discovered and who's going to hold us accountable.

2. A free man will have nothing to lose.

Paul was in prison and he had lost everything. He had lost his education, his religious pride, his leadership position, his money, his worldly friends, his synagogue connection. How does Paul feel about it?

Phil 3:7-11 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

"Nothing" and "rubbish" - that's what Paul considers what he has lost. We have left many things behind to become a disciple. How do we feel today? If we get attached to these things now we become anchored to this world and we cannot get closer to God. People think this world is life.

Paul says gaining Christ is the only thing he wants to know. He does not care about what he lost but he wants to gain Christ. Paul says, "To live is Christ, to die is gain". He says he wants to be like Christ, to love like Christ and to die like Christ. Are we carrying the cross daily and follow Jesus? Do we desire to know Christ more, his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. Who can oppose a person who has given up everything? As disciples when we are willing to lose everything we gain Christ. The more we sacrifice the more we are set free.

3. A free man will have nothing to fear

Rom 8:15,16 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

We can call God "Abba, Father". It's amazing - for God, whether we are 5 years old or 50 years old, we are still his children. When he sees us he loves to hug us, to hold us tight, to look at us and admire us.

We know the story about a small boy who accidentally killed a duck. The servant, who was watching this, after a few days, called the boy and asked him to wash the dishes. The boy refused to do it saying it was the servant's job to do it. The servant looked at him and said, "Ducky, ducky". The boy was so afraid the servant would tell his father and he washed the dishes. The next day the servant asked him to sweep the floor and when the boy refused, he reminded the boy about his crime saying " Ducky, ducky". But one day the boy told his father about the duck, how he killed it. From that time onwards he felt free.

Is there any 'duck' in our life making us to be enslaved? We did not receive a spirit that makes us a slave again to fear but a spirit of sonship. Let us go to our Abba and get the freedom.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Let us love our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and let us love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Let us live a free life.

47. Be A Leader, Not A Boss

Let's be aware that the days ahead of us depends on how we are today. We as Christians if we are not prepared to be committed to the cause, the people yet to be disciples will not be able to understand their commitment towards God. What motivates us to be a disciple? Can we say we are ready to face persecution like the Christians in the first century? If not when are we going to be ready?

We as Christians are also leaders in leading people to Christ. We need to sit down and count the cost. We need to understand that we need to commit ourselves as much as a father and mother are committed to their sons and daughters.

Let's consider Joshua's commitment to the Israelites. In Joshua 24: 15 Joshua sets himself as an example to others and leads the way in his personal commitment to God and others.

1. Commitment to God.

Mark 11: 12-19 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations' ? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, they went out of the city.

The best person to learn from is Jesus Christ himself. Jesus found himself not happy with the temple. He took his stand as a single man to cleanse it. He did this even though he knew he would suffer death. He had a commitment to God that he would keep even if he had to give his life up. We have committed to God to serve him at the time of baptism. We need to keep it at any cost.

2. Commitment to People.

Mark 10:46-52 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the Son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Jesus saw blind Bartimaeus not been treated properly even though he had a genuine need. He stopped his journey to reach out to him. It inspired the people to encourage him in Vs. 49. When we start being committed to people as Christians/leaders we can inspire the others to be atleast encouraging to each other.

Be a leader not a boss!

*The boss drives his men
The leader inspires them!*

*The boss depends on authority
The leader depends on goodwill!*

*The boss involves fear
The leader radiates love!*

*The boss says 'I'
The leader says 'We'!*

*The boss knows who is wrong
The leader know what is wrong!*

*The boss know how it is done
The leader knows how to do it !*

*The boss demands respect
The leader commands respect!*

So be a leader, Be not a boss!

48. Who Is Our Master?

Money is a resource that is used to provide for our families and to build the Kingdom. It is not ours. It all belongs to God and He can give and take as He sees fit. Without the right Godly perspective of money we will be tortured by Satan's greatest weapons of greed, materialism, discontentment etc.

So let's dive in and look at the Biblical perspective that we need to drill down to the core of our hearts. The Bible contains over 1,800 references to money starting in *Genesis 13:2 "Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold"* to *Revelation 18:19 "... all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth"* . In fact, in approximately one third of the parables Jesus teaches or uses money as a basis to teach about the Kingdom.

The temptation, lure, enticement, attractiveness, desires for wealth is not new to us nor was it foreign to Jesus. Think about it - one of the temptations in the desert presented by Satan was the

ownership of "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour." Satan told Jesus, "All this I will give you if you bow down and worship me".

In order to arm ourselves against the dark side of money we must be convinced of a few powerful truths that the Bible teaches in regard to money:

1. Money in itself is not evil

1 Timothy 6:10 "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs".

This is a very powerful truth spoken by Paul. How many times have we started confessing sin and discovered that at the root was the love of money - greed, materialism, financial insecurity. The love of money is the root and the sin that grows from that root is all kinds of evil. Let's start by pulling the sin out by the root and not just do a little gardening by confessing our most recent evil deeds.

2. God draws a line in the sand

Matthew 6:24 - "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money".

Notice the capital "M" in money written by Mathew as they both serve in the role of gods - one is the real God and the other the false god that gives us false promises. When God is being served and put first we love being at church and with the brothers, but guess what? When the almighty dollar/rupee serves as our god then everything else good in our life becomes a distraction to our pursuit of wealth. We hate this passage because it goes straight to the heart and is black and white with no room for compromising.

3. Don't worry - God knows our heart!

This can be a great thing or a real downer depending on where you are at today.

Acts 5:1-10 describes the great deed that Ananias and Sapphira were going to do for the Kingdom -giving proceeds from the sale of property. However, greed and deceitfulness set in and God used this opportunity to put all disciples on notice about how he felt about these sins.

Another great example showing how Jesus knows our hearts is the parable of rich young man (Matthew 19:16-22). The rich man had accomplished alot by being able to say he had obeyed the commandments. Jesus, however, knew the true condition of this man's heart and that without true repentance he would not be able to follow Him. We can't hide the condition of our hearts from God.

4. We are expected to be productive and responsible with the money God has chosen to give us.

In Mathew 25:14-30, Jesus teaches us to be good stewards of what we have been blessed with regardless of the amount.

Budgeting:

Total Income :

Expenses :

Fixed Expenses: Church Contribution, Rent, School Fees....

Variable Expenses : Grocery, Utilities, Water, Electricity, Gas, Travel...

Savings : LIC Policy, Fixed deposit, Monthly deposit...

Never Borrow. Don't take loans, especially for weddings. Learn to live within your budget. Be content.

Philippians 4:11-13. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

5. You can't out give God.

Proverbs 3:9-10. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Test God by being more sacrificial.

In summary, lets embrace the Bible's teachings about money and set us free from the love of money. God wants to give us the desires of our hearts as long as they are with the right motives and bring him the glory.

49. Known But To God

We can learn many lessons from church history. If we are to continue to be the movement of God, we must constantly be willing to learn the lessons from the people of God in the Bible.

Joshua saw an incredible victory in Joshua 6 as the walls of Jericho fell. We too have seen the walls of tradition, apartheid, language, culture, poverty and communism fall. However, in Joshua 7 overconfidence and self reliance led the nation to be discouraged and their "hearts melted." There are always casualties in a war. Sometimes we are surprised even today that people struggle spiritually and even that people fall away. We are in a spiritual war. In this spiritual war, everything in our lives is Known but to God. Achan's sin was known but to God.

1. The Test of Distinctiveness

Perhaps our greatest challenge as a movement is to keep our distinctiveness in the area of holiness. What really makes us stand out better be our holiness in our walk with God. Secret sins are known but to God.

Rom 12:1,2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

We must continue to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. Let us remember these two words conform Vs. transform.

At any point of time we are either conforming to the patterns of this world or transforming by the renewing of our mind.

Let us decide to be distinct by always transforming and not conforming to the patterns of this world.

2. The Test of Faithfulness

In Joshua 9, the Gibeonites tricked the Israelites because they did not inquire of God. Their lack of prayerfulness showed where their relationship with God was. Christianity is not primarily a commitment, it is primarily a relationship with God. The reason we are not being personally effective at helping others to become Christians every year is our lack of relationship with God. There needs to be tears as we have a deep talk with God and deal with the sins of doubt, cowardice and unbelief (Revelation 21:8) that are keeping us from being fruitful.

How great if God tells the following about us. *Mat 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

It would be very sad if God says the following words about us. *Mat 25:26-30 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. "'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

3. The Test of Awesomeness.

Joshua faced 5 armies together in Joshua 10. As the challenges in our life become greater, we need a conviction that we require greater miracles in our life. It's time for us to take the "Never

Been Done" challenge. When Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still, that was something that had never been done before. God showed how awesome he was because Joshua was willing to step out and believe that God would do it.

Let us remember the following scriptures

- *Luke 1:37 For nothing is impossible with God.*
- *Phil 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.*
- *Mat 17:20 He replied, Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*
- *John 14:12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*
- *2 Cor 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

God knows everything about us, His Church, His creations... Let us cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for us. Let us be holy, faithful and be ambassadors for God. *1 Cor 15:57,58 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

50. Awaken The Dream

To get to our dreams, we will have to push past the wounds, scars, weaknesses, failures and tears.

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber; because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The challenge is to wake up from spiritual deadness -- "this hour" because if we don't change now we may never change.

1. See the Impossible Become Possible

Romans 4:18 Against all hope Abraham believed

- Faithlessness says, "unless I see it, I won't believe it."
- Faith says, "unless I believe it, I won't see it."

We have to get past the cynical ness in our hearts that says, "it can't happen." .

In Genesis 15, God promises to give Abraham a son of his own in spite of his age. God moves in spite of us -- we need to always remember that it is God! It wouldn't be inspiring if all of the facts weren't against us!

Psalm 34:19 A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Could it be that we aren't really delighting in the Lord? We are doing okay, but not extraordinary? The reason we don't want extraordinary is because we don't desire it. Do we really desire to share our faith, love the lost, lead people to Christ..... If we desire we will see the impossible made possible.

2. Believe the Incredible

Mark 5:25-34 "your faith has healed you"

Are we willing to believe through difficult circumstances?

Are we listening to the doctor of procrastination?

Or frustration? "It didn't work last time I ... invited/studied/discipled this person, so I won't even try again."

The only way we are going to lead people to Christ is to inspire them and be spiritual!

The amazing thing about the woman in Mark 5 is that she called herself to faith. What are we thinking about? Are we calling ourself to faith or allowing critical thoughts take away our faith?

Matthew 17:20 "because you have so little faith" Jesus expected them to have faith!

Matthew 9:27 Do you believe? "According to your faith it will be done!"

51. Is It Well With Our Soul?

H. G. Spafford sent his wife and four daughters on a ship to England. The ship sank, and all four of his daughters died. His wife was all alone. He heard the news, sat down and wrote the song, "It Is Well With My Soul"

Ephes. 2:12-18 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. [17] He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. [18] For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

1. The near

The near are those of us in the church. We are Christians. We have been bought with the blood of Christ. We are part of that royal family, part of that priesthood. Nobody's going to take our salvation away from us. Nobody can steal it.

Too many times we worry about whether we did the right thing. Is this the right thing for me? Maybe I need to decide to go somewhere else. We play around with God, and then when he calls our bluff we get an attitude. We are worth more than gold. There's no price tag to describe what we're worth to God. Instead, we live like chump change, like we're not worth anything.

We have one standard, and we need to believe in it and to preach it. We are special, we're set apart. Just like God said to Elijah, "What are you doing here?" "I just used you to do the most incredible miracle in history. Why are you here?" Go appoint your successor, and by the way, I've reserved seven thousand faithful.

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

Romans 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

What about in our marriages? Is it well with our soul? With our children, do we have peace? Are we tight in relationships, all pretenses down, nothing to prove, just loving one another. Trying to make it on this journey. Is it well with our soul?

Philip. 4:6-9 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. [7] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. [9]

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

If it's going to be well with our soul, there are two things we need . . . vs. 6 says we need to trust. If we trust fully, he gives the full measure of peace. vs. 9 says that it also depends on our obedience. Fully obedient, fully at peace.

For the near, let's make sure we are trusting and obedient.

b. The far

When God came to Gideon, he was weak, hiding, sinful, faithless.

Judges 6:12 When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

We often don't believe we can change, because we're living in sin.

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. [21] "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

Isaiah 59:7-8 Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. [8] The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace.

It's scary living in sin. We'll never know peace. Hell is a reality, a certainty

Luke 16:23-24 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. [24] So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

We don't want to mess with God's wrath. One of the worst aspects of hell will be the regret that we didn't take the warning. There's no fellowship, no community. It's the only place we won't mess up heaven.

If we want to change, there are four things we need to do:

- i. Let us give our heart fully, and be committed to God's Word.
- ii. Let us have faith, let us pray for our faith to grow.
- iii. Let us be humble before God's Word and God's people.
- iv. Let us wait on God to do what He says He's gonna do.

Is it well with our soul? Jesus said that he came to bring a sword, not just peace. Let us decide to be more willing to stir things up, in order to bring inner peace . . .

- To pray daily that God will open their eyes, send godly people into their lives
- To pray daily that God will remove all crutches and obstacles that hinder them

This means war. Jerusalem is known as the city of peace, but it took a war.

John 14:25-31 "All this I have spoken while still with you. [26] But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. [27] Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. [28] "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. [29] I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. [30] I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, [31] but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

52. The “Problem” Of Hell!

Whenever we talk about hell, or whenever we hear others talk about it, the atmosphere becomes very uncomfortable! There are certain things it is not seemly to discuss. Hell is one of them. It is an unwelcome beast. This is understandable!

Part of the problem is that there is a great deal of emotion linked with this subject. Objectivity is hard. By way of illustration: Think about double standards in our driving. When we cut someone up on the road we are performing a daring, yet perfectly safe and skilful manoeuvre. When someone cuts us up he is a no-good life-endangering imbecile who should have his licence taken away permanently!

We all believe in judgement. It's just a question of who should be judged and how. Jesus wept over the lostness of the world around him (Luke 19.41). Jesus believed in hell (Mark 9.43). He gave up his very life to try and prevent people from ending up there. He took the issue seriously.

1) Sin is slavery

What is it that sends someone to hell? The Bible says that it is sin. What is sin? One definition: "Sin is making something other than God our ultimate value and worth."

Anything that we make more valuable than God will become our focus. For example, if we love our job more than God we are putting it at the centre of our lives. What happens then? Everything in life gets out of proportion. Relationships suffer (especially marriage and children), our health suffers (stress, heart attacks etc.), and our selfish ambition ultimately leads us to loneliness, bitterness and anger. Whatever we give ourselves to (job, sport, relationships, hobbies, laziness) takes us over and will drive us to hell.

To paraphrase C. S. Lewis: "We become the sin which at first we could see as a distinct entity from ourselves, but after giving ourselves over to it we become it and this inevitably lands us in hell."

Rom 6:16-23 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. 19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. 20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. 21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Somewhere along the line every man and woman chooses between sin and good. As we live we engage more and more in that sin or less.

The Bible is so condemning of sin because it turns our lives into a living "hell" which inevitably leads to spiritual hell after death. This is the place we have chosen to go to. A place inhabited by self-addicted sin-junkies who desire no other abode. God does not want us here, but we have insisted on this destination. God has no choice but to allow us our freedom of choice. It hurts him, but he cannot force us to do anything against our will if he truly loves us.

One thing we tend to forget is that some people simply do not want to go God's way. For him to force them would be unkind, un-loving and against what is just. Some deliberately choose hell, even if they don't realise the full consequences of what they are doing.

It's not as if God hasn't left us with enough warnings. Witness the many prophets, Jesus and the Bible itself - as well as what we can see so obviously in our world today. Sin is destructive and horrible. As someone once said: "Heaven would be Hell for those who didn't want to go there."

2. Tolerance is exclusive too

Why can't a good Buddhist, humanist, atheist etc. go to heaven (even though he or she doesn't believe it exists)? Surely God wants all people to go to heaven? He lets all kinds of "sinners" in according to the Bible. Look at King David (adulterer and murderer), the apostle Paul (Christian-killer) or even Moses (killer of an Egyptian). If he wants them in, why not let all in and be done with it. God should be more tolerant.

Don't forget, though, that we all believe in judgement (we want the thug who mugged and beat up Granny to be arrested, tried and jailed). We want tolerance as long as we think the person is "good enough". This is more exclusive than the Christian message.

We want to believe that in life we develop a good record and give it to God and then God owes us. If we do enough good deeds then God will owe us a reward. The truth is that God develops a good record and gives it to us and then we owe him.

(Rom 1:17) For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

We have been given the gift of life which we did not earn, work for or deserve. We have many good things in our lives which we take for granted (food, air to breath, senses with which to enjoy the world around us) - which again, we did not earn. The truth is that we have been ungrateful for the good that God has done and developed a bad record of our own with God by breaking his laws (laws put there for our benefit). In fact - we owe God!

In short - to say a good person can find God is to say good works are enough to find God. In other words, a good person can find God a bad person cannot - this is more exclusive than the Christian message.

What about grace?!

This says that it doesn't matter how bad you've been - God's goodness is enough for you! The message of the Cross is good news because it says that no matter how much sin you've done, God will accept you. The great news is that there is an alternative to hell for those who wish to find it.

3. There is no love without wrath

(Rom 1:18 -20) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

A wrath-less God cannot be a loving God.

If we see someone we love mistreated in a serious way we do not feel indifference. In fact, the more we love someone the more we hate what is being done to that person. If a man hit our wife, we feel anger towards him. We may struggle not to hate him, but we may feel OK about hating what he had done. As has been said: "The more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor."

And again: "God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer of sin which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being"

God is able to do perfectly what we struggle to do. To hate the sin and not the sinner. If God loves us and is just, he will hate our sin. He will feel anger towards the things that destroy us (which the Bible calls sin). We end up destroying ourselves and making our own way to hell

without the assistance of God or anyone else. God does not hate the individual, he hates the sin working within that person.

Conclusion:

It is only because of the doctrine of judgement and hell that Jesus' proclamation of grace is so brilliant and astounding. Be encouraged that God loves us enough to

- i) Warn us of the consequences of sin
- ii) Allow us the choice
- iii) Provide us with the rescue package for when we fail.

God loves us!
