

GUARDIAN 2014

DEVOTIONAL LESSONS

1. What Is Eternity?

As people, we operate more in the realm of the short-term than the eternal, yet there is something in us that desperately wants some-how to be a part of it. We think that there has to be more than our few years on this earth. What is Eternity? No limit in time. Outside of time. From eternity past (i.e. no beginning) to eternity future (no end). Always existed, always is, always will be. We get a clue from verses like Heb 13:8. God is in fact outside of time. He sees time like we see the beginning and end of our driveway.

FIVE ETERNALS

1. God is Eternal

(Psa 93:1-5 NIV) The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. {2} Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity. {3} The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. {4} Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea-- the LORD on high is mighty. {5} Your statutes stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days, O LORD.

2. God's Word is Eternal

(Psa 119:89 NIV) Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

Bible doesn't change. What was true thousands of years ago, still is.

Illustration: Olympic flame (kind of an eternal flame), transferred carefully between torches carried by runners so it doesn't go out. Thousands of runners carry the flame from Olympia in Greece to the final venue of the games.

Do we treat God's Word that way, i.e. with care and respect? Do we realise that we hold the truth of eternity in our hands when we get up in the morning for our Quiet time? People pay thousands of dollars to study for an MBA, improve their selling skills, Stress management, Anger management, Marriage and Relationship guidance, Stock market trading etc. picking up the latest management theories, selling styles, psychology fads etc. which change every year. but we can get every day for free the truth that has stood the test of eternity!

3. Salvation is Eternal

(Heb 5:9 NIV) and, once made perfect, he (Jesus) became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Jesus is the source of our salvation, and we know that he can say that because he has already conquered death. (the resurrection). Salvation available to all who obey.

4. God has an eternal purpose

(Eph 3:10-12 NIV) 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, {11} according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. {12} In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

God has had a plan for eternity for :

- the church of Jesus to preach the word
- us to be able to approach God with freedom and confidence (ie having had our feelings of guilt removed)

5. The Eternal is Spiritual, not Physical

(2 Cor 4:16-18 NIV) Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. {17} For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. {18} So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

What we see : the physical world, material things etc are temporary only.

What is unseen : the spiritual world, future eternal glory etc is eternal.

We get older and our bodies waste away (hair loss, loss of fitness etc. Humour ???), but God promises that a relationship with him can renew us every day inwardly.

Illustration: Imagine that when you woke up every morning, all your possessions were brand new again. New perfectly-fitting clothes in the wardrobe - no wear or stains, that new-clothes feel. A new car in the garage, zero kms on the clock, clean, shiny, that new-car smell. All your furniture: new, no scratches, chips or dents; the house: brand new, no marks on the wall, the carpets - never touched. Every day it was like this.. Fantastic!!! Well it can be like that for us spiritually. Old wounds, old troubles, old disappointments and defeats (chips and dents of life) should be put in perspective. They are light and momentary troubles only when compared with the eternal glory that is ahead. With a spiritual perspective we can wake up every morning with a greater excitement about life than new clothes, or houses, or cars can bring! Or do we focus

more on the trouble and woes and pass up the opportunity for a new start every day? What are your eyes fixed on? The seen, or the unseen? The physical, or the eternal? That which passes away, or that which lasts forever?

Conclusion:

- Let's start thinking with the ultimate long-term view! Eternity
- Understand that God is eternal: Be amazed!
- God's Word is eternal: respect and value it!
- Salvation is eternal: Be obedient!
- God has an eternal purpose: You are a part of it!
- The Eternal is spiritual not physical. Be renewed every day!

2. The Messiah

Isaiah 9:1-7 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan-- [2] The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. [3] You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. [4] For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. [5] Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. [6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Let us understand and appreciate who Jesus is, the great and powerful Messiah, spoken of by God thousands of years in advance. Let us think about all the preparation, the incredible detail of 4000 years of prophecy.

1. The Power and the Prophecy

It began that Jesus would be the offspring of a woman, the promised offspring of Abraham. He would descend from the tribe of Judah, heir of the throne of David. The exact place of his birth was predicted, the time and circumstances--a virgin. The slaughter of infants at the time of his birth, the escape to Egypt and beginning in Galilee. He would be a priest after Melchizedek, rejected by the Jews, filled with wisdom. His triumphal entry, the singing of children calling out his name, his friend's betrayal. Being sold for 30 pieces of silver, buried in a potter's field, the traitor's place taken by another. Silent when accused, struck and spit upon, hated without cause, crucified with sinners. Hands and feet pierced, mocked and insulted, given gall and vinegar to drink. Mocked, his side pierced,

soldiers cast lots for his clothes, not a bone of his body broken. Buried with the rich, and resurrected from the dead on the third day

God showed with incredible detail exactly what would happen when his Son came to earth. More than anything else, the opportunity for us as Gentiles to begin a new life. The greatness of Jesus. Nobody ever has or ever will impact the world like Jesus Christ.

We have fallen on distracted times. The world is hungering for something it scarcely knows. Technology has come, but life is still a riddle and a delusion. Life is full of inventions, skills and genius, but life is more empty than ever before. Only one man can fill the soul--Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

Jesus never chiseled a statue, painted a picture, wrote a poem, composed music. Never published a book, framed a law, made a discovery, contrived an invention. Never wore a crown, held a scepter, carried a purple robe, never held an office. Did absolutely nothing in art, literature, science, philosophy, statesmanship or war.

Today, if a President or king entered this room we would greet him, standing. If Jesus entered this room, we would greet him on our knees. We need to ask the question, with all these things in mind, "Who is Jesus to me?" When we look around the world, Jesus is everywhere. Books, monuments, temples. All of this means nothing if the message isn't communicated in a man or woman's life. Being a disciple is the only way to communicate the true meaning of who he was and is.

To think it began 6000 years ago, and we are the fruit of that prophecy. Way back, when we were young, we believe God had a plan to use our life. If it began long ago, how much powerful is it today.

2. The Messiah and His Messengers

Matthew 16:13-16 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" [14] They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." [15] "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" [16] Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

There was nobody alive they could compare Jesus to. Had to go to the grave. Even today, 2000 years later, who can compare to Jesus Christ? His love, mission, faithfulness, righteousness. Who can compare? Today, though, the question is simple. "Who is Jesus to you?" "I know what the people say. What do you say? What do I represent to you?" Peter spelled it out. "You are the Christ." What did this really mean to him?

John 6:67-69 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. [68] Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. [69] We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

To Peter, Jesus was everything. He had nothing else, nowhere else to go. Today, who is Jesus to us? If challenged to give it all up . . . Would we respond like Peter? "I have nowhere to go. I have nothing else" We see too many disciples today turning their backs on Jesus and the church. It makes it very clear who Jesus is in their life. He's not the Messiah, the Christ.

If challenged to leave, what would we do? Would we fall on our knees? Would we run somewhere else because we've been waiting for the opportunity? We have the doctrine on straight. We know what it takes to be saved. The question, though, 20 years later is, will we be faithful to what we know?

Think what it means to be a disciple of Christ. That is our challenge today. We have to restore being like Christ. What's the difference between us and others? Jesus is the reason. Why should our lives be different from the rest of the world? Jesus. Our life is more like Jesus.

Why should our family be different? Jesus. We're all trying to follow him. Why should our work be different from all our co-workers? Jesus. Why should everything we do, our schoolwork, friends be different? Jesus. That's the reason. If it's not different, if it's the same, we have to ask a question . . . Are we the true messengers of the Messiah, or not?

When they looked at the apostles, they were unschooled, ordinary men. They recognized, though, that they had been with Jesus. They were just like him. They were unafraid of the religious authorities, challenged at the risk of their lives. Many know what the Bible all about, but don't practice it. "Who is the Messiah in our life?"

John 21:15-21 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." [16] Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." [17] The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. [18] I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." [19] Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" [20] Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") [21] When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus put the question to Peter. "Am I really that special in your life?" "Then show it." That should be the difference in us. Not just sing about Jesus, not just preach about Him but following Him. At any point in time, we, our ministry can leave Jesus as our standard. We can focus on one another, compare ourselves with everybody else, like Peter

3. Closing In on His Coming

It doesn't matter where we are in the world. We're in the same fight.

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.

Ask the Lord, and he will do it. Maybe not in the time frame that we desire. Maybe He'll let us sit on it. God can be glorified through weakness as well as through victory. Here's the question. Are we ready to do even greater things?

We're on the verge of doing something never seen in the history of God's people. Six billion people in the world, and we have the gospel of Christ to take them into glory. The opportunity to lift up the name of Jesus, the Messiah, is unparalleled. They did some great things in the first century, but after 2000 we can do greater things.

It all starts with us extending our hand, laying it on the line and saying, "Jesus is Lord". If we see somebody struggling, let us go help them. It's time to stretch out our hands and start going.

(2 Pet 3:10-14) 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. [14] So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

3. Building To Last

Mankind has always grappled with the tension between building quickly and cheaply, or solidly at a greater cost. We can buy a pair of shoes for Rs.500/- and they may last a lifetime. If we buy a pair for Rs.50 and they might last few months. Students can be faced with a temptation to party during term time and resorting to "cheating" just to pass the exam. They might pass (if they don't get caught), but they won't have learnt much.

There are always temptation to take short-cuts. "Near enough is good enough".

(1 Tim 6:10-12 NIV) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. {11} But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. {12} Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

What is it about the lure of easy money? We know it can be used to provide all kinds of material things. But compare the temporary pleasure of acquiring things or spending on pleasure (James 4:3) with the eternal benefit of building a life based on faith, love, endurance etc.

As disciples of Jesus, we must clearly reject the temptation of short-cuts and strive to build well, taking a long-term eternal view. Build great lives, great marriages and families, great friendships, great ministries and great churches.

1. Foundation of the Building

We all know the parable of the wise and foolish builders :

(Luke 6:47-49 NIV) I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. {49} But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

Are we building a makeshift or mansion? We need to build for eternity. We are building for eternity, so we need to build to last. We need to count the cost. *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.' No point in laying the foundation, and then not completing the work.

2. Quality of the Building Material

(1 Cor 3:9-17 NIV) For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. {10} By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and

someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. {11} For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. {12} If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, {13} his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. {14} If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. {15} If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. {16} Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? {17} If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

- (1 Cor 3:10) each one should be careful how he builds.
- Picture here of how our God will test our work on Judgement day.
- Notice the building materials: Either gold/silver/costly stones or wood/hay/straw. What's the difference? Wood is actually not a bad building material surely? And goes gold have any structural strength? The difference is in the cost of the material.
- How can I know if I am building well (my life, family, ministry etc)... Well, how much is it costing you?

Personal spiritual life

- delving deeply with God, developing a great relationship with him. Sacrificing the time for excellent personal devotions (this is the gold/silver/costly stones) or superficial/brief/lazy quite times (wood, hay, straw).

Marriages

- The costly stones of denying self to give to your spouse,
- The investment of getting lots of great advice.
- The gold and silver of listening, supporting, serving etc..
- The hay-barn of selfishness.

Ministry/Relationships

- Respect of others: giving notice, returning phone calls, doing what you said you would do, keeping commitments.
- Truly meeting needs... someone needs to talk, you didn't budget the time..

We are building for eternity, so we need to build to last. We should not take short-cuts. We need to lay the right foundation. We need to use the right building materials.

4. Christian Living

The simplest way to get someone to believe is to expose them to the message of Christ. When they hear it, they are amazed. When they live it out, they see it is true. When they see others with faith, they are inspired to believe.

1. Read the Bible and You Will Believe.

Rom 10:17 We get faith when we hear the message of Christ.

Jn 20:24-31 Thomas wanted proof. Jesus had him touch his hands and feet and probe the wound in his side. Though we cannot do this, the miracles written in the Scriptures are recorded so that we may believe and follow Jesus!

Lk 24:13-32 They had hoped Jesus was special. But his death disappointed them. He rebuked them for not believing prophecy. They noted that their hearts had been burning within them (v.32) while he opened the Scriptures to them. In the same way, our faith grows when someone studies the Bible with us!

2. Choose to Obey and You Will Believe.

Jn 7:16-17 If we choose to do God's will, we will know whether or not the Bible is from God.

Jn 8:31-32 If we hold to the teachings then we will know the truth and be set free from sin.

Mt 28:16-20 Some doubted. Jesus solution was to give them the great commission! He got them sharing their faith, and so their faith was strengthened. Try it-you will like it!

3. Fellowship With Believers and You Will Believe.

Phm :6 When we are active in talking about our faith with others (non-believers, and in fellowship with other believers), we get a full understanding of our blessings in Christ.

2 Co 3:1-3 Paul did not need a letter of recommendation; the Christians at Corinth were living testimony to the power of his ministry and message.

Jn 13:34-35 Our love shows the world that we are from Jesus.

Jn 17:20-23 Our total unity shows the world that Jesus came from God!

Ac 8:26-31 Philip asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading; the eunuch said he needed someone to explain it!

4. Pray and You Will Believe.

Ac 10:30-31 God heard Cornelius prayers and sent an angel!

1 Ki 8:41-43 Solomon asked God to answer even the foreigners' prayers, to give them faith in God.

5. God Leads Us Into Waiting Rooms

God leads us into waiting rooms, but there's always a purpose to waiting, and ways to cope with it

Have we noticed that rooms speak for themselves? Walk into a freshly decorated nursery and the room speaks of joy and excitement. On a cold winter evening, enter a cozy den, with a large fire playing percussion in the fireplace and shadows dancing in syncopated rhythm on the walls and ceiling. The room invites us to sit down and succumb to its atmosphere. Or walk into a festive holiday dining room. Plates at each chair await a sumptuous feast. Friendly voices and warm laughter drift from down the hall. The room sings with the theme of celebration and reunion.

Other rooms aren't nearly as inviting - for example, waiting rooms. For all of us, life brings many experiences that develop into "waiting rooms." Maybe we're launching into a new arena of education. Or maybe we've completed our formal education and are waiting for employment. Maybe we are waiting to have children, or at the other end of the spectrum, maybe we are waiting for them to leave home. Maybe we're waiting for a long-anticipated trip.

It's impossible for a person not to be waiting for something. And waiting is never easy. It's always been difficult, our culture has made it even harder. We live in a society that has ready-made frozen dinners and instant potatoes. Our phones are touch-tone and mobile, so we can do two things at once. Our ovens are microwaves. Our information is generated on a computer screen at the touch of a keyboard. Our culture demands instant gratification and immediate success.

Yet all of us face times when God seems to hit the "pause" button in our lives and He invites - and sometimes forces - us to accept a posture of waiting. This is true for the biblical character Joseph. He lived in a "waiting room." Imprisoned on false charges, his deliverance didn't come quickly.

Genesis 40:1-23 Joseph met the Pharaoh's chief baker and cupbearer in prison and interpreted their dreams. Joseph requested that when the cupbearer was released from jail, that he would speak to the Pharaoh on his behalf. But the cupbearer forgot his imprisoned friend and Joseph's life continued in a holding pattern for two years.

Then, suddenly, the holding pattern was interrupted. Pharaoh had a couple of dreams: seven sickly, skinny cows devoured by seven fat cows, then seven scorched and dry ears of grain swallowed by seven picture-perfect ears of grain. Suddenly the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told the Pharaoh about the young man in jail who had successfully deciphered his and the baker's dreams.

Joseph was immediately summoned and he rocketed from the pit to the pinnacle in one quick step. The time of waiting in the stone-cold dungeon had finally expired. He had been in Egypt for 13 years. His arduous ordeal had put him to the test and he had passed with flying colors.

Joseph's principles for coping with the rigors of waiting are still valid today.

1. Wait alertly.

During waiting periods, we should be especially sensitive to God's intentions and actions. God often uses cool-downs and waiting rooms to prepare us for something we will encounter later in life. If we are docilely folding our hands and enduring these faith-stretching times, we are wasting valuable time. We either choose to draw close to the Lord or we drift from Him.

2. Wait expectantly.

When circumstances require patient endurance, the Bible is the best source of encouragement and hope. From the examples recorded in His Word, we learn that waiting is part of His plan for preparing His people. When we are in the midst of waiting, we can honestly say, "I know that God has a reason for this and He will bring me through."

3. Wait quietly and patiently.

Patience is a commodity in short supply. The word most often used in Scripture for patience is a word that means to "abide under." It means that we are unwilling to surrender and collapse under trying circumstances. Abiding under has an active quality in that it indicates pressing on and not giving in; it has a passive quality often referred to as endurance. Once we have done all we can, we must also trust God to accomplish His purposes.

4. Wait realistically.

God is never in a hurry. He works from and toward eternity. He will take every bit of time needed to make a person the best he or she can be. Nothing that lasts happens quickly. God is not the author of shortcuts.

5. Wait cautiously.

Our natural instinct is to complain when the delay lengthens. When we test God in our waiting we have the tendency to look toward Him as a last resort, rather than a first source. We can also veer toward deliverance by our own timetable and method rather than His. We also border on preferring not to have an answer if God's answer does not agree with ours.

In the midst of waiting, we are never without hope. If we are waiting for something right now, remember that nothing is impossible with God. If God has us in a time of waiting, let us be sure to wait effectively. But if the time of waiting is drawing to a conclusion, let us be sure we are not numbed into inactivity. Be willing to step out in the boldness of faith. Remember, life's cool-down periods and waiting rooms not only have entrance doors, but exit doors as well.

6. God's Plan For Evangelism

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is full of promises about God's plan for world evangelism. He has a global plan and He is bringing it to pass in our day as never before.

1. God's Character

a. God's character makes world evangelism central in His thinking. He already has shown the beginning of His plan and He predicts the completion. His faithfulness assures us that it's going to happen.

b. God's character makes world evangelism inevitable. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). From the overflow of His loving nature, He desired a being to love Him back. The fall of Adam did not change God's character. He continues to so love the world that He gave His own Son to buy us back for that love relationship. If love was the reason for Jesus' first coming, love also is the reason He hasn't come again. Peter tells us that the delay is because He doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9).

2. God's Activity

God's activity proves what His heart is like. Every major act of God since the Fall is a missionary act.

a. God favored Abraham in order to bless the whole world through him (Gen. 12:1-2). He needed a people isolated from the moral pollution of the nations - so they could receive a revelation of Himself without distortion and be His messengers of God's saving truth.

b. The Exodus was God's way of re-establishing His missionary task force which had been in danger of extinction in Egypt.

c. As His task force became corrupt, running after other loves and other gods, God disciplined them, sending them into captivity in order to purify them. He was creating the spiritual and social context into which He could come Himself and find a foothold.

d. The incarnation is when God's only Son left His homeland to become one of us in order to save us.

3. God's Promises

God's promises assure a successful conclusion to His plan. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Gen. 12:2-3). It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob...I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth (Is. 49:6).

4. God's Command

God's command means we must think the way He thinks, act the way He acts. Jesus gave the "Great Commission" many times:

a. As the Father sent Me, so I send you (John 20:21).

b. All authority is given Me in heaven and earth; go therefore and disciple the nations (Matt. 28:18-19).

c. He showed from the Old Testament how repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [My] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Luke 23:47-48).

d. You will receive power...and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

e. Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).

7. Keys To The Kingdom

1. Key Players in the Valley of Vision

Isaiah 22:1-3 An oracle concerning the Valley of Vision: What troubles you now, that you have all gone up on the roofs, [2] O town full of commotion, O city of tumult and revelry? Your slain were not killed by the sword, nor did they die in battle. [3] All your leaders have fled together; they have been captured without using the bow. All you who were caught were taken prisoner together, having fled while the enemy was still far away. This is a prophecy in Isaiah 22, concerning the invasion of Sennacherib. Hezekiah was 25 when he came to power, and the kingdom was in a shambles at that point. Hezekiah had to break down idols as one of his first duties as king. He unified the nation from north to

south, celebrated the Passover and reinstated temple worship. He was incredible in trusting God and keeping his commands His first 14 years in power were incredible. Jerusalem became called the Valley of Vision. People could come and see God at work in Jerusalem. Then Sennacherib invades.

As the Israelites saw the enemy gathering around the city, they began to flee. This was a challenge they had never faced before. They needed to raise their level of faith. There had been stunning successes, sure, but now the cracks began to show. If we read Isaiah 30-31 we learn more about how the Israelites were captured. They were running down to Egypt, to enlist Egypt's help and hide there. They were trying to find a way to win the battle without facing the risk. Literally, they were trying to do it without God, without desperate, total reliance on Him. We're working hard, we're more knowledgeable and better-trained, but we may not be growing. We're so much more mature but we may be unified. We have so much more to be thankful for, but we may be less thankful than we've ever been. We have more to be thankful for than ever, and so many of us are less evangelistic than ever. We have less motivation now than ever. Why is that? We were the "Men Who Dreamed" What's the vision in the Valley of Vision? It's every nation, every town, and every person. We taught it, we studied it, we believe it, but is that still true today.

If we take a survey of our ministry, is it the Valley of Vision? What drives us? So often, what drives us is our schedule, what we have to do. Not our vision. We were born in the Valley of Vision, and we need to stay in the Valley of Vision. *Isaiah 22:7-11 Your choicest valleys are full of chariots, and horsemen are posted at the city gates; [8] the defenses of Judah are stripped away. And you looked in that day to the weapons in the Palace of the Forest; [9] you saw that the City of David had many breaches in its defenses; you stored up water in the Lower Pool. [10] You counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall. [11] You built a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the Old Pool, but you did not look to the One who made it, or have regard for the One who planned it long ago.*

They got ready for battle, even breaking down houses to reinforce the wall. They built up a double wall to collect rainwater, in case they were under siege. They had meetings, they planned and worked hard to prepare for battle. *Isaiah 22:12-13 The Lord, the Lord Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. [13] But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine! "Let us eat and drink," you say, "for tomorrow we die!"*

"Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Who cares?" There are millions and millions of people who care. Why do things go awry sometimes? God doesn't need us to become better planners or technicians, although we should. He's not waiting for that, but he's waiting for us to turn back to him. Ever been on a treadmill? Maybe, instead of building walls we need to be changing our hearts.

Great planning minus brokenness = frustration.

Great planning plus brokenness = victory

Isaiah 22:15-24 This is what the Lord, the Lord Almighty, says: "Go, say to this steward, to Shebna, who is in charge of the palace: [16] What are you doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock? [17] "Beware, the Lord is about to take firm hold of you and hurl you away, O you mighty man. [18] He will roll you up tightly like a ball and throw you into a large country. There you will die and there your splendid chariots will remain-- you disgrace to your master's house! [19] I will depose you from your office, and you will be ousted from your position. [20] "In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. [21] I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. [22] I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. [23] I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will be a seat of honor for the house of his father. [24] All the glory of his family will hang on him: its offspring and offshoots--all its lesser vessels, from the bowls to all the jars.

Two key players here in the Valley of Vision. Shebna was the steward, like a treasurer. He was like the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance all rolled into one. Amazingly, he's the only one in the whole book singled out by name for a rebuke from God. Hezekiah was actually a very godly man. Shebna was trying to get him to compromise. That's why God was so angry with him. He was advocating compromise, rather than God's way

Shebna didn't believe they could do it God's way, so he determined to find another way. Eliakim, on the other hand, was a godly representative, and everybody felt his impact. Where was Hezekiah? Well, there are a few lessons here. First, we are responsible for your own faith and godliness. We're also responsible for your own impact. Do we challenge one another to dream even greater dreams?

We're a key player in the Valley of Vision. God watches us, and that's a good thing. He loves us, but He also has extremely high expectations for us. He wants us to exhaust ourselves not on building walls, but on seeking him.

2. The Key Comes Chained to the Cross

Matthew 16:16-24 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." [17] Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. [18] And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. [19] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." [20] Then he warned

his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ. [21] From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. [22] Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" [23] Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." [24] Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

From holder of the key to son of Satan is a very steep drop. What was so bad, so horrible? It almost looks like Peter's expressing concern and love for Jesus. Well, verses 21 and 24 both talk about the way of the cross. He must have resented the insinuation that there was any other way. It ticked him off. The key to be a disciple comes chained to the cross. It's like the guy who gets on a plane, and the stewardess gives him a parachute "That will make your flight so much better." It's uncomfortable, so he takes it off. It's not the better flight that motivates us to put the parachute on. It's the fact that the plane's going to crash. That makes the suffering worth it. It's not actually the suffering that hurts us, but the surprise. We're not ready for it. Have our challenges made us more bold, more urgent, or more conservative?

John 21:18-19 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." [19] Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

The key comes chained to a cross. We can't separate the two. Is that our heart, is that our mindset? "I want to go. Show me the way"

3. Be Weak, So We Can Become Strong

Rev. 3:7-8 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. [8] I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

The key of Christ is a universal key, a master key. It will open any door. What does it mean that they had little strength in Philadelphia? Not much talent? They were persecuted a lot, probably weren't lukewarm. What was it then? Well, Paul said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." Maybe it was like that. Maybe he's saying that this church, more than all the others, wasn't deceived. The truth is that all the churches had little strength, but most didn't realize it.

That's really the challenge for us, to realize that we are totally dependent on God. We need to be committed to doing it God's way, to see ourselves as weak and in need. We

don't know everything we need to know yet to complete the work God has given us. Let us not try to impress each other. Spiritually, we know we're weak, which drives us to God.

Jesus opens the door that nobody can shut. 1 Cor 16, 2 Cor 2, Col 4 . . . These doors are all evangelism doors, opportunities to preach the gospel. It's when we're weak that Jesus opens the door that nobody can shut.

We live in the Valley of Vision. We were all born there. We were told we would evangelize the world. It's one thing to be born in the Valley of Vision, and it's another thing to die in it. The only way to avoid that is to turn the Valley of Vision into reality. Without brokenness, all of this means failure and frustration. With brokenness, it means victory.

8. Mighty God In Minnie Me (Part #1)

Let's go back to 700 BC: *Isaiah 9:5-7 Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. [6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [7] Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

Jesus is not just a prophet, not just a teacher. He's the Mighty God, the exact representation of God's glory in human form. He is 100% God, and just took a human shell for a limited time. Not a created being.

***John 5:22-23** Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, [23] that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. **John 10:25** Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, **John 17:21-22** 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. [22] I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:*

We know that Jesus' actions in the New Testament show us the character of God. Have we ever thought that God's actions in the Old Testament show us the character of Jesus?

1. Mighty God / Mighty Jesus

Jesus has always been and always will be. He created time. Jesus is the very definition of love. We wouldn't know love at all if it weren't for God. Everything that has a trace of love in it comes from the Mighty mind of Jesus. Jesus loves everybody. Every single

person matters to him. We many times give preferential treatment to people who we like more. Athletes, physical strength, etc. God cares about the most diseased, frail carcass of a human being. He also cares about the strongest, most-handsome, most brilliant as well.

Jesus is perfect. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. Why is that? He's perfect. He never lies. He's incapable of lying. Lying is the world's native language. TV, newspaper, even our own ideas are often wrong. Jesus is always right. Jesus is the only one who can forgive sin. Your wife can forget it, but only Jesus can forgive it. Nobody on earth can really forgive you from an eternal perspective.

Jesus is the true Creator. He spoke, and it stood there. "Let there be light". God strikes a match out of his hip pocket, and the universe is created. That was Jesus. Jesus looked up at the stars by the Sea of Galilee, and knew them by name. He had been insulted all day by people who didn't know who he was. Imagine that. He holds the oceans in the palm of his hand. We still can't find the bottom of the Marianas Trench. It's at least as deep as Mount Everest is high. The fish look like aliens from another world.

The Mighty Jesus knows all our thoughts even before we think them. Can we imagine what that would be like if the evangelist knew everyone's thoughts in the room? Can we imagine the potential for evil, and yet Jesus was so full of love for everyone. He knew excuses that were going to be made, lies that were going to be told. Jesus has the power to over-ride all physical laws. He can make the sun stand still, and not burn the earth.

Psalm 8:1-9 For the director of music. According to gittith. A psalm of David. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. [2] From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. [3] When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, [4] what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? [5] You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. [6] You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: [7] all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, [8] the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. [9] O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

This passage, though short, has many different chapters that show us the Mighty Jesus.

a. Children

We see the Mighty God in children. If you've ever had a child, you're seriously humbled. Two cells come together, mitosis begins instantly. Nobody can explain that. How do some cells form the liver and other cells form the eyeball? Nobody knows. Even the most average of human beings is amazingly complex. We don't do anything--the mom eats and sleeps, and a human being comes out.

Once they begin to talk a bit, children say profound things. We see the Mighty God in them. They believe in God. They know there must have been a Creator. Children can show incredible amounts of love. They learn selfishness from adults. Children even around 12 years old, still likes a kiss and a hug. There's something special about that.

b. The universe

Neutron stars and so-called because their protons and electrons have crushed together. They're only 20 miles across, but have as much mass as the sun. A pinhead of material from a neutron star can weigh as much as a million tons. That's as much as two of the world's largest supertankers put together, in a pinhead. God pinches that out between his thumb and forefinger, like a watermelon seed

The nearest star to us, after the sun, is Alpha Centauri, four light years, 24 trillion miles. To drive there at 55 miles per hour, we could reach the sun in 193 years. It would take you 52 million years to reach Alpha Centauri. That's the closest.

Let's talk about black holes. Black holes are the collapsed remnants of giant stars, when they fall in on themselves. Not even light can escape their gravitational force. If a 20 pound telephone book were brought within 20 feet, it would weigh 1 trillion tons. These are all forces that the Mighty Jesus sets in motion and controls.

The center of the sun is 27 million degrees Fahrenheit. If a pinhead could be brought to that temperature, it would burn everything for 60 miles. God set the sun there for us, at exactly the right distance, perfectly regulated.

You can download stuff off the Internet directly from the Hubble telescope. It circles the earth eleven or twelve times every day. Every few centuries a rock impacts the earth with the potential to disrupt civilization. Thousands of unknown asteroids likely exist. Four have passed inside the moon in 10 years. Were one of these to strike the ocean, a dangerous tidal wave could easily develop.

There are craters in all the planets. Why doesn't the earth have all these craters? The Mighty Jesus sets up a shield for us.

c. Animal kingdom

The least impressive creature in the zoo is probably man, except for our brain. The male mole cricket sends out his mating call in hi-fi stereo, through homemade speakers. He burrows out a twin-tunnel in the ground, sits at the branch and plays his music. Passing females are attracted by the sound, and that's how they mate.

The Arctic Tern flies from North Pole to South Pole and back every year--22,000 miles. It lives where the days are longest, and flies up to 100 miles per day to keep up. Who taught them this path? Who taught them the route? We get lost, avoid storms, etc. Somehow they

stay on course. They have a flawless stellar navigation system. They've removed their ears and eyes, and they can still find their way. That's from God

Your average garden-variety bird flying. That in itself is amazing. They've always done that Fish in the sea. Dolphins can talk underwater, even without vocal cords. They force air past valves and flaps, and can make about 32 different sounds. They talk to one another, and they can converse with whales as well. Think that's impressive? The average human being has a vocabulary of about 4,000 words.

We don't have time to talk about the 20-pound brain of the sperm whale. The fastest-moving animal isn't the cheetah, but the peregrine falcon flying at over 200 mph. Talk to Bill Throne piloting a plane at 200mph to within 1 inch of earth and snatching a mouse. That's a ride for Hershey Park right there. That's the power of the Mighty Jesus.

Sunrise and sunset have inspired literally thousands of paintings, songs, poems. Thousands of colors, it's incredible. What about snow, looking at mountains. Flowers, thousands of varieties all with different smells and colors. Most animals only see in black and white. Bees don't need thousands of smells, only one. It's all a big kiss from the Mighty Jesus here.

d. Through the church

Ephes. 3:10-11 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, [11] according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's crowning glory is not the creation, but the church and the transforming power of Christ. God thinks the church is more impressive than any created animal or heavenly body God: "My screaming advertisement of my mighty-ness is the church I've created"

What prevents us from seeing the mighty-ness of Jesus? Being focused on the mighty-ness of ourselves and the mighty-ness of our problems. We look at the universe like a new VCR we've just bought. We don't read the directions, don't know all the great things it can do. We just plug the cable into the back of the TV, and run to Blockbuster.

We walk around this incredible planet with the mole doing stereo in the ground beside us. We've got our children, our families, an incredible universe and all we do is play and eject. We don't see the Mighty Jesus all around us, because we're too full of ourselves. We have to be a bit of an artist to really love God. Absorb ourselves in life.

9. Mighty God In Minnie Me (Part #2)

2. "Minnie Me"

1 Cor. 8:1-3 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God.

The man who has big thoughts of himself--"I understand what it's all about" "I understand all about the Christian life. I know all about marriage, raising children . . ." This man can never, never see the mightiness of Jesus. You'll see yourself before the Lord. Your picture of Jesus shrinks when you see yourself. In fact, you can't see Jesus.

Michael Johnson can run 29 miles per hour. An 1800-pound hippo can run 40 miles per hour. We need a perspective on ourselves. We're arrogant beings. Fast men are slow creatures. If we had to run to survive, we'd be eaten by almost everything.

We are so impressed with ourselves. Why do we need houses to protect us, then?

Eccles. 6:12 For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?

Isaiah 40:6-7 A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. [7] The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass.

James 4:13-14 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." [14] Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

Proverbs 16:25 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

So often we're totally confident, totally wrong and stunned that we're wrong.

1 Cor. 1:19-25 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." [20] Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

God at his weakest moment can still crush the entire universe. Men who don't believe in God try to come up with theories about why life exists on earth.

Job 4:15-21 A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. [16] It

stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice: [17] 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? [18] If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error, [19] how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more readily than a moth! [20] Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces; unnoticed, they perish forever. [21] Are not the cords of their tent pulled up, so that they die without wisdom?'

The Bible compares us to grasshoppers. What about our own sinfulness? Sometimes we go so far from the utter depravity of man that we sugarcoat who we really are.

Job 25:1-6 Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: [2] "Dominion and awe belong to God; he establishes order in the heights of heaven. [3] Can his forces be numbered? Upon whom does his light not rise? [4] How then can a man be righteous before God? How can one born of woman be pure? [5] If even the moon is not bright and the stars are not pure in his eyes, [6] how much less man, who is but a maggot-- a son of man, who is only a worm!"

We know that we are made pure in Jesus Christ, praise God for that. In and of ourselves, though, we are spiritual maggots and worms. We're so proud that we repented three years ago. We've done so many more maggoty deeds than Godly deeds. God chooses maggots for his ministry. "No one is righteous, not even one." That's us.

Romans 3:23 all of us have sinned and are sinning. We will all fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace. Sometimes we are tempted to fall away and go back to living in the dumpster. Satan from the very beginning of time has been successful in getting men to be in awe of them.

A man never rises above the view of God that he has in his heart. Satan has us groveling in the gutter, doing measly things with measly faith. We have a shrunken, distorted view of Jesus, because we see ourselves in a Jesus suit.

How do we allow Mighty God into Minnie Me?

3. Mighty God in Minnie Me

If Jesus can heal a guy with mud, of course he can make a church out of maggots.

Let's look at Nebuchadnezzar. He had a problem. He'd been used by God in a mighty way. *Daniel 4:28-34 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. [29] Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, [30] he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" [31] The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. [32] You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you*

acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." [33] Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. [34] At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. When you look to heaven and see how mighty Jesus is, your sanity is restored. This guy lost his mind because of his own arrogance. We get so arrogant. When we look up to heaven and see the mighty Jesus, our sanity is restored.

How do we get Mighty God in Minnie Me? Let us pray to be humbled by God. We may not like that prayer, but we need it.

Most of us struggle with a lot of arrogance and pride. Some of us, though, have a negative self-image. We have the opposite problem. We don't see Mighty God in Minnie Me, not because of our big ego. We just feel like our problems are too big, that God just can't take them away.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. [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. [30] For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Either let us pray to be humbled, or pray to be able to surrender our pain to Jesus. We are spiritual beings, and we need an accurate picture of Jesus in our minds. He went through terrible torture so we could be with him forever. We matter to the Lord! Meditate on His being, not on ourselves, and we'll have Mighty God in Minnie Me

John 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Jesus doesn't enter our life through a Revelation 3 prayer. It's love and obedience. He still wants his spirit to live inside our maggot hearts. That's incredible!

Wishing to encourage her young son's progress on the piano, a mother took her boy to a Paderewski concert. After they were seated, the mother spotted a friend in the audience and walked down the aisle to greet her. Seizing the opportunity to explore the wonders of the concert hall, the little boy rose and eventually explored his way through a door marked "NO ADMITTANCE."

When the house lights dimmed and the concert was about to begin, the mother returned to her seat and discovered that the child was missing. Suddenly, the curtains parted and spotlights focused on the impressive Steinway on stage. In horror, the mother saw her

little boy sitting at the keyboard, innocently picking out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. "At that moment, the great piano master made his entrance, quickly moved to the piano, and whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't quit. Keep playing."

Then leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around to the other side of the child and he added a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice transformed a frightening situation into a wonderfully creative experience. And the audience was mesmerized.

THE LESSON: Whatever our situation in life and history -- however outrageous, however desperate, whatever dry spell of the spirit, whatever dark night of the soul -- God is whispering deep within our beings, "Don't quit. Keep playing. You are not alone. Together we will transform the broken patterns into a masterwork of My creative art. Together, we will mesmerize the world with our song of peace."

God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. Let's see the Mighty God in our lives.

10. United We Stand, Divided We Fall

Samuel anointed Saul to be a King of Israel. Some of the Israelites were skeptical about it. At this time the Ammonites besieged Jabesh Gilead.

1. Are we making a treaty with sin?

1 Sam 11:1-5 Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you." But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel." The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you." When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with the people? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

Nahash the Ammonite besieged Jabesh and the people of Jabesh wanted to make treaty with the Gentiles who were not Israelites. This was against God's law. The elders kind of lost their faith and wanted to surrender to the enemies. They were trying to get help from others. The whole Israelites became discouraged and started to weep aloud. They wept aloud because the Ammonites wanted to gouge out the eye of everyone of the Israelites.

What about us? Do we make treaty with sin and compromise righteousness. As disciples do we confide in each other and open up about ourselves or do we have best friends outside the Church. How much do we believe in being united.

There are two kind of people in the church:

* One is those who think that they are not that sinful and their sins are not as bad as others sins. They look down on others and so they are not really open about themselves.

* Second is those who think they are the most sinful person in the whole world and nobody can relate to them. They become selfish and not wanting to help others but always wanting to flatter others.

What kind of person are we? We need to be neither. We should be able to say we have sinned and let us help each other. When the others are in trouble then we should be the first ones to help them in a great way. Saul later came from the field and enquired about the feelings of the people. He was a people's man. How about us?

2. Is the terror of the Lord in us?

1 Sam 11:6-11 When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they turned out as one man. When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and the men of Judah thirty thousand. They told the messengers who had come, "Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, 'By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be delivered.'" When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated. They said to the Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever seems good to you." The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom. Unity was brought about by Saul by him being aggressive in dealing with the situation. He took a pair of oxen and cut them to pieces and sent them throughout Israel. People respected Saul and feared the Lord. They decided to be united. God's power can change us radically if we decide to be united. How is our family group? Do we see people being united? If not it is your responsibility to get our family group to be united.

3. Do we show mercy to people?

1 Sam 11:12-15 The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Bring these men to us and we will put them to death." But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel." Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship." So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

The disciples of Jesus wanted to bring fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans who were opposing Jesus. Jesus rebuked them. The people of Israel were fired up after victory and wanted to kill all the trouble makers. Saul showed mercy. Saul helped people to understand the punishment is not the only way to change people. When we show mercy to people they became grateful and change. Do we take advantage of mercy? Are we grateful for the mercy that has shown to us? When was the last time we showed mercy to somebody? When was the last time somebody showed mercy to us? We have recieved mercy from God and we need to show the same mercy to one another.

11. Enter By Grace And Remain By Grace

1. Let us get our focus right with ourselves.

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" [22] Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. [23] "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. [24] As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. [25] Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. [26] "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' [27] The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. [28] "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. [29] "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' [30] "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. [31] When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. [32] "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. [33] Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' [34] In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. [35] "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

This passage is one of the most confounding passages in the entire Bible. How could someone who had been forgiven so much be so unforgiving himself? Remember the day we were baptized? We could have gone home and for three hours could have read the Bible. What an exciting feeling it was to know that all our sins were forgiven? We just wanted to enjoy our salvation and share it with others.

In this parable he was forgiven an incredible amount. The problem was, he didn't feel forgiven. He thought it was a loan he had to repay. Look at what he says. "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything". Even though that was impossible, even though he

was forgiven by the master . . . He still thought he had to pay it back. That may be the reason why he choked his fellow servant.

Too many of us are confused in the same way. They've been totally forgiven. The joy that is meant to come from that, though, gives way to duty and pressure. Their focus quickly shifts to what they need to do, from how much they've been forgiven

At the time of salvation we just focused on living and enjoying the Christian life, and sharing it with others. There was no system, no infrastructure, no plan to depend on for our success. All we had was God, and somehow that was always enough for us.

Galatians 3:1-3 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. [2] I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? [3] Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Galatians 3:10-11 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." [11] Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

All of us got into the kingdom by grace in the first place. There's no other way. Too often, though, we try to remain in the kingdom by our own human effort, our own system. When we struggle spiritually, and what do we focus on? It's not the insufficiency of God's grace. It's our inability to uphold our own standards "I haven't been fruitful." "I've missed so many Quiet Times." "I can't overcome this sin"

Imagine we love running/jogging. For some time we did jog and enjoyed our practice. Then we thought we can make it more fun and we bought a heart-rate monitor, and started tracking our progress. All this "progress" was supposed to help us enjoy running, keep us motivated. But it can take all the joy away. We may end up focusing on our progress and not on our joyful running. The system we had invented to help us with our running may end up ruining the experience. This is sometimes the case with our spiritual lives as well. The system takes our focus off of the cross, off of Jesus and puts it on our own obedience.

Romans 7:10 I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.

The very system that is meant to help us be better disciples can drive us away from God. There's only one way to enter the kingdom. That's by grace. Too often, though, we try to depend on human effort and obedience to remain in the kingdom. Need to enter by grace, remain by grace. This is what will make our hearts strong.

Hebrews 13:9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial foods, which are of no value to those who eat them.

2. Let us get our focus right with others

Many times we see in the Bible, many, the lame, blind, crippled, paralytic, the sinful..., came to Jesus for help. Few times the disciples around Jesus felt disturbed. They even stopped them doing it. But Jesus was focused on meeting the needs of the people. There are people in our fellowship that are desperate for healing, they've looked everywhere for grace. Are we as disciples showing them the grace of God or blaming/branding them for what they are?

Hebrews 4:14-5:3 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. [16] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. [5:1] Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. [2] He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. [3] This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.

Jesus is able to help us because he understands our struggles. This is the kind of help we need to give to others who are in need.

*Heb 12:12 -15 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. **See to it that no one misses the grace of God** and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

Col 4:5-6 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every

opportunity. ***Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.***

2 Tim 2:1 NIV You then, my son, ***be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.***

12. Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility

God is the sovereign ruler over the universe and all human affairs, and human beings are responsible before God for the moral choices and actions they make.

What does the Bible teach about God's sovereign rulership?

Consider Daniel 4:35 where we are instructed that God "does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth, and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'what have You done?'"

- 1) God's rulership is the exercise of "His will." That is, he decides in advance what he wants to happen so that "His will" precedes and directs all that occurs.
- 2) His will is exercised universally—over those in heaven and all the inhabitants of earth. There simply is no place where his will does not pertain or is not exercised.
- 3) No creature of God can thwart the fulfillment of God's will or charge God with wrongdoing.

In short, God's rulership by his will is absolute, universal, and effectual.

The Bible contains a number of "spectrum texts" which display God's ultimate control of both good and evil, light and darkness, life and death. In Isaiah 45:6b-7, God announces "I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these" (Exod 4:11; Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6-7; Eccles 7:13-14; and Lam 3:37-38).

And, while we gladly affirm that God is good (only!) and that God neither approves evil in itself, nor does any evil reside in him (Ps 5:4), yet we must affirm with the large and sweeping testimony of Scripture that he reigns over all of life, both its good and evil, and that in all that occurs "the counsel of his will" (Eph 1:11) is fulfilled.

What does Scripture teach about human moral responsibility?

From page 1 of the Bible, we are put on notice that God holds us accountable for the moral choices and actions we make. The law of God, whether the simple law not to eat of one tree in the garden (Gen 2:16-17), or the Law given on Sinai (Exod 20), or the Law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2) - each establishes for its time the moral framework within which our lives are lived.

God will "render to each person according to his deeds" (Rom 2:6), and this judgment will be based on whether we "persevere in doing good" (Rom 2:7) or whether we "do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness" (Rom 2:8). There simply is no denying the fact that God considers his human creation as responsible for the choices and actions they make, and the final judgment day will bear testimony to how we have chosen to live our lives.

So, God is the sovereign ruler over all, and human beings are responsible before him, but just how can both be true?

We simply cannot understand fully how both are true together, but that they must work together is demanded by Scripture's clear teaching.

Consider one illustration from Scripture where both are seen, namely, a lesson from Joseph's story (Gen 37-45).

- Joseph's brothers were deeply jealous of him and grew to despise him.
- When the opportunity presented itself, they sold him into Egypt (37:25-36) where Joseph was misunderstood and mistreated.
- Despite this, God's hand was on Joseph and he was elevated to second in command in Egypt (Gen 41).
- During a famine, his brothers traveled to Egypt to purchase grain, and there Joseph made himself known to his brothers.
- What Joseph tells them is as incredible as it is instructive: "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 45:8).

Surely they did send Joseph to Egypt! And so they did, and so Joseph previously acknowledges (45:4). But, to get at the full reason that they were sent to Egypt requires looking not just to the brothers but also, more importantly, to God!

So it is clear: both God and the brothers are responsible for sending Joseph to Egypt. Both God's sovereign rulership and the brother's moral actions are active. As Joseph puts it later, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20). The brothers acted for evil, and God acted in the same events for good.

Not every question is here answered, but we see that we must affirm both the sovereign rulership of God and the genuineness of our moral responsibility.

13. The Church In Your Home

1 Cor. 16:19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

1. Make the Family Group a Smaller Version of the Church

Small groups are the backbone of a large church. This is where people get individual attention, get their needs met. The center of life for the early disciples was in people's homes. The synagogue was a place of preaching and persuasion. Worship took place at home. This presents a unique challenge, but also creates a unique opportunity. There's no place you can offer as much love, warmth and hospitality as we can at home.

As disciples we should get along with every person in our family group, where they are, where they aren't. We also need to be instrumental for the growth of our group.

1 Cor. 3:5-9 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. [6] I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. [7] So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. [8] The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. [9] For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

We have the responsibility to plant and water. God makes things grow.

The family group can mirror what the larger churches have done, like sending mission teams. It hurts the sending church to send out talented leaders, but it produces even more fruit. Once the sending church has recovered, though, it can produce more fruit again.

2. Make the Family Group a Larger Version of your Physical Family

Resolving conflict within the family group is just like dealing with our physical family. People know that we'll sit down, open up the Bible and see what we can do to help. The family model really works well in the small group. Bridal showers, groom-honorings . . . Any get-together is bonding. We need to learn to love and pull people in who have special challenges.

1 Thes. 5:14-18 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. [15] Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. [16] Be joyful always; [17] pray continually; [18] give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Another thing we can do in building family is to get a lot of input from one another. We need to be patient with everyone. The scripture says always try to be kind to each other. Is our family group a place of prayer, a place of thanksgiving, a place of joy?

1 Thes. 2:6-9 We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, [7] but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. [8] We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. [9] Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

It's a challenge to make sure we are close to everyone in our family group. It takes spending time. It takes time for people to trust us enough to share the deeper things with us. Often people think things don't effect them, but they really do. Need to talk about those things. This adds to the tight, family nature of the group when people feel they can trust us.

Leading a family group is something we can do for the rest of our life. It will never get boring, never get old, never be too much for us. It's exciting.

2 Cor. 3:18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

14. These Three Remain : Faith, Hope And Love

1 Cor. 12:28-31 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. [29] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? [30] Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? [31] But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

1 Cor 13 goes on to describe the greater gifts of faith, hope and love. These are the gifts we are to go after. These are essential for the ministry. Invitations, food and logistics don't make for an effective Bible Talk. That's not the gift. We have to beware of numbers and paperwork. They can numb our hearts. Dealing with problems all day damages our faith. We can be guided by policy, not principle. What we need is faith, hope and love.

1. Faith

We can even falsely believe that because we work hard, God accepts us. It requires faith. Let us ask yourself if our personal ministry goals require any faith. Do we feel stretched? Are the good old days in the past? Do we have any dreams that scare anybody? Are we willing to accept an OK ministry, a comfortable, controlled situation? Do we push forward and desire new things, or do we pull back and desire status quo? Do we put ourselves in a situation that requires faith? Are we willing to move somewhere else?

Are we known for our faith? Does our ministry call us for faith? This is a great indicator. If we're not full of faith, our ministry won't desire our friendship. Are we known not by the words we say, but by the ministries we lead? Are we having an impact on people? Is it plainly evident to everyone?

a. What is Faith?

Heb 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

b. Where Faith comes from?

Rom 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

c. When faith is faith?

Mat 24:9-13 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. [James 1:3 testing of faith develops perseverance, I Pet.1:1-8, faith is precious than gold] When you go through trials, your faith is tested.

d. How much faith is faith?

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." Sometimes we struggle to have this mustard seed faith.

e. Why faith is so important?

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.

We can keep on talking about different attributes, ingredients, stories, examples, victories, prayers of faith from the Bible. Today do we have faith to continue to live as Christians / Disciples? Do we have faith to carry those marks of disciples (Prayer, Bible study, loving one another, denying self) which we learnt while becoming a disciple?

2. Hope

a. Suffering produces hope

Rom 5:3-5 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

b. Hope in the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 23:6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."

Acts 24:15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

1 Tim 4:9,10 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.

c. Hope of eternal life.

Titus 1:1-3 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness-- a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

1 Cor 15:19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

1 Tim 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

1 Pet 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

3. Love

a. Love God

1 John 5:1-4 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

b. Love one another

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

How do you know you have love? If we possess the following qualities.

1 Cor 13:4-8 NIV Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

In conclusion :

1 Cor. 13: 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Do we eagerly desire to have it? Are we known for growing in these three? Let us decide to love God and love one another more than ever before.

15. Servants Called By God

Being called is a very interesting phenomenon. Many of us wonder if we were ever really called. Being called is when you understand what is needed, and you do everything you can to meet that need. The word "servant" in the Bible is typically rendered "diakonos," which implies meeting needs. We are called by God in many different ways. Joseph was called by being sold into slavery. Nehemiah was called by a deep compassion in his heart. Daniel was called by being righteous.

God has called us to be servants. What if we translated "diakonos" as servant all the time That's all we are supposed to be. There was nothing glorious in it. He was the guy who washed your feet. He was the guy who served the food when you sat down at your friend's house. Didn't even know his name. God has called each one of us to meet needs where we are. He's called us to a spiritual service. He's called us to serve.

1. Called to bring glory to God

Mark 6:35-44 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. [36] Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." [37] But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" [38] "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five--and two fish." [39] Then Jesus directed them

to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. [40] So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. [41] Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. [42] They all ate and were satisfied, [43] and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. [44] The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Look at all the tasks performed by the disciples here. Look at all the numbers. Five loaves and two fish, exactly. There was so little. They sat down in organized groups. Why did Jesus want them in groups of 50 and 100? To know how many were fed by the miracle. Why did they have 12 baskets? May be one basket per apostle. Twelve apostles, twelve baskets. By knowing the facts, the miracle could be measured. Truth led to right decisions.

We can tell the pulse of a ministry by their giving, their baptisms and their growth. These numbers tell us how people are feeling in their faith as disciples. Without knowing how much we have and how much we have left over, we don't know what happened. In this story, the apostles helped to show the facts, and those facts testified to a miracle of Jesus. Those facts bring more glory to God.

2. Called to meet the needs

Acts 6:1-4 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."

Here we see the apostles are free to do the ministry of the word of God when certain jobs are taken care of effectively. What a great privilege, Steven went on to become the first martyr. Philip went on to become an evangelist. These were spiritual men who did great things, and so are we. We're not simply called to worry about mundane matters. The Seven weren't complaining. It was pretty awesome to be one of the Seven. It's even mentioned in Acts 21. Maybe we're in a small church, a small situation, and we wonder "Who am I?". In ten years, the whole scene will be different. Using our talents for God is the most fulfilling thing we can do.

Philip. 2:25-30 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. [26] For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. [27] Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. [28] Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. [29] Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, [30]

because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

The only reason Epaphroditus had been sent at all was to meet Paul's needs. He carried the money. That's all he did, but Paul calls him a "fellow soldier". Look how close Paul got to a brother who was sent to bring him the money. He even calls us to honor other men like him, brothers who carry the contribution, who does ushering and so on in our churches.

3. Called to serve others

Mark 10:35-40 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." [36] "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. [37] They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." [38] "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" [39] "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, [40] but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

Ambition is something we all have. God's not against ambition, not against a person who wants to do great things. God's made us in his image, and God loves to do great things. Where we mess up, though, is that our ambition is too often for ourselves rather than God.

Mark 10:41-45 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. [42] Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. [43] Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, [44] and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. [45] For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Here again we find our favorite word "diakonos." Jesus came to serve everyone. We can't find a single thing in Jesus' life that wasn't intended to serve someone else. Even his very presence on the earth was to serve us. He wasn't here for himself.

The way to achieve greatness is to serve. That's where the reward is found. Too often we get bent out of shape because we're too worried about what people think. Who cares about a servant? What difference does it make how people feel about him? You can't be more than a servant. It's the greatest calling anywhere.

Philip. 2:7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

A human being is by nature a servant. We can't really do anything about that. Jesus said we can serve God or money, but we have to serve someone or something. We can't change the fact that we're a servant. We can only choose our master.

Luke 17:7-10 "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? [8] Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? [9] Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? [10] So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.' "

This is the beauty. We've all been called to serve our ministries. We've also been called by God to serve, and Jesus is our model, our standard. Are we looking for the thanks and praise of men?

We need a conviction that God has called us, and that needs to motivate us. We need to serve when we have cash and when we don't. When things are smooth and when they're rough. Even when others are going through their own spiritual struggles, we need to serve with a pure heart. We were slaves to sin, and God bought us. It's now our choice. We choose to serve.

16. Faithful With A Few Things

1 Samuel 2:11-12 Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest. [12] Eli's sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord.

1 Samuel 3:11-14 And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. [12] At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family--from beginning to end. [13] For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them. [14] Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.' "

Eli was used in a great way, but his sons were wicked men. How did this happen? May be he was too busy with his other responsibilities to have any concern for his kids.

1 Samuel 8:1-3 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. [2] The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. [3] But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

We're also familiar with the story of David, Israel's greatest king, a man after God's own heart. We know that he married Saul's daughter Michal, after killing 200 Philistines. He

married Abigail, after almost killing her husband Nabal of Carmel. He committed grievous sin with Bathsheba, murdered her husband and married her. What horrible things resulted in David's own family because of his family decisions.

We can have many reasons where these people went wrong. We may miss one thing. These men cared deeply about their children. Eli died when he heard the news. When Absalom fled Jerusalem, look at David's response . . .

2 Samuel 14:1 Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom.

2 Samuel 18:33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you--O Absalom, my son, my son!"

David felt the pain of losing his son. He was emotionally attached to his family. It's often difficult to understand why these things happen, and it challenges our faith.

We feel many emotions. Sadness, fear, we fear for our own children, that they may be deceived. We need to be begging God for our children, to protect them from Satan. We need to be begging God for wisdom, to be able to set a godly example for our kids.

1 Cor. 10:11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

We are to be warned, we are to fear God.

1. Get Smart, Get Help

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 19:20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

These are familiar. Let us not yawn when we hear these Scriptures again. They still apply! Our families, more than any area, is where we need input the most, and it's the hardest to take.

Sometimes we can see we are sentimental with our kids, and not hard-line with them. We could have compromised so much, and hadn't helped the children to be what they needed to be.

Our frustration is a lack of faith in God and in our children. If we as their father/mother don't believe in them, how is he going to believe in himself/herself?

God is by no means finished with us. We still have a long way to go.

If we're open, it doesn't take a genius to figure out what we need. Any spiritual brother can tell us what we need if we are open. It's always easier to see what others need to change than it is to see our own weaknesses.

Who is the person in our life who is helping us? If we put up barriers, get attitudes or become discouraged, it pushes people away. We need to crave input, respond positively.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Prov 14:26 He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.

17. For The Sake Of A Servant

1. For the Sake of a Servant, God Will Take Care of your Kids

As we get older, perhaps our greatest conviction is that we want our kids to do well. We still want to win the world, but we particularly want our own kids to make it. It's so traumatic to lose our children. We desperately want them to do great.

1 Kings 11:9-13 The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. [10] Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD'S command. [11] So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. [12] Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. [13] Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

Solomon had messed up, and God was angry with him. God was prepared to bring down judgment on him, but didn't because of his dad. If we really serve God with all our hearts, we can store up blessings for our children.

We have in our minds that we all stand on our own, and that's true. Here we see, though, that because of David's awesome relationship his children were blessed. This is encouraging. It is motivating us to be close with God.

We go through hard times, and we know our children will as well. We need to remember God will treat them special because of our life.

2. For the Sake of a Servant, God Will Take Care of your Ministry

2 Kings 8:16-19 In the fifth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat

was king of Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat began his reign as king of Judah. [17] He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. [18] He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. [19] Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever.

This was a wicked king, and he deserved punishment. For the sake of God's servant David, God took care of his people in Judah. Most of the church leaders today will be gone in 50 years. They'll just be a memory. God will still bless the church, though, because of their hearts. He'll even take special care of the ministry you are in because you are a servant of God.

Judah was messed up, but God kept them alive because of his servant David. We can influence God's decisions way in the future by our lives today.

3. For the Sake of a Servant, God will Take Care of your City

Let's look at a situation 270 years after the life of David--like 300 years from now! It's incredible to think that our hearts can influence God 300 years in the future.

2 Kings 19:32-36 "Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. [33] By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the LORD. [34] I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant." [35] That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies! [36] So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

God even spared a whole city 300 years later because of the faith of David. It's inspiring to think that God may spare our city because of our faith today. God honors and respects the heart of a servant devoted to him.

As disciples, we need a renewed commitment to win the whole world. Let us remember, though, that our hearts can influence God's heart in the future. He'll look on our children with favor, our ministries and even our cities.

There are dividends paid for our righteousness way beyond the scope of our own years. It's great to serve an awesome God.

18. Seen, Heard And Appreciated

We could have heard this saying,

If you want to be seen, standup;

*If you want to be heard, speak up;
And if you want to be appreciated, then shut up!*

This sums up all of us deep inside. We all want to be seen. We all want to be heard. Moreover, definitely we all want to be very much appreciated. However, what does it take to be all this. Often we go about this with worldly motives and ungodly ways. There is a great example we can learn from the life of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14 (whole chapter).

It was a time when all the Israelites were scared or cowardly (V.11). They were faithless and were living in shameful ways hiding in caves and holes from their enemies. (Does this reflect the state of our life/ministry?). Their leader king Saul had a terrible relationship with God and had just been rebuked by his discipler for disobeying God (13: 13-14). This ministry was going nowhere. No one was fired up. Everyone was 'out of it'. Caught in a rut! No way out. They were stuck.

Well the solution came in the form of a courageous, young man named Jonathan. He was different from everyone. He was not controlled by the situations. He was not waiting for an example. He did not complain about his leader(discipler). Because He knew, his real leader was God. He was a radical man. He believed what others thought was impossible because he walked with God. He was not waiting for a leader to lead him. He understood that he was the leader God had appointed. When all around him people were self-focused, his focus was on God.

1. Seen

He stood up for God and was seen as a hero. It is those who stand up who are seen and not those who are always seated, afraid of 'rocking the boat'. When the ministry was dead just he and his armor bearer went to attack the enemies. Even though the odds were against them they understood the equation that 2 + God is always a victory. How is our faith in God today? Do we think more of the obstacles or believe God will help to fight the battles? God helped Jonathan. There was an earthquake (V. 15). God wants to help us. But we must take the first step.

2. Heard

He gave the war cry and spoke up for God and all the Israelites heard him and followed. Suddenly all the Israelites got their courage back and started joining in with the fight. It only took someone standing up. Jonathan did something that no body thought about or expected, even the enemies! That is what it means to be radical. Let us put our heart into the ministry. Let us take advice and be creative. Let us get out of the rut we are in. We

live in a world where people are shouting and crying for their own needs to be met, fighting for their rights. Christians look to meeting others needs more than self needs.

3. Appreciated

However, when it came to standing up for himself the people of Israel appreciated Jonathan (14:45). They rescued him when his life was in danger. They were willing to die for him. What motivated them? They saw his faith in God. People want to follow a selfless leader. Someone who is willing to get up early, work late, be tired, go against the family, listen to ridicule; all because they want to see one more soul being saved. Are we that kind of a leader?

It is time to march to a greater victory for God. Let's decide to do things we have never done before. Let our ministries not reflect the state of the Israelites who were hiding, faithless, cowardly. Let us be like Jonathan, who was Seen, Heard and Appreciated for his faith and deeds for God.

19. Remember The First Love

We as disciples enjoyed many victories given by our Lord. As the church grows bigger there are many things to do, our responsibilities grow bigger and we might forget to do basics.

Rev 2:2-3 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Is this our reputation? Let us not lose our first love. Many of us might be tired of doing the same things over and over {Prayer, Bible Study, Evangelism and etc.,}. Israelites also did the same things year after year in the desert.

1. MANNA OR MEAT

EXO 16:35 - The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

Israelites were hungry, God opened the sky and gave manna in the morning, they were fired up. When we were baptized we were happy, were up early in the morning and enjoyed praying to God.

NUM 11:4 - 6 - The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in

Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

Israelites started grumbling and got tired of eating manna. They needed some taste. They looked for meat, fish, cucumber, melon, leech, onion, and garlic.

We as disciples may get tired of praying, Bible Study and being pure. We sometime desire to taste the world. Though they suffered in Egypt, they still needed that taste. Though we know how we were under Satan, yet we want to taste the world. What is the meat we are looking for?

It is time to be focused and do the basics. Let us not in the midst of responsibilities forget our love for God.

2. NO BRAKES BUT ACCELERATE

Acts 2 : 41 - Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

The first century church reached the membership over 3000. However, Peter did not stop preaching or He did not feel that the job is over. He understood that the church needs to grow. We may feel 'Wow! Its all over, I have done enough. It is time to apply brakes on my ministry'. No we should not apply breaks but we got to accelerate. Let us have the attitude of Peter to see the church grow.

Acts 5:14 - Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

The church grew in numbers. It never stopped growing.

Acts 5:42 - Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

They preached everyday and had a passion to grow. We as disciples should never apply brakes on the ministry. There are many who are lost. We have just started.

Acts 6:7 - 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.

Let us accelerate our ministries so that we can see many more victories for God.

20. My God And I

We would have reached some milestones in our faith. We would have broken barriers in our goals. We have planted, watered and seen our seeds grow, We have grown in our Faith, Love

BUT who is the We? Is it you and your disciples or you and your leaders our brothers and sisters? On a permanent note, It is (personally) "My GOD and I !"

1. God Of Glory

Acts 7:2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

Over the years our God has truly been a GOD of Glory, He has blessed us in ways more than we could ever imagine, The church has grown from strength to strength.

2. Chosen and Appointed:

Acts 7:2,34 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

GOD has always called men and women alike to be his messengers (just like Abraham and Moses even though there were many obstacles in their paths) with the heart to do his will.

We have to believe that at any cost because when HE calls us, HE will never let us down. All we have to do today as Christians is to believe that we are Chosen and Appointed.

3. Train and Ordain

Acts 7 :45-47 Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

The time is also right for us to pass down the torch, as you have witnessed The church has done awesome, but we need more leaders, more fired up men and women to do his will.

Right from Moses to Joshua, David to Solomon, Jesus to The Apostles... People have been taught to continue the good work, Brothers and Sisters it is time we become those men and women who can learn and grow.

4. Even greater things

This is what Jesus has Promised us...

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.

This is just the start, a beginning for us to see how God can take us higher, maybe we feel that we have not done anything to be a part of this Victory. The time is still right to take a fresh stance to renew our guard and focus on how GOD can use us to do Even Greater Things.

21. The Keys To Change

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. [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. [30] For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Are we weary and burdened? Jesus says, "Come to me." That's what it's about. He says His yoke is easy. How? He has a gentle and humble heart. That should be enough to comfort anybody.

The key to changing, though, is starting in the right place. Jesus wants us to have rest. We are sure He's not talking about sleeping for 24 hours, though. He's talking about a yoke here, a burden we have to carry. We need to understand this concept though--we need to find that rest.

1. Change starts in the Heart

We've got to learn where to start from. Jesus wants to save all of us, but . . . He also wants us to find rest for our souls. Need to be secure in our faith. Where do we start from? It starts in the heart.

Why are people so fired up about Jesus? We never saw him, never met him. His heart is compassionate, forgiving, merciful, kind, unselfish and sacrificial. His unassuming nature made us to give up all we had in the world. Yes, He's powerful, but we have the confidence that Jesus has the heart we can trust. No matter how bad things are, if we have Jesus' heart we'll always be fired up.

The joy, radical ness, growth of our Christian life really starts in our heart. Want our life to be joyful? It's got to start from our own heart, our own joy.

Acts 26:20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.

Repentance is turning to God, and then showing it by his deeds. It starts in the heart, though, not in the deeds. We can't focus on the actions first.

We all want to grow and we will grow. Marriage, parenting, being a disciple, etc. Do we want to change our heart? That's the thing that will change everything else.

2. Change By Imitating Jesus

Luke 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."

This is the only place where disciples ask Jesus to teach them something. They've learned a lot from Jesus, but here they ask for something specific. Does this mean that this is the only time they learned from Jesus? No. The other times, they learned by imitating. More is caught than taught. We need to imitate the heart of Jesus. Learn by imitating, not just by words.

Don't imitate things, but imitate the heart. Focus on being, not on doing. It's so easy to change our actions, but our heart doesn't change. That will only last for one month or so. We must dare to be different, not just act different. When we see somebody we like, we want to imitate them. Do we love Jesus? Are we willing to imitate Him?

We all have a yoke to carry. The choice is whether to carry a heavy and hard yoke or an easy and light yoke. Jesus said, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Let us go to Jesus when we are weary and burdened, He will give us rest. Let us carry His yoke.

22. A Place Called Gethsemane

Do we know this place? Most of great events of Jesus centered around this place. Jesus and his disciples ate together. Jesus taught about love and showed them His love. Satan entered Judas, and he left to get the soldiers to arrest Jesus. And much much more. A few days earlier, Jesus had entered the city to cries of "Hosannah".

John 18:1-3 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

Luke 22:39-48 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into temptation." He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called

Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Mat 26:36-46 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

1. Place of Pressure

Gethsemane means "oil press". Drops of blood fell from Jesus, like drops of oil from the olive press. Living a Christian life is a life of pressure. Denying ourselves and carrying the cross daily. That's what we hate about it. Jesus was held accountable as well. He passed the test. We crash too much under pressure. Jesus felt more than we ever will.

2. Place of Weakness

Jesus himself was tempted to be weak in Gethsemane. The three loudest apostles were helpless here. They all tripped up, they all fled. Gethsemane is where confront our weaknesses, and are still forgiven. Only thing that can hold us back is lack of forgiveness. If Jesus can forgive, who are we? Spirit is willing, but flesh is weak.

3. Place of Service

Jesus gets the towel and serves at the table. We've had our bath, but part of us still gets dirty. Our feet is where we come in contact with our world. Our charge is to wash one another, to keep each other clean. Let us speak the truth in love.

4. Place of Loyalty

Mount of Olives in the Old Testament:

Zech. 14: Messianic prophecy of restoration of Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 15:30- David comes weeping and crying because of betrayal. Ahithophel hanged himself when exposed, as did Judas.

Anguish of separation is like anguish of betrayal. So painful. Let us leave pain of betrayal move to loyalty.

5. Place of Sacrifice

We remember this phrase, "God himself will provide". In Mark, Jesus uses "Abba Father". Jesus cried to his Dad. Isaac cried, "Don't, Abba! Don't!". God sacrificed His only beloved son. Being a Christian is living a sacrificial life.

6. Place of Prayer

We all have to do things we don't want to do. Need to change our hearts at that point. We've lost that in our life. OK to ask for alternatives. Not OK to have a bad attitude.

Jesus takes Peter, James and John. "Watch and pray". What's the greatest enemy of prayer? Sleep. Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Do we? Let's never fall asleep as a Christian. Let us stay on our knees, praying.

23. The Healthy Body Of Christ

What does a "healthy" church look like? For church leaders and builders, it is the fundamental question of our time. *After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. -Ephesians 5:29*

But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. -1 Corinthians 3:10-15

With most of us being disciples for more than couple of years identifying and extirpating unhealthy patterns and practices in our congregations, we now have a pretty good idea of what doesn't edify the church and what doesn't lead it to maturity.

But we need more. As cooperating congregations, most of us now seem able and zealous to take the spiritual offensive against Satan's schemes. As we do so, we need a clear and hopeful picture of what does bring maturity and edification in the church. Extending God's own metaphor, we need to know what keys and catalyzes a healthy body, what constitutes "vital organs" and their maintenance, and what we should look for to prevent acute or chronic disease. This really matters because our good and painstaking reforms have not exempted us from spiritual attack. Are we, ready and fit to fight?

Go see the Doctor

Most of us don't like to go see the doctor. It's an emotional issue: an annual checkup offers the possibility of bad news. We might prefer to just "let life happen" and take our chances. Yet logically, it's obvious what a difference regular checkup with a skilled physician can make-in fact, it might make all the difference between life and death. We need to take care, then, not to define ourselves by our freedom from accountability. Pretending isn't health.

Some of us love to see the doctor-it's called hypochondria. We affirm ourselves by our possible illnesses and hope the doctor will confirm. It's a control issue. We keep checking: "Am I well? How am I doing? How about tomorrow? How about now? How about five minutes from now?" We seek too much evaluation and define ourselves by accountability. Obsessing with our "health" isn't health either.

Healthy people measure their fitness in reasonable ways and at reasonable intervals. So do healthy churches. Seeing the doctor is a good thing. Without it, we tend to deceive ourselves, perhaps fatally.

Vital Signs

Doctors have a logical and scientific algorithm for determining where we are on the health continuum. It's a serious exam. For good reason they check blood pressure, heart rate, reflexes, and run appropriate series' of blood tests. If symptoms warrant, they order more tests, all the way up to an expensive MRI. The goal is to evaluate and respond to the prime indicators of health. There are particularly concerned with vital signs that speak of our vital organs.

And what are these prime indicators for our churches?

1. **Health means growth** -individually and as a church. All healthy living things grow, but not out of control (we call that "cancer"). God, in His wisdom and timing, "makes things grow" as they should (*I Cor 3:7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*) This means the church grows both in maturity (*Eph 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*) & numerically (*Col 1:6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth*) . Let me emphasize that healthy churches feature both.

2. **We grow in our walk with God** -in intimacy and imitation (*Eph 5:1 Be imitators of God*). How does this become manifest congregationally? We might look for a congregation's joy, zeal, willingness to serve, and its ability to raise up leaders according to their gift sets.

3. **We grow in our spiritual relationships.** Whether or not we call it "discipling," "faith partners," "the one another way fellowship," or something else, the reality is that healthy

churches preach and train Christians to practice the familiar "one another way" scriptures: encouragement, depth, confession, "seeing to it" (Hebrews 3:12-13, 12:15ff), spurring, and more. The "fellowship" ought to be primary, vibrant, stimulating, comforting, encouraging, full of love in fact, and full of magic in feel. Remember our relationships when we first came to Christ?

4. **We grow in our love for the lost.** Jesus came to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19:10) and commissioned each and every Christian to go and do likewise (Matthew 28:18-20). Historically, we have been a family of churches who have given heart, mind, soul, and strength to this worthy cause! God has blessed that commitment abundantly and miraculously over the years. We have, however, sometimes confused commitment with evangelistic results. Now we know better: we cannot control the decisions of non-Christians. But we can control what we do, that is, our part. Healthy churches preach a passion for the mission and challenge every single Christian to be "in the game" rather than on the sidelines. We need to challenge everyone to pray about and work towards bringing their neighbors to church or Bible Talk, but especially to be involved in a Bible study with non-Christians. These are things all of us can strive to do. It's not a matter of talent, but of commitment and understanding our role. It is not our role to manufacture evangelistic fruit; that's between God and the non-Christian we love and serve. It is our role to sow and water to the best of our ability. By faith, we know God will eventually bring the increase, because he loves the lost even more than we do.

5. **We grow in our service to the poor.** The brevity of this statement is enough because there's nothing to clarify. May we individually and congregationally, locally and globally love and serve the poor!

Of course, there is much more to a vital church than these few vital signs, but no church will be healthy independent from them! We want to give attention to any need in the body, but not all body needs are vital organs. We may have the world's best manicure, but if our liver isn't functioning, we are not healthy and we need to get help as quickly as possible. We would rather have the good liver and bad nails. May we urgently attend, then, to vital organs!

24. Mount of Beatitudes

Mat 5:1-12 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

These words were spoken after the calling of the Twelve. Sort of an orientation to the Kingdom of God. Significant that Jesus doesn't talk about dreams for the future. He emphasizes the heart of God that every disciple must have.

1. God Desires Humility

First four beatitudes deal with our attitude towards God.

World tells us humility is weakness. Pride, confidence are keys to success. God hates pride, wants us to remain humble. Sets up our lives to bless us with humility (aging, parenting, etc.)

Deu 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.

When we're confident all is well, we're weak. Spend our lives trying not to need God (prepare for everything). What do we put our confidence in? Results, preaching, wisdom, planning, etc.

God wants us to seek humility. Blesses us when we humble ourselves (fruit). Do we prefer humility, or worldly confidence? When are we most comfortable?

2 Cor 12:10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2. Relationships Demonstrate Humility

Last four beatitudes deal with our attitude toward others. Paul highlighted Timothy as a humble man.

Phil 2:20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

How did Paul know Timothy cared about others? He watched him in the fellowship. We all struggle with being task-oriented. When we go to church sometimes we go with a long list of things to do. We think we're so unselfish, giving and serving all the time. Actually most of the times, we're seeking our own interests. Trying to get everybody to do what we want them to.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Does this sound like us in the fellowship? Do people always say, "we're so busy". We need to be known as Timothy having genuine interest.

God desires humility. Relationships demonstrate humility. Let us build our lives on this foundation.

25. Helping People Find Strength In God

We will all face hard times in the life as a disciple. It's vital that we learn to help one another find strength in God at these times.

1 Samuel 23:1-6 When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," [2] he inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" The Lord answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah." [3] But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!" [4] Once again David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered him, "Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand." [5] So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. [6] (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

This city was going down. In those days, when you lost the battle you lost everything. God told them to go, but the men were afraid. David prayed again, and they went. The people were so fired up to have been rescued. It was an awesome time.

1 Samuel 23:7-12 Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, "God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars." [8] And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. [9] When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." [10] David said, "O Lord, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. [11] Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, God of Israel, tell your servant."

And the Lord said, "He will." [12] Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will."

David and his men just saved an entire town, and they expect some gratitude. Unfortunately, they aren't getting any.

1 Samuel 23:13 So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

It's not so exciting to move from place to place. We all dream of being able to stay somewhere for a while.

1 Samuel 23:14-16 David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands. [15] While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. [16] And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.

1. Help Disciples To Stay Humble, Don't Humiliate Them

David was down at this point. People weren't grateful for his help. He only wanted to help Saul. Saul was down on him, Keilah was ungrateful. When we're talking the desert of Judea, we're talking real desert.

David a man of God had to run from place to place. Even though he saved the people of Keilah, we are seeing that the Lord telling him the people of Keilah will hand David to Saul. David had to stay in the desert. Day after day Saul searched for David. But God did not give David into his hands.

The best thing someone can do to David is helping him and finding strength in God. Jonathan the son of Saul did that to him. He helped David to stay humble. All of us need people to help us find strength in God from time to time.

When our Christians go through struggles we need to help them stay humble. We need to help them find strength in God. We should never humiliate them by using words which will make them feel hurt. Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you . . .". Treat them as you would want to be treated. Be encouraging, build them up, show respect for their experiences at this point. God has chosen them to be disciples.

2. Provide Disciples A Safe Place

In the ancient world, if somebody was accidentally killed they had to get payback. Even though it was an accident, emotions ran so high that people had to get revenge. God understood this in the Old Testament, and provided cities of refuge. You had to stay there

until the High Priest died, and as emotions died reason took over. The relatives of the dead man could say, "It was only an accident, after all".

You could also run to the horns of the altar, grasp onto them. According to law, you couldn't be punished while holding onto the horns of the altar. The altar, like the cities of refuge, provided a safe place where emotions could die down. When we get emotional, we don't think logically. Emotions run so high that you just don't think straight. This happens with pain as well.

When we are having a tough time, when we are struggling with emotions, we need a safe place. The safe place is God. When people are going through tough times, it would be great to pray with them. That is the safest place we can take them to.

3. Help Disciples To Build Foundational Blocks

In our 30's and 40's, something interesting begins to happen to us. A brother tore the ligament in the knee when he was 19 years old. The doctors just opened it up and cut it out. It left the knee destabilized, but he was young and strong and kept on functioning. The destabilized knee started to grind out the cartilage on the inside of the knee. It never hurt him in his 20's, but it certainly has started to hurt in his 30's and 40's. Many of us are starting to have symptoms from injuries that happened years ago. Many of these injuries are emotional hurts. May feel you need counseling.

The way to deal with this is to back up and rebuild the foundation under that part of our life. It's hard to do. No time. Marriage, parenting, your own heart--these get neglected and then catch up with you.

Many of us have these things that come back to haunt us later in life. We can't go back and rebuild if we're so busy. Need a bit of relief from the pressure to give us time to get these things resolved. Ultimately, we'll have our best years later in life, if we rebuild our foundation.

1 Samuel 24:3-7 He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. [4] The men said, "This is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.' " Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. [5] Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. [6] He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." [7] With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Saul comes in, and David's men were persuading him to attack. Obviously, David had some of these feelings in his own heart. He wasn't an angel. David cuts off a corner of his robe, but then his conscience gets the best of him. David knew how to fight the fight and

be powerful in some ways, like against Goliath. God put him in the cave to change his heart, to work on his own conscience.

None of David's men were condemning him; it was his own heart for God. It takes more effort, more sacrifice and more time to get a good conscience than to train a top-class athlete, musician or businessman. Ambition is good, but a pure heart is better.

"Godliness with contentment is great gain - I Timothy 6:6"

26. Zeal For Your House Consumes Me..

1 Chron. 11:4-6 David and all the Israelites marched to Jerusalem (that is, Jebus). The Jebusites who lived there [5] said to David, "You will not get in here." Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David. [6] David had said, "Whoever leads the attack on the Jebusites will become commander-in-chief." Joab son of Zeruiah went up first, and so he received the command.

David and his men marched up to Jerusalem, and the Jebusites sneered at them. The Bible shows us the reason David succeeded. It was through a challenge. "Whoever leads will become commander in chief." People respond to challenges.

Sometimes, people around us are a bit like the Jebusites. Satan uses them to taunt us. They stand there staring at us. "You can't get into my heart". "You can't change me. I'm gonna change you. Let's see how long you will last". They're sneering, and they're taunting us. What are we going to do? Do we sit there and get discouraged? Do we act confident on the outside?

Joab was a controversial figure, but most of us are controversial at times. Let us see some positive aspects of Joab. We know he's got some faults. He took the lead. That was great. He went first, stepped up and went for it.

David had many mighty men. Some had faces of lions. What does that mean? They could fight right and left-handed. They were swift as gazelles . . . The least was a match for a hundred, the greatest a match for a thousand. Above all these incredible guys, Joab became the chief in command. What set him apart? Why was he able to get the position? Was he the most talented? He had real zeal.

We can have zeal that's not real. Just put it on, and take it off. Jesus had real zeal as well. He could see life at its worst, and still love and serve the lost. He saw more, got hurt more, walked more, was rejected more than any of us. Still he possessed a zest for life, a love for the lost that we stand in awe of. Jesus knew the impending end that awaited him, yet he was never self-focused. He never let his zeal wane. He had real zeal because he was in touch with God.

Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions

with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Jesus was deep with God. That was the source of his real zeal. Most of us are not in touch with our feelings. We can go on and on, work on and on without knowing how we feel inside. Jesus could have real zeal because he was in touch with his feelings. This is directly related to being deep with God. He knew himself, and he knew God. The enemy of zeal is a lack of depth with God.

When we move one step towards God, he takes ten steps towards us. He is quick to bless when we rely on him. When we get deep with God, have real zeal, we don't care what people think. God will move our life and ministry.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Do you believe that advancing the kingdom of God is a good deed? When our ministry is stale, not moving, what are we doing? God said, "Let there be light." Thomas Edison said, "Let there be a light bulb". He tried 50,000 filaments without a success. People asked him how he did it. He said, "Now I know 50,000 ways not to make a light bulb". Are we trying the same old ideas that we've always done that still don't work? Sometimes we get tired. Instead of pushing on, we just stop trying.

Real zeal will instill creativity. If we really love, we'll be creative. If we really love our ministry, we'll find creative ways to move the hearts. Do we have thinking times? Do we get on the phone, talk to people? Do we ask for help, or are we a loner? That does not show real zeal. Do we raise up the talent God has given us in our own life and ministry? Let us look at the talents we have, give them faith, show them God and let them go.

"To achieve anything significant, everyone needs a little imagination and a big dream" God has a big dream for every disciple. Where there are obstacles, there's room for growth. Every obstacle is an opportunity.

Proverbs 24:10 If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength! If we falter when we face obstacles, our strength will always be small. We have to ask ourselves one question: "How big is our faith?"

1. Face The Giants

Satan consistently threatens us, makes us think we will fail. Just when we think we've figured it out, we hear that unique voice threatening us. There's a giant waiting. The challenge is, how are we going to face that giant?

1 Samuel 17:2-11 Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. [3] The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them. [4] A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. [5] He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; [6] on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. [7] His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six

hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him. [8] Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. [9] If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." [10] Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." [11] On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

1 Samuel 17:16 For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

1 Samuel 17:20-24 Early in the morning David left the flock with a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. [21] Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. [22] David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and greeted his brothers. [23] As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. [24] When the Israelites saw the man, they all ran from him in great fear.

Israel had great potential, but they were not overcoming their greatest obstacle. The devil hates seeing men of potential max out. How does he do it? He gets us to focus on the odds, the size, the shape, the strength of our problems. Funny things start happening. We lose the size and shape of our powerful God. We become crippled with fear and insecurity. We become overly emotional. We even overeat at times like this, and then we get guilty.

When does this happen? When we're "feeling things". Let's just admit that we have a pygmy-sized God, and giant-sized problems. We have to see our need for a big God, to slap those problems away. When our giant problems are slapping our pygmy-sized God around, what's happening? It's a sign that we're not close to God anymore. That's when those thoughts come in.

What are the top three Goliaths in your life? Perhaps cowardice, maybe emotionalism or being feelings-oriented. Maybe it's inconsistency. Maybe worldliness, unhealthy independence, impatience. Bottom-line, it just comes down to heart and conviction.

When we decide to face our giants, then and only then will we go through our obstacles. We need to decide, "I am going to win." Winners go through obstacles. Losers go around them. It's a long way around.

2. Expect the Victory

1 Samuel 17:32-37 David said to Saul, "Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him." [33] Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting

man from his youth." [34] But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, [35] I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. [36] Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. [37] The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

1 Samuel 17:46-47 This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. [47] All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."

Look at David's confidence. He was absolutely convinced that God would win. Some points to consider for great victories are :

1. Being faithful when nobody else seems faithful.
2. Personal example must be on fire all the time
3. Don't be afraid to take risks
4. Pouring ourself into the hearts of our people
5. Titles don't inspire, courage does
6. Marital unity brings ministry unity
7. Initiate with different leaders and visit other ministries
8. Let nobody be more giving than us
9. Establish great friendships
10. Are we fun, or stoic and stiff? Are we tensed, or intense?

God has a unique way of blessing us, just as he did with David. He used David to slay Goliath with a stone. *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. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

27. Staying Alive

There will be all sorts of emotions building inside us. Sometimes we feel the need to spend more time with our children. Then we feel the need to spend more time with our wife or husband. Finally, we think we need to work on our commendation--the ministry! What's the top priority? What do we need to focus on first? Need to figure out which emotions are the healthy ones, which are unhealthy.

We emphasize a lot about joy and being positive, but get unsettled by trials. We need to have the balance of both in our lives. Pressure is a fact of life.

We're just not smart enough or awesome enough to do it on our own. Any area we want to pick, we're just not at the top. God set it up this way so the glory would go to him, and not to us.

2 Cor. 4:7-12 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. [8] We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; [9] persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. [10] We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. [11] For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. [12] So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

We're always being given over to death. That's not very inspiring.

1. Hard-Pressed, but Not Crushed

Pressure on every side is normal. Let us just better get used to it. Family, ministry, special events, satan, neighbors, finances, etc. Hard-pressed, but not crushed. Once an ornament is crushed, we can't ever put it back together again. Hopefully, when the pressure builds we become more focused. If we're doing all that we can do, that's great. Let us keep it up. If we ever feel resentment toward the ministry, it is not good. Being hard-pressed is great, but crushed is not acceptable.

2. Perplexed, but Not in Despair

We're always perplexed. We hardly ever know what we're supposed to do. Losing hope, though, is not acceptable. Being in despair is unhealthy.

3. Persecuted, but Not Abandoned

Persecution kind of fires us up in a funny way. At first, it gets on our nerves a bit, but after a while it weighs on us. Abandoned is something we definitely don't want to feel. Feeling all alone is a wrong feeling. We are not all alone--we have God and friends.

4. Struck Down, but Not Destroyed

Nothing wrong with feeling struck down. When we're struck down, we get back up. That's the key difference. Once in a while, perhaps more often, we will get struck down. Not time for a pity party, but time to get back up. Struck down is ok. Destroyed is not ok.

2 Cor. 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. [17] For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. [18] So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Even though we're hard-pressed, struck down, perplexed, persecuted, we can't lose heart. We need to stay faithful in the face of bad news because of the confidence that God is going to win. Whatever happens, He's in control. We would like him to win by a larger margin sometimes, but he's going to win for sure.

Outwardly, we are wasting away. We're going downhill fast. If we're starting to droop, we have to get in there with the Lord. Let us get close with the Lord and get renewed on the inside.

2 Cor. 6:3-10 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. [4] Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; [5] in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; [6] in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; [7] in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; [8] through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; [9] known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; [10] sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

We have to go the extra 6th mile to be sure that our life is not discredited. When we think what life as a disciple is supposed to feel like . . . Where is our commendation? What do we boast in?

- a. Great endurance
- b. Troubles
- c. Hard work, sleepless nights and hunger
- d. Sleepless nights
- e. Truthful speech
- f. Glory and dishonor
- g. Bad report or good
- h. Genuine, yet regarded as impostors
- i. Beaten, but not killed
- j. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing
- k. Having nothing, yet possessing everything

What really matters? What's really going to make a difference? Paul was way worse off than we are. We actually have something. When we look at the changed lives in the church, realize this . . . We need to keep going. It's worth it, whatever the pain, whatever the cost.

There will be challenges, but we need the heart to step up to it. We need to take the pressure, may feel perplexed, will definitely experience sorrow . . . But we should always keep going, keep getting up, keep staying alive.

It's a rich life we have in the kingdom. Let's never let go, never give up.

28. Yoked With Jesus

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Matthew 11:29-30.

Jesus used the picture of yoked oxen plowing a field. Some say in Bible days a farmer would yoke a young ox together with an older, well-trained ox so that it could learn to plow a straight furrow in the field. Christ wants us to be yoked with Him so that we can learn from Him how to walk with God.

1. The wrong yoke

"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" Galatians 5:1.

This yoke of slavery is the yoke of self-effort. This is a heavy yoke because we try to do it all in our own strength.

There are three yokes which we need to be careful about.

- a. The yoke of the law. *(Acts 15:10) Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?*
- b. The yoke of the world. *(James 4:4 NIV) You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*
- c. The yoke of the flesh. *(Lam 1:14 NIV) "My sins have been bound into a yoke ; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand.*

2. Breaking the Old Yoke :

Jesus refuses to be yoked with our old self.

(2 Cor 5:14,15) For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

That means if He wants us to be yoked with Him, He must first destroy the old yoke. And that is exactly what Jesus did at the Cross.

"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" Romans 6:6 (Romans 7:5-6).

3. Yoked to Jesus

God wants us to be yoked with Christ. This means that Jesus carries the heaviest load. This is why His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light." His strength, righteousness and life are transferred to us. His footsteps become our footsteps. This is how the Christian life has been designed to work.

4. A daily yoke :

"The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught" Isaiah 50:4.

In taking His yoke upon us Jesus told us to learn from Him. This is how we learn from Jesus...

Daily we:

- a. Pray (Luke 11:3) *Give us each day our daily bread.*
- b. Spend time in God's word. (Mat 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.'"*
- c. Experience God's grace (2 Cor 4:16) *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*
- d. Fellowship together (Acts 2:42, 46-47) *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*
- e. Work with God. (John 5:17) *Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."*
- f. Take up our cross and follow Him. (Luke 9:23) *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*

When we start off the day with Jesus, we continue through the day yoked to Him. When distractions come, the gentle yoke of Jesus pulls us back on track. As Jesus walks the straight line in His Father's will, so we also walk the straight line God has set for us.

Let us make a decision to be yoked with him, because in the yoke of Jesus we discover true victory, true freedom and true life.

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" 1 Peter 2:21.

29. Chosen

Mat 27:27-33 Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull).

Here we see Jesus being tortured and the Bible details all the way he was tortured and finally he's led away to be crucified. v32 says as they going on the way they met a man from Cyrene named Simon and they forced him to carry the cross. Who Simon of Cyrene is, is a mystery. Cyrene is a place in northern Africa. It is in modern day Libya, in Tripoli. So at that time there was a synagogue, as it says in Acts 6, in Cyrene. The Jews probably had a regular habit of coming to Jerusalem for the Passover. So Simon had probably come all the way from Cyrene just for Passover and had probably decided to stay a few days. So he was in the crowd. He had no intention of doing anything with Jesus or the cross or the crucifixion or anything. He was just a spectator. The Roman soldiers just pulled him and forced him to carry the cross of Jesus.

1. Chosen to carry the cross

Simon was chosen to carry the cross. He didn't want to, but he was chosen to carry the cross. God has chosen us, the disciples to carry the cross. Now, do we want to carry the cross? Would you want to share the intensity of the persecution and torture that he went through, would you want to be there in his place, carrying the cross? Simon didn't want to. But he was chosen to carry the cross.

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

As disciples of Jesus the call is very simple - we've got to be willing to carry the cross. Maybe we feel like Simon of Cyrene - maybe we don't want to, maybe we feel forced to but as disciples we must carry the cross. Carrying the cross is not very popular is it? No one wants to take the pain. Who likes suffering? None of us. Who wants to mourn? None of us. We want our lives to be easy. We want our life to be happy. We always want to be joyful. We want life to be a party, to enjoy ourselves, we want to enjoy the benefits of this life, and we want to enjoy the pleasures of this life. Nobody wants or desires the cross. Carrying the cross is very unpopular. Do you know when we love to carry the cross?

Probably when we just got baptized. At that time we are willing to do anything for Christ because we are so grateful, so thankful. What happens as we get older, we don't want the

cross. Isn't that true? As we get older the cross becomes burdensome. As we get older we're eager to put down the cross rather than picking it up. Simon of Cyrene had the honor of carrying the cross. As we get older the cross can become less and less significant in our lives. As disciples we should always go back to the cross because that's where we need to get our inspiration, that is what we're here for. So we are chosen just like Simon of Cyrene was chosen to carry the cross even though he was not willing.

2. Chosen to see the grace of God

Luke 23:26-34 As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Here it says Simon came from Cyrene, from the countryside and he was forced to carry Jesus' cross. He saw that as they were going, a lot of people including women and children were mourning and wailing for Jesus. What did Jesus tell these women? "Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children." You've got to understand it's so easy for Jesus to invite this kind of sympathy because he was in such a bad shape. But Jesus was not into self-pity here. Jesus was saying don't cry for me, I don't need your sympathy, I don't need pity. You need to worry about your families. Jesus was not invoking any pity for himself. His voice holds no self pity. In the end he says "Father forgive them because they don't know what they're doing".

That's what we've got to learn: to understand the grace of God from the cross. Jesus forgave the men that hurt him. Simon of Cyrene was probably the only one who heard these words "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing". Even though Simon was reluctantly carrying the cross, he was watching what Jesus was saying, hearing his words, seeing how he was bearing the pain and probably as he was walking his life changed. As Simon carried the cross he understood Jesus. He saw the grace of Jesus. He saw that Jesus was not there to pay back the people who had hurt him but was there to forgive those who hurt him. God calls us and chooses us to understand the grace of God. We've been blessed by his grace. None of us stand a chance before God because he has forgiven us much.

We remember the incident where the woman caught on adultery was brought to Jesus. She was caught in adultery - she was in absolute sin. Everybody wanted to stone her because she had committed adultery and she deserved to die. Some people didn't know

what was happening but they must have picked up stones like everybody else. All wanted to throw stones at the woman. What did Jesus say? If any of you have not sinned let them be the first one to throw the stone. When you understand the grace of God the stones will automatically drop. And that's what those men did - they dropped their stones and walked back because they were convicted. We should be so grateful for our salvation that we are quick to forgive even when it is hard to forgive.

3. Chosen to change the world

Mark 15:21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Here the Bible talks about Simon being a father. And its amazing that Mark when he wrote this account of Jesus in this gospel, mentions the names of the sons of Simon. Probably the church that would read this account knew who Alexander and Rufus were and that's why he mentioned their names.

Rom 16:13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me, too.

Here it talks about Rufus who is chosen in the Lord and also his mother who has been a mother to Paul who wrote the book. It may or may not be the same Rufus but one thing we understand it's very likely that Simon, his two sons, his wife all became disciples of Jesus. And probably Simon is the one who shared the story of Jesus saying these words at the cross "Father forgive them..." to the entire early church. He must have told the church how he shared the cross with Jesus, what experience he had and how that walk with Jesus to Golgotha changed his life. Simon spread the message of Jesus and what impact Jesus had on his life to the early church and to all the people who studied the Bible.

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. 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. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

After the persecution broke out, the disciples went out of Jerusalem, were scattered and preached the word wherever they went. They went all the way to Antioch. The Bible says some of them, men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also telling them the good news about the Lord and the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. So the men of Cyrene went up to Antioch and for the first time the Greeks heard the message through Cyreneians and who taught the men of Cyrene the Bible? Probably Simon of Cyrene who taught them, encouraged them "Go preach the word". The reason we are chosen is not just to change our lives or to carry the cross - we are here to change the world. God chose Simon to change the world. Our mission is still the same. It is still what Jesus wants to do, his dream is still to seek and save the lost, and that all men can come to know the

truth. Our mission has not changed. We, as disciples, are still chosen, every one of us, to impact the world around us.

30. Victory Through Jesus

1. War or Peace

We do not know what peace is unless we know what war is. Only when we face the war we appreciate what peace is. We can see many physical war on TV, but there is a war we cannot even see we only feel and experience.

Rev 12:7-13 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

This war is a spiritual war. There is a war between God's angels and devils angels. It is intense war and Satan was hurled down and has come down to earth. And he is come here to hurt the people, to deceive the people, accuse the people and people who obey God to get them out of the Kingdom of God. It also talks about people overcame with the blood of Jesus. This war is real we all are in the war, the war for our souls. The war the Satan is fighting is very clear. He wants to take our souls. He wants to get into his side. It is not easy to face war because we see the pain. We can see fear. We can see the discouragement, worry, there is uncertainty, we don't know what is going to happen. That's what we feel when we go through our own wars in our lives. How are we going to overcome? who is going to win?

Are we going to change, are we going to come through? Are we going to change through struggles of sin? That's the fear when we are going through this war. And the Bible says the only way to overcome the struggles is through blood of Jesus. Not by our strength, not by our good deeds but through blood of Jesus only, by holding on to Christ.

All over the world the disciple are going through this war. Some are wounded Christian,

some are hurt, and some are going to die. All this is going to affect us. That is the reality of war that is the reality of spiritual war. When there is fierce battle between and Satan somebody is going to fall, somebody is going to hurt and somebody is going to die. We got to decide how we're going to face this battle.

Eph 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Here the Bible tells us how to face this war, v.10 be strong in the Lord and His power. We got to be that close to him. We need to be able to trust in his mighty power to save us. May be we are struggling in sin, may be some character weakness, may be financial struggles, may be marriage problem, may be relational issue in our family, whatever it is we got to stand strong in the Lord .

Vs 11 We need to put on full armor of God. How? Vs.14 we need to put a belt of righteousness, fit for feet with readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. We need to take a shield of faith, wear a helmet of salvation. We got to pray in spirit in all occasion, with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints in the battle. The only way we can be in battle is by being spiritual. We got to pray all the time that's when we can stand firm.

Peace is something rare, it can't be bought, bribed to receive, we can only get it from God. God wants us to have peace. He wants us to enjoy this peace.

We are not going to let Satan win so quickly. He may tempt you, he may discourage you but we are not giving in. He will put doubts in our mind he will confuse us, he will try every trick to hurt us but we are not going to give in so quickly. That's the spirit we are going to have as Christians. Today we may be going through whatever struggle in our life but we have to have that faith, we have to stand strong in the Lord, we can fight the good battle.

Rom 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

This is the promise. God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet so your battle,

the end of the battle is very clear we are going to crush Satan under our feet. Who is going to allow us to do that? God himself. He is not a God of war but God of peace. Let's really believe and hold on to the promise that God is going to help us to have victory. There is a war out there but we want peace. That peace comes only from God.

2. World Cup Or Jesus Cup

1 Cor 9:24,25 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

This world cup is going to perish. People in the world are competing for perishable things that's temporary it lasts as long as we live. If we live today we can enjoy our money today, it perishes with us. All the worldly rewards will perish but what we need to fight is for the crown that is imperishable.

All the money we run after will be gone. We shouldn't run our whole life running after perishable things. We have to run after imperishable crown.

2 Tim 2:4-8 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.

Paul is waiting for a crown. While on earth he didn't receive a crown. He got persecuted, he went to jail, and eventually he was beheaded. The world did not appreciate him. The world did not respect him. He did not get the award for anything he had done in this earth. But he believed that there is up for him a crown of righteousness. And the Lord righteous God will give me, not only to him but also for all those who are waiting for him. That's an imperishable crown.

If we're going to work for something we got to work for what God has kept for us. Jesus on earth was crowned. He was crowned with a crown of thorns. In this life we will also be crowned. Sometimes we will be crowned with crown of thorns. It may be crown of pain, or suffering can be a problem of disability. In this world we will be crowned. But do not look at the crown we are holding on to right now. It can be suffering, temptation or pain or it can be anything.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Blessed is the man who endures temptation. When we have been through that, when we stood the test we will receive a crown. Let us not give up when we are going through

trials. Let us persevere and we will receive the crown. 1 Pet 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. It will never fade.

We need to ask ourselves what are we looking for, a world cup or Jesus cup?

1 Cor 15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are looking for a victory. In the war against evil forces of the world we are looking for victory. In each of our life we are looking for victory. It is the promise. We need to thank God to give us victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. We will be victorious in God. Let us pray that war will end but peace will prevail. Do not run after the cup what world can give but what Jesus will give.

31. Repent Or Perish

2 Pet 3:9 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.

Luke 13:1-5 Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

1. Why we sin?

Life is a rat race. When you are born, they see what color you are. If you are black, you are already made to feel as if you are not good. If you are girl, you are also made to feel you are no good.

Even for play school, there are interviews. To join good schools, you need money. If you do join you feel shame when you don't have what other children have: cars, good clothes, good homes etc. If you join a municipality school you feel ashamed all your life. If you didn't study in English medium you feel ashamed. If you fail and didn't make it to college, you always feel diffident.

You get a job, great. If not, daily scolding about how bad you are eating at home without shame. Once in the job, pleasing boss, facing threats. Fear of losing job. Desire to make it in career.

If single you want to get married. Get discouraged, by rejection. Face pressure from family and society. You try to be attractive than the other one. There is jealousy hopelessness.

If married, you hate the fights in marriage. You wish you didn't marry. Sometimes you wish you died.

Run, run, run,..Life is a rat race. We all are running this race. Most times we are running happily, but many times we fall. What we do when we fall is important. When we fall we get discouraged and that is when we sin. We look for consolation, comfort. When we don't get that, then we fall in sin, just to feel good. Feel alive. We sin because we feel unloved and looking for something to make us feel good, feel loved.

To a world like this God sent a message through Jesus. To tell us, 'son, do not despair, I am with you. I love you for who you are. I love you so much as to die for your sins. I will forgive all your sins. I will be with you always. When you fall think of me, I am by your side. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Take my hand. Get up and run. For with me by your side you are more than a conqueror, for you have nothing to fear even death.'

How are we running your race? What do we do when we fall? What are our pet sins we commit to comfort ourselves? Some like to sleep, eat, watch TV, be immoral, cry, withdraw.. What do we do?

The reason, Jesus came and died for us is that we may not sin again. That we may remember how much God loves us and how much God hates sin and wants us to overcome sin and find strength and comfort in Him and repent. Instead of seeking God's comfort, we give in to our sinful nature, or we look for man's comfort.

In the church we are responsible for each others well being. There are many who need strength. We need to help each other find strength in God. We need to take up the responsibility of praying with the other disciples and helping them find strength in God.

2. Why we must repent?

Because God loved us and sent His son to show how much He loves us. He assured us of His love and cleansed us and adopted us as His children. Nothing can separate us from His love. He won't condemn us. He gave us a free gift of forgiveness through confession. He won't condemn us if we live by His word.

When we struggle with sin, think of Jesus on the cross. Bleeding, nailed to the cross, in terrible agony and pain looking at us with compassion and mercy, pleading for our forgiveness saying 'father forgive him he does not know what he is doing'.

What does Jesus' love mean for us now? If we are sinning means we are spurning Him and honoring our desires above Him. Let's not do that. Let us make every effort to resist the devil and not the Lord. The first step for that is to confess our sins. Forgiveness is free.

He called us to be example of His love and grace. He called us to fulfill His purpose. If

we walk in light with Him, we will be pure and go to heaven like Jesus did. Our aim is to bear fruit for Him. If not at least do not bring shame to Him. If we do, He won't spare us. How could we bring shame?

3. How to repent?

We need God, His Spirit, His word and His mercy to be able to repent. First of all we must desire to repent. We must fear the consequences of our sin, realize where our life is heading and deeply desire a change. Do you have the desire? If not, like the prodigal son, we have not yet come to realize how meaningless our sinful life is, and how wonderful life in God is. May be we have not yet reached our pig pen. Keep hunting for the pigs we will soon find them. If we have the desire, then there is hope.

Repentance begins with going to God first. If we have been out of touch in going to God, we need to seek others help and get on our knees and plead to God. Let us pray with someone till our heart goes soft. Initially we may not have words, we keep wrestling with God, groan and moan, but stay in prayer till you we our prayer right.

4. How not to repent?

Repentance means taking responsibility for our own sin, and forgiving others sin. We find it very hard. So we try to take short cuts. We like to look to others who have not repented. We want to hear what we want not what we need. We try to manipulate our way out.

Sometimes no one comes, and we keep walking away from God and soon harden our heart and will not bother even if we fall into devil's hand. We won't even know when we left God and started to follow devil. That is how devil deceives us.

Do you know where we are going today? Are we alert against devil's schemes? Don't we care to be trapped by the devil? That is how Judas fell. When he realized it was too late.

5. What are the consequences if we don't repent?

First of all know that there are consequences for sin. What we sow is what we reap. If we are a liar, know that we are losing peoples trust. Trust is love. So we won't be loved. So let us not blame others, let us stop lying and we will be trusted and loved. If we are lazy and not have a job, it leads to poverty, and let us not blame others. If we are proud, we won't have friends, and even God will oppose us. If we give in to our sensual desires, then we are slave to our sinful nature and we don't know where we are going.

If we are stubborn and unrepentant we are storing up God's wrath. Once His arm raises, it won't come down until His wrath is fully poured out. Is that what we want? Are we stubborn and unrepentant? Let us wake up, God may soon be angry with us and pour out His wrath. And there is no stopping Him. Let us repent before it is too late.

6. Why not repent and get happy?

To repent means to die to self and submit to God. We must decide to crucify our pride, self, sinful desires and worldly hopes.

Heb 10:26-39 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. 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.

32. God's Dream

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 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 made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We are the ambassadors of God. Christ died for all and those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died". We are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come. We know we are filled with the Spirit. All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. He has committed to us the message of reconciliation and therefore we are Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

God is making his appeal through us that is why he sent Jesus to die for us. The scripture says he has given us a message of reconciliation. God has given us a message, the good news, where we could be reconciled (because someone gave us the message, we got reconciled to God). Also we have the opportunity to reach out to someone and reconcile them to God. That's what Jesus did. He went and reconciled people to God. It is like this when we go and reach out to a person, we take his/her hand and go and take God's hand and reconcile that person to God. Every time we do that we touch God's heart.

And in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus himself spoke and said to his disciples, "*You are the light of the world*". He also reminded that nobody lights a lamp and hides it somewhere. They keep it on a stand so that all people can see the light. He challenged them to let their lights so shine that people will see it and praise our Father in heaven. Jesus taught his disciples that they are, and need to be, the light of the world. He challenged them to not extinguish their light but to allow people to see it so that they can come to God. His main focus was reaching out to people and reconciling them to God.

1. Why is it important for us to share about Christ?

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Jesus' purpose was to bring salvation to the lost world. He himself said to Zaccheus when he went with him to his house that salvation had come to his house that day. *Luke 19:9-10 Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* Today if we say we are Christians and that we are following Christ, this should be our mission too.

John 17:18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. Here Jesus was praying for his disciples and for believers, He prayed an incredible prayer. He was praying for the disciples and he had the conviction that God had sent him into the world to do the mission and so He was also sending his dear disciples to do the same. For Jesus the purpose was very, very clear. Today we need to have the same purpose. Most of us, if we look at our lives, God has done incredible things through us. When we understand what God desires through our lives, it is very clear that we should reach out to this lost world.

God's desire is very clear in the Bible. God wants all men to come to repentance. God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. This good news is with us. We need to take it to our dear ones around us. There are a lot of people around us, very near to us who need so much of reconciliation with God. This we need to do out of gratefulness to God. Christ's love should compel us. God will be so happy when we reach out to someone because that is what Jesus' mission is and we are imitating the same in our lives.

2. How do we fit into God's plan?

Mark 1:14-18 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the

good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" 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. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Here Jesus is reaching out to Simon and Andrew and we'll listen to their conversation. Jesus came with the focus of reaching out to the lost people and reconciling them to God. Here we see Jesus was walking by the sea side. He saw two people catching fish. He called them. He asked them to follow him and from that day onwards he would make them fishers of men. They responded to his call. From the start of Jesus' mission, he called them to fish men. When he asked them to follow him he was pointing out that since he had himself come with a purpose if they followed him, he would give them the same purpose. Their response was almost immediate because they understood that was the right thing for them to do.

And we all know at the end of Matthew, at the end of his life on earth, he calls them again. *Mat 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Jesus' farewell message was also a reminder of the mission. He commanded his disciples to be active in making disciples of all nations. Just think for a moment. If those disciples had become lukewarm about what Jesus said -the message would not have gone throughout the world. This is something for us to remember. This is something we all need to understand to fit into God's plan. Jesus had a plan to multiply his ministry. God's plan and Jesus' plan have not changed - it is the same. He is appealing to us even today and it starts from us.

3. Are we ready to go?

The time to act is now. Are we ready to go? That's the question. *Rom 10:12-15 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

Sometimes we think, 'Oh here's another message about evangelism and sharing of faith. For us to go and do Jesus' mission it needs a lot of inspiration and self motivation. And that is what we need to draw out of the scriptures. We need to allow God to work in our hearts. Let us be motivated to do what is right. It calls for sacrifice, personal time - we need to go out of our way to do these things. Are we ready for that?

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. God is ready to save anybody who comes to him and calls on him. V14. how can they be saved without believing? How can they believe without hearing? How can they hear without somebody preaching to them? How can they preach without somebody sending them to preach?

Are we ready to be sent to preach? The scripture ends with a beautiful line, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." We have the message of love from God. When we take a step and share God has his own way to reach out to people. So let's think about God's dream in our life. He has an incredible dream that He wants to accomplish through us. So are we ready to go? That is what God wants us to do.

33. Protect Relationships

We know the Ten Commandments. Why did God give those commandments: to burden us / to find faults in us / to trick us / to trap us / to make us fall / to make us feel guilty etc. We believe God gave those commands not to hurt us or to burden us, but to protect us. To protect different relationships. We can see them in Deuteronomy chapter 5.

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol. You shall not bow down to them or worship them;
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God
4. Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

The first 4 commandments were there to protect our relationship with God. If we obey them God will be pleased with us. The last 6 were to protect our relationships with one another. If we obey them we will have great relationships with others around us.

5. Honor your father and your mother
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

How to handle relationships in the church? God in the Bible gives specific instructions. We are all learning to build relationships and nobody is ever going to be perfect at it. Jesus was a master of relationships. He knew exactly what to say to whom at what time. We all have to grow in this area. We all need to learn to handle the delicate relationships. Many people come to church because of relationships and also leave the church because of relationship problems. We can learn from the Bible how to handle this righteously. The only way we can be a disciple is if we hold on to the teachings of Jesus - John 8:31

1. Forgive Each Other

We all have had to face this problem sometime in our lives: child abuse, parents, boss, relatives, brothers & sisters, friends, ex-girl friend / boy friend. We have hurts from the past / we had attitudes / we had hatred / we had quiet reservations, we don't talk about. We have not dealt with it in a godly way! Now we will learn how to deal with it in a spiritual way! We all can learn how to be like Jesus in this area. Jesus on the cross said, *Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

How was he able to do it? If we claim to be a Christian and can't be like Jesus, we are not Christians. That is scary! Unforgiveness will take / lead us to hell!

Some people are not in touch with their feelings.

- They say I love my family but they are always shouting at them, that is not love there is some deep (-ve) feelings there.
- Husband & wife - too much (-ve) tone in conversations - there are some feelings there. We got to deal with it!
- How many of us have felt mistreated in the past by others!
- How many of us have felt mistreated in the past by others in the church!
- How many of us have mistreated others in the past?
- How many of us have mistreated others in the church?

Once upon a time we used to live in hatred?

Titus 3:3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Mat 6:12-15 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

What if someone slaps us and asks for forgiveness? Why does it become hard to forgive, when we feel like we are the victim! Victims always are looking for sympathy from others rather than forgiving! Jesus was a victim for our sins! But Jesus forgave our sins! Because he was willing to go through pain to forgive us!

Mat 18:35 "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Luke 17:3-4 So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. :4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Eph 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. :32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

2. Do Not Slander One Another

Another thing that hurts relationships is slander and gossip! When we fail to forgive and deal with our relationships in a Jesus way to spiritual way we end up gossiping or slandering!

What does slander & gossip do - it makes others sins look more bad than our own sin! It is saying other person sin is so bad and not ours. Undermining our sin and exaggerating others sins so we can feel good about ourselves! We feel justified with our feelings rather than dealing with it in a godly way. When we amplify others sins we don't feel like we have to change! That is from the devil! Devil wants to make us feel we don't have to change. He takes on his role as a deceiver powerfully. Many of the Christians fall in this category.

Psa 36:1-2 For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD. An oracle is within my heart concerning the sinfulness of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.

They say he is a hypocrite and he is like that and she is like that, there is a scripture regarding those attitudes!

Mat 7:1-5 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out

of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

We have to always remind ourselves of this, before we challenge others. We have to take our plank out first! Gossip comes when we don't deal with our sin righteously & seriously and we look at other peoples sins more seriously and start talking about it.

What is gossip? What is slander?

Prov 16:28 A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.

Prov 18:8 The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

Prov 20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

Many people start gossiping by getting with someone and saying: "I want to be open with you about so and so.....". This is the beginning of gossip. If some one comes to us sharing about someone else then we must not entertain that, we must direct that brother / sister to the person they have a problem with.

1 Tim 5:13 Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

Prov 10:18 He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

1 Cor 5:11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

Eph 4:29-32 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

James 4:11 Brothers do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

1 Thess 5:15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

What are some things we gossip about? Others sins / others weaknesses / church matters / leaders / personal hurts / others hurts / relationships -he likes her and she likes him! He is only fellowshiping that person / look at his dress / look at her she is proud / sitting and discussing other persons. If we have a problem we need talk with the brother or sister concerned!

Jude 1:16 These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

3. How To Deal With Each Other

Matt. 18:14-22 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost. 15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

The above passage talks about that when we find some one in sin we must first talk to that person before we talk to others. This is what the Bible says to protect relationships. Most of us we talk to the whole world about others sins before we talk to the person itself. That is wrong according to the Bible. After we talk to the person who has hurt us or is in sin and if he does not agree or we can't seem to come to some kind of agreement then we bring in the third person. Then it still does not change then we let the church know [may be our family group]

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch

yourself, or you also may be tempted.

- If some one is caught in sin restore him gently not harshly.
- If some one is in sin we must talk to that person immediately about his / her sin to help that person to change and not to put that person down.

34. How To Stay Calm In A Storm?

Let us learn a lesson from the book of Habakkuk. The word Habakkuk means embrace. Out of 12 Minor Prophets, Habakkuk is in 8th Place. Also not much said about Habakkuk apart from the book of Habakkuk.

Habakkuk 3: 19 the director of music, that means he could be a descendent of Levite. This book got one of the famous verses from the Bible. It says the righteous will live by faith. Acts, Romans, Galatians and Hebrews talks about Habakkuk's words. There are many controversies about what time it was written. Habakkuk probably was grown up in the time of Josiah the king. After Josiah the king there were lot of kings, during this king's time Habakkuk grown to be the prophet of God that God wanted him to be. There were four other kings who came at that time Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah. None of the kings were righteous; there was lot of unrighteousness, ungodliness in Judea. Habakkuk was disturbed seeing the ungodliness, rebelliousness and unrighteousness in the country of Judea. Just like we feel when unrighteousness, ungodliness and sin being there, it disturbs us, it bothers us. Habakkuk was completely disturbed and he was praying to God for a revival in Judea. He was begging God day and night God you got to change this people; you got to do some thing in this nation.

1. Reflect

Habakkuk 1: 1-17

We will reflect as Habakkuk reflected in his prayer. Habakkuk is praying how long God, how long to wait, why did you allow me to see all these things. There was lot of Questions Habakkuk asked God. The wicked people are destroying the righteous. He saw lot of fights and conflicts. Habakkuk was praying and begging God and begging the people to change and expecting God to bring the revival like he brought in Judea.

As we read this scripture, we will also pray for revival and we want to reflect on our own hearts. We got to reflect on how are we towards God, how is our relationship with God, how is our personal righteousness, how is our purity, our conviction towards righteousness, how does God see us today. If God would come today are we ready to face him, will we be accepted by him? We need to look at our own hearts. It looked like God was silent for long time. Sometimes we feel like how Habakkuk felt. Sometimes our prayer can take long time to be answered; we may get frustrated with God and say God are you there or not there. God will always answer prayers. He may take long time or shorter time but God will always answer prayers.

Habakkuk 1: 5,6 and 11,12 God said you are going to be totally amazed by what I am going to do. You want a revival in Israel; you want a revival in Judea. You know who I am going to send as a revival to you I am sending the Babylonians for the revival. God knows what he is doing when we want change in our life God will send something that we are not ready for. Habakkuk did not want Babylonians to come and restore righteousness in Judea. Habakkuk was not ready for that kind of answer from God.

Prayer is dangerous, we may pray for something but God will give the opposite which you never expected. God knows that Babylonians are not good people. God said I know that they are ruthless, they are violent, they will laugh at people, their own strength is their god. God knows Judea, God knows Babylonians, but He had some plan and He will do it.

Let us look at Habakkuk's second prayer, God answered Habakkuk's prayer but was Habakkuk happy? Are we happy when God answers our prayers? Vs 12, 13. Can we see how Habakkuk is complaining? Judea is not as bad as the Babylonians, Judea they fight little bit here and there but not as bad as the Babylonians. God I can't believe you chose Babylonians to attack Judea your people.

Habakkuk could not accept God's way He wanted his way to change Judea, But God had his way to convict Judea. Who will win may be our plans are good and we think this is the right way. To build the church this is the way we should do it. Who's way is going to win? We think our way is right just like how Habakkuk got frustrated. We can get frustrated when things don't go our way. When things don't go our way what we do we get angry, complain, cry, mourn, get upset, get frustrated, and become critical. And we see Habakkuk struggles with these kind of thoughts. Habakkuk is still respectful to God in Vs 12 he says Lord I know you are my God you are the Holy one and I know you are the rock, even though he is boiling in his heart why God allowed this to me, he never lost respect towards God.

Here Habakkuk had a great complain - Lord! Babylonians are not more righteous than Judea, you should not have allowed Babylonians to attack Judea, it should be the other way around. He thought all his complaints are right. He might have thought Ha! I got God in this. Chapter 2 Habakkuk is waiting for God to answer. How is he going to answer? Then God answered, what is going to happen if Babylonians attack Judea? Everybody knew that the Babylonians are such a powerful nation they are going to destroy Judea. It's not going to be a revival, it's destruction. God had a very good answer for his complain Habakkuk was concerned a lot of good people would die; we will lose the good-hearted people. He was more concerned about the good people who lived in his country. 2: 4 God said don't worry about the Babylonians they will attack Judea but the righteous will live by their faith. This was God's plan for Judea. The righteous will live by faith.

That's true God ultimately cares about his faithfulness towards God, being faithful to Christ till the end of his life. That is what God wants. Faithfulness is what God cares more than anything else in this world. God is checking is this sister who is going through a lot of financial problem is she going to be faithful to me, is she going to hold on to my word and me. This brother is going through a lot of temptation in the world, is he going to be faithful to me rest of his life. This brother is going through a lot of doubts, so many people are putting a lot of doubts about the scriptures and different other questions in his mind. Listening to all these things is he going to be faithful in his life time. Righteous will live by his or her faith.

God rises up individual or people even if it's Babylonian. God can rise up people or

nation and God can remove them when he wants. Whose in charge of history, not man God changes history. We cannot change history; we can only be a part of history. We can only be able to influence history, God allows us to influence history in our life.

2. Renew

Habakkuk Chapter 2

God is talking about the Babylonians. God is saying don't worry about Babylonians I know everything about them. You worry about yourself, righteous will live by faith, you also Habakkuk its time for you to live by faith. 2: 20 what we should do, what Habakkuk should do, stop complaining don't worry about God is just or not. Don't even worry about people, you got to be silent before the Lord. If we trust God if we are really faithful to God you will be silent because God is in control of good people and bad people because God is everything.

Let's see whether Habakkuk gave up praying after Gods answer. Lets see in chapter 3: 2 Habakkuk prays Vs3- 15 he remembers all the good things that God has done all the times of history in Israel and Judea. And he is praising God how awesome God is and how he is standing in awe for all these years the Bible says. Habakkuk is not giving up praying for renewal. He did not get discouraged by Gods answer - instead he got more inspired to pray to God. So never give up praying.

2. Resolute

Habakkuk: 3:16-19

The time of calamity has come Habakkuk is in fear. Yet his prayer is that he will wait for this time of calamity because his God is with him. Even if he faces hunger, famine, no wealth, he will rejoice and be joyful in the Lord. He was resolute in his faith, he confronted fear with faith. Fear is a powerful enemy of faith; it destroys leadership, relationships. But faith is powerful we can confront fear in any circumstances, just like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Be resolute in our faith. Prayer changed Habakkuk the whole book is about his prayer. It helped him to stay calm in the storm. Be resolute like Habakkuk, let's embrace God and his ways and his plan in our life.

35. The Author Of Our Faith

The title is from Hebrews 12. What is the situation in the book of Hebrews? The Hebrew Christians were struggling in their faith because they started having doubts about Christ being the Savior, Christ being the Messiah, Jesus being the Messiah. Is he really greater than Moses or the old covenant they were part of? The Hebrews writer is calling them to keep following Christ and not lose faith in Christ and explaining who Christ is in the whole book.

In chapter 10 there is a call to persevere, to keep on in the faith and not lose their faith. And the way they are showing their lack of commitments is that they started to miss meetings. The author is telling them 'do not miss meetings, do not be in the habit of doing that. You need Christians'. Let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. Here he's encouraging us 'we need Christians, we need other brothers and sisters, we need the church, we need fellowship, so do not miss meetings!' And he's encouraging them to not give up their faith, to not shrink back from their faith.

And in Hebrews 11, the writer is inspiring the Hebrew Christians about all their spiritual ancestors and reminds them how they lived by faith even though they did not get what was promised to them. You see the struggle of the writer to get the Christians back to their faith. He's inspiring them with the stories they have all heard throughout their lives, reminding them that what kept them going was their simple faith.

Finally, in chapter 12 he concludes in a beautiful way.

Heb 12:1-3 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

He's asking them to not give up their faith and inspired them with stories of all the great men and women of faith who stood their ground through difficult times of testing and who were willing to persevere in their faith. Then he inspires them by reminding them about the cloud of witnesses they have, who had gone ahead, who had lived by faith, who had been there to inspire and that the Hebrew Christians must now follow their example. He said that all these witnesses were there for a reason, why they are mentioned in the Bible - to give us hope, to give us faith, to give us conviction that we can do it because they had done it first. The writer is reminding them that they were running a race. He urges them to keep running and not to give up the race. How should they run? With perseverance, without stopping in between. Then he reminds them of who their ultimate example is, the one they should follow. He reminds them to fix their eyes on Jesus. Who is Jesus? The Author and Perfecter of our faith. The word Perfecter can also be translated as Finisher. He is the one who began everything and he's the one who's going to be the finisher of our faith. The ultimate example that we have as Christians is Jesus and his example because he ran the race marked out for us. He persevered in the race even though he had to endure many hardships. Finally he showed us how to finish the race when he was on the cross.

Our Christian faith is like a race. You've heard about the Olympic marathon race. It is a very tough race because it is long and takes at least two hours for the best runner to complete it. We walk for 5 minutes and we are tired. We take a train and we are tired by that train journey even though we are not walking but sitting and travelling. We are

talking about running non-stop for two hours! And that too we are talking about the best runner taking two hours! The goal of everyone who runs a marathon is not necessarily to win the race. Their goal is to finish the race.

The goal of our Christian faith is to finish well. If you watch the marathon race on T.V. you can see a lot of things happening. To finish the race you need to see some things to help you.

* You need fans who are cheering you on the side, who keep telling you to go on and that you can do it. Have you seen people standing on the road and cheering all those runners? So also we need fans.

* We need a finish line. This motivates you because you know it's going to finish at some point. Yes, as Christians we need a finish line too. We know the race we are running is so hard and it's tough to keep going as a Christian. The good news is there is a finish line and we can actually get there. Amen? It's good to have a finish line otherwise we'll just keep running and get tired.

* Also to finish well you need someone to chase. If you don't have somebody to chase you won't be motivated. If somebody is leading you want to follow. You feel, 'Yes, I want to catch him, I want to go behind him or at least to be on par with him'.

* Finally you need friends to run with. Have you noticed in a marathon race people don't run alone? They always have friends they hangout with and they keep changing the pace. They'll all run together keeping pace and then one person takes the lead and then someone else will take the lead. Basically it's team effort and they run together.

As Christians, we are running a marathon race.

1. We need a cloud of witnesses

Who are this cloud of witnesses? They are our fans.

Heb 11:39-40 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

In the above scripture, we see that these great men and women of faith, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what they had been promised, while they were running the race. It also says in v40 that God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. So we are all in it as a team. The people who went before us, the ones who are with us now and the ones who are going to come after us, we are all together going to make it to heaven - that is God's plan. We have a cloud of witnesses. Look at some of the witnesses in Hebrews 11. Sometimes we only see certain things as great faith. So we applaud only the one who came first in the marathon because it was so hard and he did it! Look at one of our Indian Olympic team.

Anju Bobby George was our best bet to get a medal. She came 6th and nobody was impressed! We did not look at her impressed because she had come 6th and so was the 6th best athlete in the universe. Nobody is willing to see that because our expectation is very high and we measure people in this way. We make this same mistake in the church also. We only admire certain people with certain level of things. Again, we have this terrible habit of judging one another for little, silly, things. We have to be careful how we measure others. The measure we use will be used against us.

Hebrews 11 is the Hall of Fame for people with great faith. People of great faith -that is how we define Hebrews 11. This is like in cricket people like Sachin Tendulkar, Gavaskar, Bishen Singh Bedi will enter the list if there is a book on cricket. But this is about great men of faith in the Bible. Let's see how and for what God commends them. Hebrews 11:4 onwards.

What was the greatest thing Abel did and that God was blown away by? He offered a better sacrifice than his brother. And God applauded him for doing an incredible thing. God was not looking down on Cain - he gave Cain a chance to do better.

Look at the next person -Enoch. The Bible says he did not experience death, he was taken away but what was God commending him for in this passage? He was commended as one who pleased God. We take that word 'please' very lightly when we say 'I want to please God'. We think what's the big deal about it. But we do need to please God and that's the greatest thing Enoch did. God applauded him for that. We don't know what he did or did not do that pleased God but we do know that whatever he did, it pleased God.

Noah - what is the greatest thing he did? He built an ark and saved his family. He is commended for building this ark and saving his family. He could not save the world but he saved his family. God commended him for his incredible faith. Then in v13, something very beautiful and inspiring, "all these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. They only saw them and welcomed them from a distance." What is beautiful about these people. They were still living by faith when they died. That is our Finish Line. When we die -our finish line- we die with faith. This is what blows my mind about one other person in the bible who God commended. V31 talks about the prostitute Rahab. Can you believe a prostitute made it into the Hall of Fame of faith? What is the greatest thing this woman did? She welcomed some spies. Basically she showed some hospitality. The greatest thing this woman did was to show hospitality to some spies. Isn't that amazing?

The Bible goes on to say these are our great cloud of witnesses who are in heaven, cheering for us to keep running the race. God commends these incredible men and women for their faith and we need to commend our brothers and sisters in our church for their faith. Can you hear the roar of cheering from our ancestral brothers and sisters who went before us? That is the beauty of it, that we are not running this race alone. We have a whole lot of people cheering as we are running this race in perseverance. We need to cheer one another in the church. We all have hard lives in our own way. We may not see each other's life as hardship. It doesn't matter. Our own race- the struggles, the problems,

the pain and all- is marked out for us by God. We need to respect that and appreciate that people are running the race. We need to cheer our brothers and sisters as they are running, because that's what our ancestors are doing for our brothers and sisters and for us.

2. We need to run together

Hebrews 12 shows the pattern. It uses the words 'we' and 'us' a lot. So we are all in it together. We need to run this race together. Isn't it better to run together than run alone? How would you feel if you were the only one running this long marathon? Starting to finish you were the only one, nobody around you cheering you, nobody running with you - you're doing all the running there is. The first day we'll run, the second day we'll run and then someone misses the next morning and you just can't do it. It's just so hard to do it on your own.

It's hard to be alone in this world and be happy and enjoy your life. We need relationships, we need bonds. We need to run together. And when you're running, pull someone else along and say, 'Come on, let's run together'. As we read, in the book of Hebrews, the Hebrew Christians started getting tired and weary and many of them stopped running. What happened? They gave up meeting together!

Heb 10:24-25 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We need each other, to work together, to run together to keep on in the race. We need to spur one another. "Come on, you can do it" is the attitude we need to have. We used to say sometimes that this word, 'spur', means we need to kick one another just like how a horse moves forward when it is kicked. The word 'spur' can also be translated 'provoke', 'stir up'. One of the ways to do this is to come together. And we've got to do it all the more as we see the Day approaching, as we see the finish line.

The ultimate question is, 'What is our schedule like from morning to night? That reflects our life, how we live as a Christian, how we live as an individual, everyday. That is a choice we have to make. In our schedule everyday where does God fit in? That is for us to decide. In our schedule where does God's family fit in? How does a family function if in their schedule there is no time for the family? Neither the wife nor the children are happy if the husband and father have no time for the family. Yes, the father is very busy, working hard, making money, taking care of the family but if he is not available and does not put into his schedule time for his wife and kids, the family will be a dysfunctional family. We need to make time for the important things in our life and God needs to be your priority. We need to seek God first.

We need to encourage each other by our lives - our holy lives, our godly lives, our committed lives, our prayerful lives. Whatever God has given us, we need to glorify God with that gift. We need to be faithful to God and God's family. We need to run together and this is the reason why we should come together - only then we can run together.

Generally what our schedule is like, what we plan, what we focus on is how we are going to live. That's what the Hebrew writer is talking about - a habit. Not one time or a few times but if it is a habit then it is a matter for concern according to the scriptures.

3. We need an example to chase

Who is the example we need to chase? Who is the Author and Perfecter, Author and Finisher of our faith? It is Jesus. We need to chase his example all our lives. The race marked out for us is marked by him and is the best race for us. We think we can't run it or finish it but He has marked it for us. He has shown us by example how to keep running the race. We'll get hurt - keep running. Friends will reject us - keep running. People will abuse us - keep running. People will call us the devil - keep running. People will insult us - keep running. We will be dying all alone, people still mocking - keep running. Because Jesus did it, we can also do it. That is why he's the perfect example.

We need to follow the example of Jesus in our lives - the author and perfecter of our faith - and not the men and women in this room. We can inspire each other but we are not the PERFECT example. If we're looking at someone and running, we're going to be disappointed after some time. Keep looking at Jesus. Fix our eyes on Jesus as the Bible says. We will finish the race. We have started the race and we've been running the race for a long time now. Maybe we're not running with our whole heart, something is pulling us down, something is entangling us and stopping us from running ahead. The Bible says we must get rid of all that entangles us. Fix our eyes on Jesus. Endure the race. Finish the race. We have a cloud of witnesses cheering us on. We've got to run together. We have Jesus as our example.

36. Where Is Love? [Part 1]

The family the Bible talks about is incredible. The promise the Bible talks about is incredible.

Mark 3:34,35 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Jesus says whoever does the will of God they belong to the family of God.

Mark 10:29,30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

This is just after Jesus had the encounter with the rich young man. Jesus promises here that whoever gives up something for him or for the gospel will not fail to receive a hundred times more in this present age. The Bible promise us incredible things about the

kingdom of God, about the family of God. For us to become a bigger and better family there are two things we need to focus on.

1. Family Relationships

The church is definitely big but it is made of small, small, families. If we talk about the church we say "the church needs to shine", "there should be love in the church". But there should be love in every family. Love should start from small, small, families and that love overflows to every part of the church. Bible has great family examples.

- Adam and Eve, God created a family there. It had a family feeling and God wanted that love to be spread in that family.
- Noah in his time - he and his whole family were saved in spite of the whole world getting destroyed by the flood. There was a family there, God protected that family and the family was totally united and in love.
- Abraham or Isaac and Jacob - these were all family men and women in the Old Testament - great men and women who had incredible families.
- Joshua's attitude was great after they had crossed the Jordan river and the Israelites were about to conquer the promised land. Joshua was old and he was giving his farewell speech. *Josh 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.* Joshua's attitude was like "you can do anything you like but as for me and my household we want to serve God". That should be the attitude that all of us as married men and women should have - as for me and my household we want to serve the Lord. With broken families and broken marriages how are we going to build an awesome church? The Church is supposed to be the light for the world. When people come into the church the first thing they need to see is awesome marriages, awesome parenting, and awesome families. That is where love starts.

There is a famous saying- "Charity begins at home". We can say Christianity begins at home. It is not on Sundays that Christianity begins, it is how we live our family lives, how we are at home, how we behave with our spouses and our children, that is how we remain true Christians. If we fail at home then we have failed our mission, we cannot reach out to this world, we cannot show the light to this lost world. I think the first step is, in our home itself we need to be a unit of love, there should be incredible love in every family and that is how the church is built.

How are our families today? Is our family a light to this lost world? Are we really concerned about our family, are trying to build spiritual families?

Deu 6:4-9 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your

children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

God talks about the importance of parenting. God believes that spirituality gets transferred through families. He says we should pay so much of importance how we raise up our children, teaching them to love God the way we love God. Brothers and sisters, if we are failing at home, then we are failing in what God has called us to do. We need to pay attention to our own family relationships - our relationship with our parents, our relationship with our spouse, our children.

37. Where Is Love? [Part 2]

2. Family Group Relationships

The church is so big and we cannot expect everyone to be in touch with everyone. And that's why in the church we meet in smaller groups called family groups. In the first century, in early Christianity the disciples didn't meet in big auditoriums. In one or two places we can see that they met in a theatre or some place like that but most of the time they met in houses. And those houses were called house churches - the group that met there was called the church that meets in so-and-so house.

That's how our family group is - it's a small unit that meets in someone's house or in some small place. For us to see love and see the church full of love, it should start in small family groups. There should be love in small, small, family groups and then the church will be full of love. If we are not willing to be involved with our neighbors, to love one another in our small groups, we cannot expect a big group to be united and feel loved. Our small group in which we meet, our family group, it needs to be a functional group where there is love, where all these relationships are practiced, where all these scriptures (love one another, admonish one another, encourage one another, teach one another) are put into practice.

God has definitely offered an incredible plan to build awesome families. But there are some precautions we need to be aware of. Every scripture about one another is about giving to one another. Talk about loving one another it's about us going and loving. It's not about "o.k. someone needs to love me". In some ways we have applied this scripture to our neighbors and not to ourselves. It talks about serving one another. It's not talking about "o.k. no one is serving me" it talks about we having to go and serve. It's talking to us and not to our neighbors whether they are doing their job or not. We have to apply the scriptures to our hearts.

Most of us when we were growing up, in some way or the other, our emotional needs were not being met in the way that God wanted it to be met. So when we come to the church for the first time we see this love, this outpour of love, we get so attracted and feel "wow! This is different, this is awesome". Now it's o.k. to be attracted - we see the followers of Jesus were attracted to Jesus through different things (miracles, food,

different reasons) - but attraction is different from motivation. What motivates us is not what attracts us. What attracts us is what brings us together but what really motivates us is what is important.

What happens is that when we come into the church with all these deep-seated expectations (because as a child most of our emotional needs were not met) we get disappointed that many of these needs are not met. The irony of the problem is that we are so emotionally needy it actually repels people instead of attracting them to us, instead of getting the help that we need. People get afraid because they feel they cannot meet the needs that we expect. And then what happens is we become critical that our needs are not being met in the way that we want it to be met. And we look at others and sometimes we become very possessive about relationships, we become jealous if someone else is close to the one we are close to. These things rule our hearts.

The opposite thing happens when we are brought up in a family where we are the center of attraction. Some of us, as little children, we were the center of attraction and we expected our whole family to give to us. In other words we were spoiled children. And then we come to church and expect everyone to give to us. "How awesome I am, everyone should give to me, everyone should serve me". That's because as little children that is how we received. We were so used to receiving that giving is not an issue. It's always about taking, always about receiving which is contrary to what the scriptures teach.

So what is the answer to all these problems? God should be the greatest focus in our lives. When we don't love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, with all our strength, then we look to people to meet all our needs and it becomes impossible because only God can meet all our needs.

Jesus loved people so much. If he had focussed on those people to meet his emotional and spiritual needs Jesus would have been a very discouraged man. But the Bible says with loud cries and tears he put petition to the Lord. He went to God and he poured out his heart to God and he got strengthened and he came again to give to people. God gave him the strength and he gave to others. This is very important for all of us. Jesus was focused on loving God with all his heart and mind and strength then he was able to love his neighbor just as himself. We need to build our Christian relationships on giving rather than on taking. The Bible doesn't say 'demand from one another', the Bible doesn't say 'take from one another' it says love one another, it says give to one another, it says forgive one another. It's about giving and not about taking.

Few questions for us to see our own hearts in relationships.

- Do we find ourselves waiting for others to initiate or do we initiate with others?
- Are we often critical of others when our needs are not met or are we grateful all the time?
- Are we possessive of our relationships? Does it bother us when our closest friends spend time with others? Do we feel jealous or envious at that time?

- Do we find difficulty in relationship changes? For example if we have to go to a new ministry do we have difficulty in building new relationships? Or let's say a new person comes to our ministry do we find it difficult to build a relationship?
- When we serve others do we feel hurt when they don't reciprocate or give that same service to us?
- Have we ever thought of leaving the church, leaving the fellowship because we're disappointed in relationships?

God wants us to have incredible relationships but it's not like the world - not built on high expectations and demands and all these things. It is built on sacrifice and giving to one another.

In conclusion, what we need to do. First of all we need to **get rid of comparison**. It is comparison that hurts us. We compare one person with another person and we expect that person to be like this person. It hurts us. Everyone is different. We cannot expect everyone to be like everyone else. We have to die from all sorts of comparison.

Secondly, -Romans 15:14. Paul talks here -we should remember that Paul has never visited the Roman church. The group of disciples he's talking to -he has never visited them. But look at what he says in v14. This is where we need to look at one another and believe that we have one another to help us. That is enough. Whoever is in our family group is enough to instruct us. Of course there will be specific cases where we need expert advice and we need to take it from people who are expert in that area but in general all of us are competent to instruct one another. Colossians 3:16- the truth is already in the scriptures, the truth is complete, the revelation is complete- we have it written clearly. The goal is clear - **the goal is for each one of us to become like Christ**. All of us, whatever life we may be living, our ultimate goal is to be like Christ. That is where we use the scriptures to become more and more like Christ.

The third thing is our **commitment**. Now we've heard people say "I'll be committed to the Church but I don't want any deep relationships". We are completely mistaken - if we are not committed to one another we are not committed to anything. Bible calls us to be committed first to God and then to one another. Church is not an organization where we come in every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday - like these are a certain set of rules we must follow. No, we are committed to one another. The Bible talks about loving God and loving our neighbor. That is why we meet each other, that is why we are involved in one another's life, that is why we are there, we are willing to sacrifice, willing to give. The more we shy away from relationships the more we move away from true Christianity.

Finally, **all of us need to mature**. Not that any of us have reached there but the bible talks about going on to maturity. Hebrews 5:11-6:3. The Hebrew writer says that by this time many of us ought to be teachers but we need to be reminded of the elementary truths all over again and again and again. Here in v14 it says solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. If we want to become mature we have to train ourselves. Spiritual maturity comes from training, when

we train ourselves to distinguish good from evil. Do we need someone to teach us? Yes, we need someone to teach us but we need to teach ourselves more than that, we need to train ourselves, we need to be open to discipling ourselves to change, not to accept our feelings and not to go in the way we want to go.

Christ revealed God and it is the church that reveals Christ to the world. Our role is to reveal Christ to this lost world, to give a solution to the world.

First of all we need to build spiritual families. It is the smallest unit, it is what the church is built on - small, small families everywhere. We need to have strong convictions about building spiritual families.

Secondly we need to build awesome family groups. We need to have family group relationships. These are the small units of the church. We cannot expect everything to happen just like that. It has to start in small, small family groups. And then we will be the kind of church that God wants us to be.

38. Active Christianity

Our faith should be shown in our action, not just in our talk. People should be able to see that in us Christ Jesus is alive. We know who is really active in our life. Is Christ active in our lives or is it our sinful nature or the work of demons?

The book of Colossians is written to the church in Colosse. The primary problem of the church in Colosse was Christ was losing his supremacy. It was a Gentile church. Gentile church means it had non-Jewish believers. So Christ was somehow losing his supremacy or his lordship in the church. So Paul deals it very strongly in Col.1. He talks about how Christ is every thing and Christ is the head of the church. Through Christ everything came and we all are there because of Christ, we all live together because of Christ. He just exalts Christ in an amazing way. And he also deals with some strange teaching that was going in the church, some rules that was not very helpful which are worldly rules. We are going to focus on chapter 3 it talks about how we need to be active Christians.

1. Remember our baptism

Paul keeps reminding the Gentile Christians about their baptism. There is a constant reminder about this baptism.

(Col 3:1-4 NIV) Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

When we have been raised with Christ? - at the time of baptism, but also it says you died,

when did we die? - At the time of baptism because of our sins we died and we participated in the death burial and the resurrection at the time of baptism. So Paul is somehow reminding the Christians to remember the baptism. Remember that we died and our sinful life must be dead. So with all this, how are we supposed to be? We have to set our hearts on things above. Set our minds on things above not on earthly things. A mindset that determines the actions of our life.

What do we normally worry about? What is our mindset like, we are worried about our future; we are worried about our job. We are worried about our future how are we going to live on this earth. We are worried about earthly things. We are worried about our food. When our mindset is on the things of the earth, our actions will also be connected to the things of the earth.

We as a human being should constantly remind to think about our baptism. So often we get all clogged up in our day to day burdens, problems and worries and struggles and all entanglements of the earth and we have to be reminded. When we are active Christian some things die and certain things come alive. Certain things have to die we cannot be an active Christian with our old life resurfacing all the time and living according to it. Something has to go, something has to change and something renewed has to come alive.

2. Put Off

(Col 3:5-7 NIV) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

The 5 things Paul mention sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed. You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived. Paul is again reminding about the baptism, he is saying you used to walk in these ways you once lived. What is the life that you once lived? - Our sinful life.

(Col 3:8-11 NIV) But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Five things again Paul has a nice ways of putting things, 5 things at a time. 1st 5 things and next 5 things what are the 5 things anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy languages from your lips. What are these 5 things going to do - destroy our relationship.

What else it says circumcised and uncircumcised it doesn't matter. We are all same. That has nothing to do with our superiority. Barbarians, who are barbarians? They are non Greek-speaking gentiles. Greeks are Greek speaking gentiles. Scythians are non-Greek speaking gentiles at the lower end, they are like uncivilized people they are really rash and uncivilized, so in the church there is nothing called civilized and uncivilized. Once you become a Christian, Christ is in all and Christ is all. So whatever language, whatever cast, creed, whatever we belong to, once we become a Christian it doesn't matter.

3. Put On

What else Paul is saying finally we have to put on. So we have to remember our baptism. When we remember our baptism we have to get rid of something and also we have to put on something. Active Christianity is presentable. It is not some thing that we put on the dirty clothes and keep every body wondering whether you are Christian or not because you still seem to be putting on the old clothes. Everybody is looking forward for you to get rid of those old clothes and put on the new clothes. As an active Christian we are supposed to put on new clothes.

(Col 3:12-17 NIV) Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Five things, compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patient you know what it does - this promotes relationship. This makes us close to one another. This makes us happy as a family this makes us loving as a church, as a family. When we put on our old clothes and walk around expecting some thing great to happen. Nothing is going to happen unless we get rid of this and put this on.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues the 5 things he said what we are suppose to put, we are suppose to tie it with the belt, what is this belt over all these virtues put on love. Bind them together in perfect unity.

39. Gifts Of Resurrection

Gifts are something which we all like, may be its hard to give. Gifts are some thing special.

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. Every good gift is from our father our God. Most of the time we boast about the things that we have done in our life. Do we keep God in every thing that we do in our life? Do we see that our family, wife children, brothers and sisters are from God, the life that we live is from God, and every good thing that we receive is from God? Let's see some of the gifts that God has given.

1. Gift Of Importance

Those who were with Jesus were hated, if you are with Jesus you will also be looked down. But the Bible says you are important.

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

Bible says that God loved us, do we realize that Jesus died to show his love for us. "Who would we die for in our life" Many of us might not have faith to die for somebody else. God send Jesus to die for us, may be some of us not feeling important, not valued, we feel we are very small. May be in our family they treated us very bad saying we are useless. We don't have to believe that lie because we are valuable to God.

John 20:11-13 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

Mary was another disciple; people might have known her life from her previous past yet Mary was important to Jesus. Mary was the first person that Jesus appeared, what an honor to see Jesus! God will always honor the people who wouldn't be used by this world.

- Moses was the man who couldn't talk who had a speech problem and yet God used him to deliver Israel out of Egypt.
- Jonah hated Ninevites and God used him as a missionary to Nineveh.
- David an ordinary shepherd boy became Israel's greatest king.
- Humble family Mary and Joseph, their income must have been very less, yet God chose them to be the parent of Jesus Christ.
- Ordinary unschooled men became disciples of Jesus Christ.

Everyone is valued in the eyes of Jesus Christ. If we are feeling small today God loves us, we are valued to him.

Isa 43:3 For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.

Bible clearly says we are precious and honored in his sight. We are so precious to God that He will exchange life for our life. Every day we do not see the dangers that are placed right before us. When we die and go back to be with God, and ask him, how many times we faced death? There will be a list of times He saved us from the death. God loves us.

1 Cor 1:26-31 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. 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. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Bible says God chose the foolish things to shame the wise, God chose the weak people like us to change the world. He chose the lowly things of the earth to despise the things that are not and to nullify the things that are. We are precious in Gods eyes.

2. Gift Of Comfort And Joy

John 20:14-16 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Mary was looking so sad that she couldn't recognize Jesus because she thought He was a gardener. May be His appearance changed, may be God kept her from recognizing. That's what happens some times with us we look so sad, we don't see Jesus when we have problems. Problem in life clogs our faith that we should have. Mary fell in to a conclusion that He was a gardener, some times when we are not doing well we jump into conclusions. When people try to help us, we think that they are hurting us. Some one doesn't give us invitation we feel they dislike us. If some one opens up their heart we feel they have bad attitude. Midst of all these problems we don't see Jesus. That happened to Mary but when Jesus called her name light shown on her.

Some time we jump into conclusion, we got to trust people around us. Mary felt Jesus was a gardener she could not recognize Jesus and yet when He called her name she came back to life. She turned towards him and cried out in Aramaic 'Rebonah' that means teacher. Then she got back her zeal. So many times we look for various places for joy and comfort rather than going to Jesus Christ. We look at the world and people, to give us comfort and joy, these are okay but are we looking at Jesus. That's where we get the complete joy, and that's where joy comes from. We are looking for the joy in the wrong place no wonder why we are looking sad.

John 14:15-18 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Jesus will not leave us like orphans; orphans don't have house to stay or any body to take care of them. But Jesus says that he will take care of us and give us heaven as our home. Jesus will not leave us till the end of our life, as disciples we are not walking alone. God is walking with us and that's the second gift that he has given us. Comforter to walk with us, a counselor to be with us, only after Mary seeing Jesus, realized that Jesus was near her and she was comforted. Let's remember we have joy and comfort from Jesus Christ. He has given us a purpose in our life.

John 20:17-18 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

God has given us a purpose, Jesus not just rose from the grave to say I am alive but He wanted us to go and share our faith and tell people about him. We got a command to reach out to people, to share the good news of the resurrection to save people from their sin, to bind the broken hearts. Jesus is expecting us to go and share the good news of his resurrection to the world. All of us have the responsibility to share our faith to. That's the good news of the resurrection, what Jesus said came true there is no other good news than this. Are we keeping this to our selves?

For many of us, we want the blessing but not the Jesus Christ the son of God. We want to be Christians but we don't want to go to the cross. Let's remember the gifts that He has given us through the resurrection. Let's see Jesus more clearly, let's know that we have purpose in our life, let's not keep the good news to our self but share the good news.

40. This Too Will Pass

No matter whatever we go through, whatever problems we face, we need to understand this too will pass. Book of Job is about the evil forces against the spiritual forces. This is

the story of the good, bad and the ugly. It's the story of a mans struggle against Satan the devil, a story of testing, a story of pain, a story of what God can do at the end of our life. Through all Job's trials and temptations he still hung on to God.

1. Job Was Faithful

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's life was so inspiring that even Hezekiel had written about Job in his book, even Paul writes about him, even James has written in his book. When you read this story you might think no, can this happen? It looks so strange some thing that can't happen.

In vs.1 it says this man was blameless and upright, he feared God and shunned evil. In fact the first five vs. talks about his profile, Job was blameless and upright. He was a holy man; he was not scared by the world. Bible says he feared God, how many of us here who fear God; this is the kind of man who feared God and lived many years ago. This is what God is expecting from us as a disciple as a Christian. Bible says when we fear God we will shun evil. Job had many children. Bible says he was a rich man he had all kinds of things, but his strength was his faith in God.

Because of his faith he was able to endure hardship that was about to come to his life. So often we too will face all kinds of problems in our life. Probably we have faced already but the difference is because of our lack of faith we go away from God. When there is lack of faith, we shut of, we back of, we get discouraged and we move away from God and yet when we look at this mans life no matter what happens in his life he fought his battles in a right way.

Job's children and family saw that his dad was a faithful dad. He was concerned about their spirituality, as parents we are responsible for our children. So often we rely on the disciplers, the leadership for our children. No, we are responsible for our children. Job took responsibility for his family, he made sure he called them to righteousness and made the sacrifices. We have to get the faith that Job had.

Job was faithful, nothing could move. We will face difficult times but as long as we are near to God, as long as we are faithful no one can take what God has given to all of us.

2. Job Loved God

Job 1:6-12 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

We see a different scene, probably in heaven the angles God and even satan being present. There is a discussion about brother Job on earth. They are talking about his life, they're talking about his future, they are talking about the pains that they are about to inflict on him, and they are planning to test him. God asked where did you come from, he says roaming through the world going back and forth a restless soul. Roaming around, he has no other jobs, hoping trying to get one of us. That is the only goal to take us away from God.

Job had great time in his life parties, children, wealth he had every thing in his life and yet time of testing came to Job. Here we see Satan accuses God and Job, he accuses Job for his impure motives. Satan said you strike Job and take away every thing and he will curse you. This was his response to God, you take away every thing all his blessings, you take away the protection around him he will get back to you and he will curse you. But God was so confident that Job will definitely love him, not because of the treasures and the blessings he received. Job loved God not because of the protection that God had given him. Job loved God for who he was.

Do we serve God for nothing? Would we love him any way? What if there is no accountability in the church, would you still be committed, would you read your bible daily and would you still do what is right? What if no body reminded you about your regular contribution would you give it every month? What if your prayers were not answered, would you still love God? What if some one was mean to you and rude to you in the church would you still love God? Job just loved God for who He was.

Whether we have things, whether God blessed us or not we got to give our hearts to God all the time, that's what God wants from us. God does not get bribe, he can't be bribed. When we are blessed we are happy we come to church. When every thing is going good we are exited we come to church, but when things don't go well would we be committed?

3. Job, The Man Of Integrity

Job 1:13-22 One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing

and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Operation begins, God is watching, the angles are watching, people around Job are watching. The first attack was in vs. 13-15 the cattle have been robbed and the servants killed. The second attack in vs. 16 the fire burns up the sheep's and the servant. The third attack in vs.17 the camels have been robbed and the servants were killed, we see attack, after attack, after attack. Sometimes this kind of incidence happens in our life as well. Satan does not stop till he gets us. If we are strong in the first attack he will give us second attack. And if we are strong in the second attack he will give us the third attack.

Imagine how Job must have felt after these three attacks? Every thing was gone his wealth and every thing was completely gone. He praised God. God gave us the wealth and he took it away, at least I have my family and he must have praised God for his family. In vs. 18 and 19 the worst takes place the fourth attack, all his family including his ten children with one shot lost their life.

He was not losing one child, he was losing ten beautiful children that he raised up. Job lost his entire precious ones he had no time to recover from every attack. He was mashed each time and each time the news got bad and worse. Satan was trying to break Job; he was trying to make enmity between Job and God. But Job fell to the ground and he worshiped God. His attitude was God gave and God took it away, Let the name of the Lord be praised. That's the kind of heart Job had. He was the man of integrity nothing could move him. Even though he had severe pain in his life- he still did what was right. Job 1:22 in all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

When Jesus was dying on the cross, two thousand years ago, God would have had a flash back of Jobs life. Job 2: 1-10 the fifth attack takes place, satan attacked Jobs body with all kinds of sores. It was so bad that he was taking anything to scrape his body because of the pain. 2: 9 His wife is telling him are you still holding on to your integrity curse God and die. She was so sarcastic with him saying, what is the use of your integrity, when you are suffering so much. Job said, you are talking like a foolish woman shall we accept good from God and not trouble. In all these Job did not sin.

Jobs life was a great life, his problems, his pain, his life, probably we cant relate to it, but in a smaller way we will go through these things in our life in the future and when we go through lets remember the faith that Job had. Let's remember the love that he had for God. Let's remember the integrity that he had. He was the man that wouldn't move for anything. Job 42 we see the blessings come in the end. Bible says he was blessed twice as before. God gave back his children, can you imagine that God gave back the same amount of children he had. Bible says that his daughters were so beautiful that every body marveled at them. No matter what goes on in our life as long as we hold on to God, this too will pass, lets be faithful.

41. Do You Love Jesus

People do all kinds of things for love, they kill and get killed for love. Is it not funny to see people do anything for love? We would have loved somebody, wives crave for their husbands to love them, in some cases husbands crave for their wife to love them.

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

In these three verses we see Jesus commanding Peter if he loves Him. Verse 15 says feed my lambs 16 take care of my sheep 17 feed my sheep. The

1. Do You Love Me More Than These?

He looked at Peter and asked a direct Question, Do you love me more than these? Probably Jesus was reflecting to the night when Peter bravely disgusted the love for God. Lets flash back on what Peter told Jesus once upon a time in *Mathew 26:33 Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will."* Peter here is boldly saying that even if all fall away, even if all leave you I will never leave you, I will love you till the end.

Jesus is asking us this question? We have to understand the love our family has for Jesus will not go into our account, the love our friends have for Jesus will not be a credit to us. The love our christians in our church have for Jesus will not go in to our account. The love our partner has for God will not be a credit to us. Do we love Jesus more than these is the question?

So many of us depending upon others to teach us the Bible to love Jesus. There is nothing wrong in that, there is a point in our life where we have to move on and get matured and grow spiritually ourselves. We depend on people all the time who are around us how to

go, where to go, sing loudly, come to church, be happy. We have to grow out of this. We have to grow up and learn to depend upon God and not on people around us. So often we wait only if you challenge me then I will change. Christ love should compel us do the things that we do.

The question was not whether we love our leader, the doctrine of the church, or do we love our church, or do we love our parents, or do we love our brother and sisters but the question is do we love Jesus?

2. Do You Truly Love Me?

Jesus could have asked Peter many other questions. For example he could have asked him, Peter do you hold an important position in the church. Peter would have said yes, "I am an apostle". Did you face any super natural expressions before? Peter would have boasted and said yes, "I walked on water before". But he asked him a very personal question do you truly love me? Real love is different from the false love. Any of us can be a leader, anybody can get baptized and we can all do his services. But what is important is our love for Jesus.

Job 27:10 Will he find delight in the Almighty? Will he call upon God at all times?

A hypocrite will not delight in the almighty. But the true disciple delights in the almighty. They would love to be in his presence, they would love to sing praises to Him. So often our work, our families our hobbies stop us from giving God our love. Many times we put Jesus on a hold like we do in telephones we make God wait in our lives.

1 Cor 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord--a curse be on him. Come, O Lord !

Paul uses a strong word it says if any one who does not love God let a curse be upon him. That's a strong statement by Paul. He is not only talking about atheist and who hate God, who hates Jesus and his doctrine. In many ways it refers to us as well. We have to love God more and more, our love for him needs to increase day by day. Love for God is a very important command in the Bible.

Mat 22:37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

The greatest commandment is so clear. Love God first more than anything else. That's the most important question that Jesus asked Peter. If we feel our love is fading away from Jesus we have to get back that love and become strong disciples.

3. Do You Love Me?

As Peter was hurt we could have also got hurt. Jesus asked him the third time Peter do you love me. He said Lord you know that I love you. It was a very submissive answer for Jesus. Peter didn't point out at every body and said I am better than every one like the

way he answered in Matt. 26:33 "even if all fall away I will never fall away". But now his answer was, "Lord you know that I love you".

John 14:15 If you love me, you will obey what I command.

What it means to love Christ? It means to obey His commands. The love that we have for him and the gratefulness that we have for him is because we are saved. That must help us share our faith and to reach out to our friends as well.

Peter changed his life from being a fisherman to an evangelist in the kingdom of God. From a coward he became a rock. From a man who was running away from Jesus stood strong even to die for Jesus.

John 21:18,19 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Peter realized following Jesus means carrying the cross and that's what exactly he did. Being a disciple means willing to die for him, it means sacrifice.

We can't say I want to be a Christian, a disciple but I can't sacrifice. It does not work that way. At the end he decided to follow Christ no matter what happens in his life. Love also means responsibility in our life, love means service, love means feeding the sheep, love means loving the sheep, love means forgiving each other. Love means take up the cross and follow Jesus.

42. How Do We Keep Our Passion For God Hot

How do we make sure we keep an eternal flame burning in our hearts? Well, this was the issue for the people to whom the book of Hebrews was originally written. Jews who had become Christians were being tempted to leave Christianity and go back to their old lives and former Jewish religion.

1. Pay Attention : Don't Drift

Heb 2:1-3 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. {2} For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, {3} how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?

The Hebrew writer says "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" How does anyone miss seeing Jesus? We can be blinded by a sense of self-importance, self-sufficiency and pride. We may end up not paying attention to the warning.

As life goes on as disciples, we need to pay even more attention to the word, not less! There is a strong temptation to think "I've been around. I've heard it all before!, I don't really need to delve into the Bible today - I know what it says"

Drifting is very gradual. The danger with drifting is that you often don't realize you are drifting until it is too late.

2. Fires Need Stoking: The Power of Encouragement

Heb 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. {13} But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

To keep a fire going we have to stoke it. Feeding the fire on a winter's night at home, shovelling coal into the firebox in a speeding steam engine, huge coal pulverisers blasting an explosive dose of coal particles into the power station boilers that power our cities. All fires need fuel. And the fires in our hearts need stoking too! We are people powered by Encouragement!

Do we really understand the power we have in encouraging others?

We need to understand that God's plan is for us to build a refuge of encouragement. The world, work-places, schools, universities, other people do a good enough job of discouraging us. The times we are in contact with other disciples are opportunities to reverse the process.

The Bible sets no maximum on the amount we can encourage others. "Encourage  as long as it is called Today" You cannot overdo this. No-one has ever over-encouraged!.

- Practical 1: Decide to call someone this week, just to be an encouragement!.
- Practical 2: Don't miss church. {Heb 10:25} Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- Practical 3: Don't forget to encourage those that are going well! We all know that even when fires are burning brightly, they still need stoking. The speeding steam-train needs its regular shovelful of coal to keep it going the same way.

3. Extinguished Emotions

Heb 5:7-9 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. {8} Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered {9} and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Lessons from Jesus here on how to handle trials. We read here of Jesus facing the most intense challenge of his life connecting with God at an emotional level - "loud cries and tears". Jesus did not hold back from expressing his deep feelings to God about the situation.

Expressing our deepest desires to God. What do You really want? Do you have deep desires about anything? We need to get in touch with our emotions. How do we really feel about God? Do we passionately love him, or are we totally ticked off with him, or are we just "numb". Are your emotions extinguished? We need to learn to "connect" with God emotionally if we are going to make it for the long haul.

Jesus was heard because of his reverent submission. But hang on! Jesus' most intense prayer recorded in the NT is surely the prayer of Gethsemane, and even after praying about it Jesus still went to the cross. So what does the Bible mean when it says God heard Jesus? God didn't take away Jesus' looming suffering. How can you say God heard Jesus' prayers? The outcome didn't change! Well, no, but Jesus' heart did. His anguish became acceptance and resolve, his actions were obedience, and the result although agony and death for him, brought salvation and victory for us!

Also impressive is Jesus' attitude of reverent submission. If we are facing trials do we have an attitude of reverent submission? Or is it more one of irreverent rebellion? If we get angry with God, or discouraged, or develop a martyr's complex we are not being reverently submissive.

Jesus had a right view of God. Although he was a son, he learned obedience. There is an old saying: familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus was a son, and therefore had the closest relationship with God. How many sons today after twenty years treat their fathers with contempt instead of respect? How many fathers today fail in teaching their children to be obedient? Jesus didn't abuse his close relationship with God for granted. He learned obedience. Jesus learned the hard lesson of the value of simply being obedient to God even when it hurts personally.

4. Fired up not Fizzled out

Heb 10:32-39 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. {33} Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. {34} You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. {35} So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. {36} You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. {37} For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. {38} But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." {39} But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

We live in a throwaway society: We are used to throwing things away: packaging, junk mail, disposable nappies and disposable razors. We are advanced at this! We have separate bins now for plastic, paper, food and glass! It's convenient, it is wonderful. We like to throw things away.

But don't throw away your confidence. But I don't feel very confident about my relationship with God! Remember the earlier days (v32) you stood your ground, you've been insulted for God, you had the joy, you knew you had the better and lasting (the eternal!) possessions. The confidence is based not on how you may be feeling at the moment, but on God and his faithfulness. We need to persevere.

"{38} But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." {39} But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

"Shrinking back" : Perhaps like an army in ancient times. The worst routs happened when the army lost their courage, turned tail and ran. Then the slaughter was great. God wants us to not slacken our course, but pull the sail tighter into the wind. Live by faith - allow God to fill our sails with his power.

- Pay Attention : Don't drift, pay closer attention
- Fires need Stoking : Shovel on the encouragement!
- Extinguished Emotions : Don't quench your passions. Connect with God emotionally.
- Fired up, not Fizzled out : Persevere. Live by Faith, Let God fill your sails!

43. The One True Church

1. Sincerity does not equal salvation.

In Acts, we see many sincere, religious, but lost people.

- In Acts 2 they were broken, cut to the heart, but still needed "saving" (v.40).
- In Acts 8 the eunuch read the Bible, traveled 1000 miles to worship God, but he still did not understand (vv.30-31).
- In Acts 10, Cornelius was devout and sincere. He prayed, and God heard his prayers. But he still needed to hear the gospel and receive forgiveness of sins through Jesus' name (vv.43,48).
- In Acts 16:13-15, Lydia was a worshipper of God. But her heart still needed to be opened to the gospel.
- In Acts 18:24-28, Apollos fervently spoke about Jesus, but still needed the way of God taught to him more adequately, for he only knew the baptism of John. We can surmise he was re-baptised, because that is what they did to the twelve in Acts 19:1-5 who only knew the baptism of John.

- In Acts 22:6-16, Paul saw Jesus, believed and obeyed him. But he still needed his sins washed away in baptism (v.16).

It is very possible to be spiritual, sincere, and even be a worshipper of God, yet still be lost.

2. The Church is for Every Nation.

Gal 3:28-29 indicates that there are no economic (slave or free), racial (Jew or Greek), or gender differences in Christ. Mt 28:18-20 says we are to "make disciples of all nations." Yet so often we find groups in a multi-cultural society comprised of mainly one nationality or age group. It is not loving or biblical to have an all-Chinese, Korean, Caribbean, Nigerian, white English, South African, Indian, Greek, etc., church. Only a language difference could allow separate services.

3. True Christians regularly confess their sins.

- Matt 27:1-5 shows how the religious leaders weren't ready to help Judas overcome his sins after he confessed.
- Mk 1:4-5 shows that people confessed sin before their baptisms.
- Heb 3:12-13 talks about being responsible for the souls of all the brothers, and encouraging them daily to prevent hardening from sin.
- Js 5:16 talks about confessing to each other.

As disciples, all of us need to be open about our lives, starting with the preacher, who is open from the pulpit. Has anyone in your group talked to you about your sins in this way? How is it that we who barely know you already are asking you about your righteousness? Could it be that the reason people in the world never asked you is that they also had something to hide?

4. The True Church Is United Worldwide.

When we read the book of Acts, we see the disciples having one church in every city. Paul would always know where the disciples were in each city, and he would stay with them (for example, Acts 21:4, 7, 8, 16). Unity was forged in spite of disagreements-in Acts 15, for example, they all met together to get united on the circumcision issue (Gal 2:11-14, where Paul and Peter disagree, yet in 2 Pet 3:15-16 Peter commends Paul's writings as Scripture). Sometimes we will see isolated, fired-up congregations. But these have one charismatic leader, and are not part of their own, worldwide movement. The Protestant reformation was doomed from the beginning because the strong-willed, spiritual men who started it were unable to get united as one church. Our movement follows the teaching of Jn 17:20-23, where Jesus says that disciples should be "brought to complete unity to let the world know you have sent me." We have strong, talented leaders, who sometimes disagree, but we work things out according to Mt 18:15-18, and we truly love each other. If someone goes from one city to another, we tell them who to meet.

5. Disciple-Making Is a Mark of God's Church.

Mt 28:18-20 gives us the great commission of Jesus. He promised them he'd always be with them if they made disciples. This is more than handing out tracts. Teaching obedience in others is much harder than getting them to say a prayer and "believe" in Jesus. We do not simply hand out tracts; we patiently walk with people, helping them change their day-to-day lives and become true followers of Jesus. 1 Jn 2:3-6 clearly says that if someone says "I know him" but does not obey his commands, he is a liar and the truth is not in him!

The churches in the book of Acts were growing, disciple-making churches. Their purpose was to save sinners. See Ac 1:15; 2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 5:41-6:1; 6:7; 8:4; 9:31; 16:5, where we find the churches actively evangelising, and growing in numbers. Also 1 Cor 4:15 (10,000 guardians in Christ!) and Col 1:6,23 (fruit all over the world!). Some groups evangelise and are active. Growth does not prove that we are from God. But a lack of growth proves that we are NOT from the Lord.

We have a worldwide vision and plan to help everyone be saved in our lifetime. Most religious people don't really believe Jesus is the only way. If you show them Jn 14:6, Ac 4:12-13, Ac 17:30, it will help them see that all people everywhere must repent. They may ask, "what about people who have not heard-isn't it unfair that they are lost?" Yet Rom 2:14-15 says that when Gentiles do right (without knowing the law), they show it is possible to do right without knowing the law, and yet they (and us) also do wrong, "their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Rom 3:9-10 clearly says that Gentiles and Jews alike are all lost. The religious world does not really believe this; if it did, it would evangelise! When religious people see the lack of commitment to true evangelism in their group, it helps them realise they don't really have a deep faith in the gospel.

6. True Christians Are Always Persecuted.

- 2 Tim 3:12 says that anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted.
- Jn 15:20 says that if they persecuted Jesus, they'll persecute his followers.
- Mt 5:10-12 explains that when people "falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" that we are blessed.
- Indeed, Jesus was slandered, and called "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners" in Luke 7:34.
- Similarly, in Ac 17:6, the Christians were accused of causing trouble all over the world.
- In Ac 24:5 they called Paul a "ringleader of the Nazarene sect." Paul admitted this in Ac 24:14, "I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect."
- In 1 Pt 4:12-16, Peter told us not to be surprised that we suffer for being Christians. The fact that traditional groups are not persecuted is evidence that they are not from God!

Jesus said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets" (Lk 6:26)

44. A,B,C's Of Conflicts [Part #1]

All of us don't like conflicts but we have to face them everyday. At work we will have conflicts, at home with our most loved partner will have conflicts, with our children we will have conflicts, with our parents we have conflicts, with friends on the field we have conflicts. Conflicts are everywhere. Let us look at some of the reasons for the conflicts we face in our lives. This is especially helpful for us to understand that conflict is very common and that we must learn to face it and handle it and overcome it and be victorious in a spiritual way.

A - Arguments.

Now why do we have arguments? Mostly because we see things differently. One problem but we see it differently and so we argue. Or we argue because our experiences are different. There is the problem but we approach it with different experiences and we have a conflict because we can't agree. And we say, 'No it won't work this way because my experience is that way'. And so we just can't agree because we have strong feelings about the problem because our experiences are different. We have conflicts because we are different individuals with different opinions. As a result we have arguments. And arguments are they wrong? Not necessarily because we get to know a lot of things when we argue in a good way. And when we argue there is an opportunity for us to resolve things as well and find a solution to the problem.

In the Bible, one of the most famous arguments is between Paul and Barnabas. What was the argument about?

What does the Bible tell us not to do?

2 Tim 2:23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.

What is the Bible against? Not against arguments but against stupid and foolish arguments. We argue for the sake of arguing just to get our point across, just to feel like we've won. So, most of the time we end up in quarrels. Why? We start off with genuine interaction and an exchange of views and opinions but eventually it becomes a quarrel because we just can't give in, because we want our way to be accepted. So we fight.

Phil 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing,

It says do everything without complaining or arguing. The Bible is very clear that arguments which are foolish and stupid are not going to help anything but instead they will create quarrels and fighting. Sometimes in marriage we quarrel a lot based on very silly issues. It can be quite silly with opinions like, 'I think the tea should be made like

this. More tea leaves, less sugar, less milk' whereas your spouse will say, 'No, no. Lots of sugar and milk and less tea leaves'. There's a guest whom you both want to please and so you argue about tea leaves, sugar and milk. Both of you are arguing over a stupid issue like tea. If your wife is making the tea, let her make it the way she wants to. If she gets praise or criticism for it let her face it. If the husband is making the tea let him face the praise or criticism. Don't we argue about our kids? So much arguments take place over raising up our little, sweet, darlings. Father thinks lot of things should be fed at breakfast time whereas the mother thinks a little is enough. Sometimes it is the other way - mother thinks he should eat a lot of idlies and lots of chutney and drink at least two glasses of milk whereas the father thinks it is more important to go to school on time and so a few idlies is fine.

New parents or newly married couples waste many good days and months of their lives fighting over these foolish, stupid and silly matters. If you have grandparents living with you, they'll say, 'what are these fellows doing? Why can't the mother do what she wants? Why is this fellow so insistent that they should follow his plan only? Let one person decide. Why are they fighting?' That's what others think but you feel, 'Huh? My kid is going to suffer that day. She's not going to eat food. She's going to get a headache. She's going to be tired. She won't do her homework'. So you fight over silly stuff. Ultimately after they grow up we'll think, 'Man, we fought over such silly stuff'. One extra idly or a little extra sugar didn't matter after all'. Ultimately the person who wanted extra sugar is diabetic and after 5 years wont be able to take sugar at all.

B - Betrayal.

The word betrayal is a very strong, serious word. Sometimes we don't understand it deeply. Do we get betrayed by our enemies? Who betrays us? Friends. Somebody who is close to us. The word betray conveys, 'I trusted you, my friend, I shared this information with you, I shared my life with you, I shared my wealth and prosperity with you, I shared my heart and our friendship with you'. And when that person hurts us by being disloyal, betrays that trust, it hits us hard. That is why it's a very deep hurt. Betrayal is an insider hurt. So we don't talk about enemies betraying us we talk about loyal, faithful people betraying us. That's very hurtful and cuts deeper. It usually happens between husband and wife because that relationship is very deep and very intimate, very close. That's why when there are affairs or adultery or lies, dishonesty in the relationship it hurts deep because we don't want the person closest to us to betray us.

In the Bible there are a few people who betrayed. One is Absalom, a son of David. What did he do to his own father? Betrayed him! How? He wanted to take his over his own father's kingdom. His father was the king and Absalom wanted the kingdom. What did he do? He started to become nice to people. He started telling them, 'By the way, I'll do a great job of ruling this kingdom'. It is like, 'come to me all you who are weary and burdened. I'll give you rest'. He sounded very nice but he had an ulterior motive of hurting his own father. That's why the Bible talks of Absalom betraying David.

We know the most famous story in the Bible of who betrayed who. Judas betraying Jesus is one of the most painful incidents in the Bible. Why was it a betrayal? Judas was one of the chosen twelve. Jesus could have chosen anybody in the Bible but He chose Judas to be part of that close-knit group. And Jesus loved him, taught him, shared his heart and plans and pains with him and the rest. When this person betrayed Jesus for thirty silver coins it hurt deep. Even now, when we talk of betrayal in the world, the first person to come to mind is Judas. Why? How could someone who walked with us so closely, who ate with us, drank with us, slept in the same house do something to us? That pain is unbearable. That's why betrayal is very hard to deal with. Betrayal leads to hurt and eventually to bitterness and anger and unforgiveness. When we feel betrayed it is hard to forgive that person, to let go, to love that person because eventually the person who was our friend and betrayed us becomes our enemy. This is a deep hurt and we need to resolve in our hearts not to do that to our friends and family friends, to people whom we love. And those of us who have faced betrayal - that pain may be still lingering in our hearts - need to go to the cross of Jesus. Jesus taught how to forgive. Jesus taught how to handle such rejection and betrayal by his trusted friend. He taught us by forgiving everybody who hurted him even though he had done no wrong. So we've got to go to the cross of Jesus and learn from our Savior because he's the only one who can give us the strength to deal with the deep wound and deep hurt.

C. Competition

Competing with one another. We know what people do? They compete with each other. What does that mean? They are trying to impress that they are greater, smarter, wiser, stronger, more good looking, more qualified. Our society is so deeply driven by this. What drives young people to study harder? They want to prove to everybody, 'I'm better'. Where does this come from? It comes from a deep insecurity that we are not accepted. We feel that the only way we'll be accepted is if we prove ourselves, if we are good in this area, if we excel in that area, if we are better than everyone else in some other area. This drives us to be ungodly, even in our relationships at home. We see it happening between children - they argue and compete with one another for attention, for love, for appreciation. We see it happening in school, in college -everybody is fighting to be No.1. We see it in politics, in the workplace where one manager competes with another manager, one office competing with another office, one Company competing with another Company. That is what drives this world and that is not from God.

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

If we practice this scripture it will remove all competition but the problem is we find it hard to practice it. See, when we consider others better than ourselves it will drive out all competitiveness because we are not going to compete any more. Because we are happy with whom we are and how God made us and what God has given us, what blessings he has given us, what talents he has given us. We are not complaining or trying to outdo somebody else and this will make us happy. When we are willing to say, 'You're better' or 'I'm not as good as you' it takes a lot of humility. That's what the Bible says. And when

we are willing to do that it changes our heart towards people. We will still excel but the motivation will not be competition. It's out of a pure heart and devotion to God.

The first instance of competition in the Bible is between Cain and Abel. What was the issue for competition?

Gen 4:2-4 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer who worked the soil. This is one of the most tragic stories. What happened? Both made offerings to God. Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil. Some. What did Abel do? He brought fat portions of some of the firstborn of his flock. sGod looked at their offerings and said, 'Yeah, Abel has given his heart. He has given his best'. And God approved of Abel for his sacrifice or offering but God did not approve of Cain. Did not approve doesn't mean God did not love Cain. It's just that of what was offered Abel's was better. That Cain could not bear. The Bible says he got angry and upset. That's what happens when you lose in a competition. People get angry and emotional and can't take it. They sleep for the next three days, they don't talk to anybody and some people take sleeping pills, some people hang themselves. They can't take failure. Failure doesn't mean God doesn't love us. Failure doesn't mean people don't love us. It just means we've got to do a better job next time. We've got to give our heart in whatever we're doing. If we're going to make a half-hearted effort, we'll get a half-hearted response from the other side. If we put whole-hearted effort into what we're doing, we'll reap the benefits of that.

How did Cain deal with the competition? He removed the competition? Who was his competition? His own brother. See how dangerous competition can be. People say, 'competition is healthy', but if it's in the heart and we don't deal with it in a spiritual way, we can end up doing such unrighteous things.

45. A,B,C's Of Conflicts [Part #2]

A. Arguments, B.Betrayal, C.Competition

D. Disunity

Disunity destroys our family. Disunity destroys relationships, friendships, ministries and churches, organizations, businesses, companies. Disunity has the power to destroy all these things. Why do we have disunity? Disunity comes out of lack of a shared purpose. When we don't all have the same purpose that's when we get disunited. It's like this. In a family, the husband wants to take the family in one direction, the wife wants to take them in a different direction and the children want to go in one direction. What happens to that family? They face disunity. That hurts deeply. Somewhere we need to learn to be united.

Jesus prayed that all disciples would be united. *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.*

Psalm 133:1 says, 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity'. In your family when you and your wife are united and your kids are united, how does it make you feel? It says, 'How good and pleasant it is!' It is a pleasant feeling, it's a good feeling when there is unity. When there is disunity it is very unpleasant and it does not feel good at all.

As a church, as disciples, we all have one purpose, one goal. Do we all want to go in different directions? No, we all want to go in one direction and what direction is that? Heaven. Imagine if we all went in different directions what would happen to the church? We'll be splintered and hate each other and we'll be scattered. We must have all think of going to heaven, fix our eyes on Jesus and heaven. Jesus is the only way for us all to go to heaven.

When we are all united in the same purpose and direction, there is no disunity and differences are not as important. Let's pray for unity. When there is disunity in our hearts, let's sit and talk to that person to resolve, to share, to reconcile and to pray for the other person or for the group or wherever we are. You'll see amazing miracles happen when we follow simple steps to go towards unity.

E. Envy

Where does envy come from? Envy comes from self-love. Envy comes when we think, 'Why should that person have and not I?' That is the reason for envy.

Ecc 4:4 And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Solomon talks of a universal truth. Solomon teaches that all labor and all achievements spring from man's envy of his neighbor. The reason people are striving big and want to achieve is mainly envy. We drive ourselves crazy to get what others are having. This is the deep-rooted motivation for this kind of sin.

Prov 14:30 A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. That means we can be so motivated by this evil called 'envy' (we don't even recognize it) that it can rot our bones. It is so deep rooted and deep seeded that everything we do revolve around it and completely destroys us and rots us inside.

Prov 23:17 Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD. Sometimes we look at sinners and they keep sinning and have no godly values but they seem to be enjoying all the good things in life while we, Christians who are supposed to have godly values, struggle with the sin of envy. We look at those in the world and think, 'Why should they have it? Why not me when I'm a Christian?' We envy

the fun they are having. 'They are drinking, they are smoking, they are hanging out with girls, with boyfriends. They are so casual about faith, God, church, spirituality but they are having such fun. Why am I struggling even though I'm a faithful Christian and carrying the cross? Maybe they are having fun now but they won't be having fun in hell.

We've got to fix our eyes heavenward, on Jesus and not people and on all the material things that people have. Let us watch out for greed. Man's life does not depend on material possessions but that's what the world is running after. We've got to be careful and say, 'No! Jesus is enough for me. He is my entire possession, He is my inheritance and my inheritance is already stored up in heaven as a security'. Let us be content with what we have.

Phil 4:12,13 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.

Do we know what will give us peace in our lives? It is when we learn the secret of being content. If we can learn that secret there will be so much peace, so much calmness. Paul learned that secret. We must learn it because it does not come automatically. We have to go after that secret, find it, learn it and hold that secret in our heart. The secret of being content. When we are not content that's when envy becomes a ruling factor in our lives. This is a hard one. The reason why many of us are not happy in our lives is because we are not content. Basically we are saying we are not happy with what God has done for us so far. We want more. That is the formula we work with every day. And when we go after that desire we don't understand where that's going to lead us to. Yes, we'll have material benefits but that's not going to make us happy. We'll enjoy the material benefits for some time but after that we'll be bored and look at the bigger or better or latest-model things that people have. If we don't learn this secret quickly we are going to burn inside - rot inside as the scripture says.

F. Frustration

Where does frustration come from? It comes from blocked goals. It comes when we think, 'These people are blocking me from what I can achieve or what I can be or from my goals because of their incompetence or because they are trying to snatch it away from me'. Frustration is like we are trying to go somewhere but someone is blocking us. We all have felt it when we were trying to get somewhere and somebody, something is blocking us. That just gets us and we get super frustrated. Sometimes Satan stops us by, sometimes God can put the blocks. You're all set to go somewhere and God says, 'No, sorry you can't go there' and puts a wall before us. We've got to pray in such situations. If Satan is stopping us we must pray, 'God, remove that block'. If God is stopping us we must say, 'God, help me to surrender to the block so I can go in this direction because I'm going in the wrong direction and that's why you are stopping me. Help me to see the right direction and go in that direction'.

G. Gloating

Gloating is basically stepping on someone who has already fallen. Making fallen people eat humble pie. Basically it is showing vindictive satisfaction in one's own success over someone else or in another person's misfortune. You not only want to rejoice over someone's misfortune but you also want to step on him or her. In Roman times, when two gladiators fought in the arena, the one who won would not only kill the other but after killing him would also cut off his head and step on his body. They were not just happy with their victory but wanted more. That's gloating. It's when you're not just happy that someone else is going through a hard time but you just want to enjoy and relish it and also step on him or her.

God is not happy with that kind of attitude. In the book of Obadiah, God destroyed the whole nation of Edom because of gloating. Why? It's because, instead of helping their brothers - the Israelites- who were going through a hard time, they rejoiced at their hardship and even told their enemies to attack Israel. Israel was also in sin but God was upset about Edom's sin because it is wrong to do that to one's brother. Maybe Israel had done something wrong but when they were going through a hard time Edom had no right to gloat over them or rejoice over their misery. They are to help them, pray for them, support them, encourage them and guide them. That's what God wanted them to do instead of looking down on them.

A,B,C's of conflicts. All this leads us to into a lot of confusion and a lot of mess. Maybe some of us are struggling with some kind of a conflict. We need to go to God and say, 'God, I'm struggling with these sins' and be convicted before God. Let us confess to God and ask for forgiveness from God. Let us ask him for strength to repent from such sins. Maybe we need to talk to somebody. Maybe we need to reconcile with somebody because we are struggling with these sins. Maybe we need guidance in the process of reconciliation. We need to ask our brothers and sisters to help us to deal with it in a godly, spiritual way in accordance with the scriptures. Finally we need to trust Jesus because He's got the solution for all our weaknesses and sins and he will show us the way- if we go to him - to handle these things in our lives. And God will give us the peace that transcends all understanding.

46. Keys To Friendship

John 15:8-17 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. [9] "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. [10] 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. [11] I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. [12] 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 .

When we answer the question, "What was Jesus' mission?" we must conclude this . . . To lay down his life for his friends. He laid down his life for us his friend. The irony is that we put friendship aside to "crank the ministry." Friendship IS the ministry! Jesus died for people, for friends, for family. Our mission is a mission of friends, a mission of family. When we get to heaven, we're gonna look around and say, "Where's the cranking?" There won't be any evangelism in heaven. The mission will have been the friends.

John 13:34-38 "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." [36] Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." [37] Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." [38] Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

1. Friendship Means "No Fear"

John 18:25-27 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." [26] One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" [27] Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." [16] Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." [17] The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

Peter had his chance to lay down his life for Jesus his friend, but he failed. Why? He was afraid of being crucified. Fear is a big factor even in this room tonight. Jail, maybe . . . All of us have felt afraid of relationships, though. Let's talk about our first key.

2. Friendship Means "No Sale"

Matthew 26:45-50 Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. [46] Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" [47] While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people. [48] Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." [49]

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.

The Bible calls him "betrayed" twice, but Jesus calls him "friend."

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

We've sold out commitment in relationships because we're weary of conflict. This happens in marriage, in parenting, in leadership groups that are divided at the top. There's too much conflict, so we just give up because it's too hard and we can't handle it.

A brother loves at all times. Does God love us only because we return his love?

1 Cor. 13:7-8 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. [8] Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Romans 5:7-8 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. [8] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

Are we greater than Jesus, in that we can choose whom we love? I don't think so. Marriage isn't designed to meet our needs, but to refine our character by loving our spouse. There's nothing so hypocritical as a person who is sure you are the unmerciful servant. We need to give with the hope that the other person gives back, but without expectation. We give without expecting anything back. We initiate forever, even when we are hurt. It may be difficult, but that's what makes it great.

It's hard, but if you'll do it unconditionally God will bring home the prize in your relationships "No Sale" in family, "No Sale" in friendships, "No Sale" when it comes to the mission.

47. Can You Hear Their Cries?

Every Christian goes through some emotional times. We have emotional needs. How many of us feel lonely sometimes? How many of us feel discouraged sometimes? How many of us feel down, lazy, just tired, can't do this anymore, not feel like giving, 'who am I' sometimes. These are the thoughts we get when we are discouraged or down.

Lots of people around us are not getting encouragement. If we feel discouraged, down,

lazy, tired at times amid all the encouragement we get, how about lots of people who is not getting it.

Sometimes we feel great to have somebody hang out with us, listens to our cry, comforting us. Same way lots of christians feel. Best way to encourage them first is to understand that their feelings are real and we must make every effort to understand them .

The following scriptures show how different people felt in the Bible. Let us try to understand them.

1. Psa. 31:10-12 My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors; I am a dread to my friends-- those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery.

Probably now we might not relate to this. When we go through the same feeling, we relate to this. People go through this feeling. They feel they are nobody. All those who left the fellowship feel that way. They might be with full of sin, messed up life but we should not make them feel forgotten. Let us not forget them.

2. Psa. 88:17,18 All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me. You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.

Very depressed person. Can we understand them, darkness as their friend? We got to relate to them and help them to come out of it. They like their worldliness, their worldly job more than their church. Many parents feel that way towards us. Oh they have taken away my son or daughter. When we feel for those Christians we'll make an impact otherwise we'll thrash them with your words.

3. Psa. 142:4 Look to my right and see; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

David had lot of people around him to help him. In spite of that he felt this way. Lots of people are not loved, encouraged. For us it is easy to get bad attitudes when somebody say nobody loves me.

4. Mk. 14:48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?"

We can't call our members rebellious because they don't understand what we are trying to say. They have questions regarding church, leaders, about our convictions. It is a very negative feeling when they're termed rebellious. When we do so they are motivated to rebel.

5. Lk. 15:16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

Please feed when people come home. They would feel they gave me something.

6. Lk. 16:20 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.

There are people like that we got to care for. The best people who can help them and show them compassion are we.

7. Jn. 5:7 "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."

Is that the cry of people who visits our church? We need to care for people we got to love, care for them.

Can you hear the cries of such people? We got to be there for them to take care of them.

We don't have to do it alone God is with us. God hears our cries.

Jn. 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Orphans suppose to feel lonely, no parents, no brothers, no sisters, no relatives. We have so many of them. Jesus said that he will not leave us as orphans. He said "I'll be there, I'll not leave you as orphans"

Isa. 54:10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

Jn. 16:32 "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

Jesus is saying even if all leave him ,Father will be with him

2 Tim 4:16-18 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul is saying the Lord will rescue him and not leave him alone even if others desert him!

As we live our Christian life we go through many struggles, but always remember God will never leave us to be alone and feel lonely. Let us be there for each other, all the lost and for all the Nation understanding their pain and helping them find the true friend in our Savior Jesus Christ.

48. Church Growth [Part #1]

How can we make our churches grow?

1. EXAMINE OUR WAYS

Lam 3:40 Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.

When our churches are not growing we got to 1] examine our ways 2] test them and 3] return to the Lord.

That is what Nehemiah did. He went to Jerusalem; he set out to inspect the wall. He examined each wall, checked how it was, noted down the problem and also devised a solution to solve or rebuild each part of the wall that was damaged.

This is what we got to do to make our churches grow. We need to inspect or survey the

Broken Walls[parts] of our churches and find a practical solution to fix them. And God will give us the wisdom, if we ask him to rebuild our broken parts of our churches, just like God had put it in the heart of Nehemiah what to do.

Neh 2:11-18 I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days. I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on. By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Survey is the right thing to do. What kind of survey we need to do?

Are stats and surveys sinful?

Survey needs to be done with the right motive. We need to know that God is the one who will make our churches grow, it is not us. We need to plant and water, but God does the Growth part.

1 Cor 3:6-7 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

God wanted Moses and Aaron to take the census of Israel.

Num 1:1-4 The LORD spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: "Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army. One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you.

He wanted them to 1. List every man by name, one by one, 2. Figure out all men who are 20 yrs old or older who can serve in the army, 3. One man from each tribe, the Tribal head to help them.

This is what we do in our churches, have a membership list. But also we need to know what kind of members we have in our church. Categorize them. Find out how many men,

women, singles, marrieds, families, campus students, teens, pre-teens who can get baptized in the near future, Tamilians, Malayalees, Maharashtrians, Biharis, graduates, post-graduates, widows, divorcees, single mothers, single marrieds[only one spouse a member of the church], how many who earn more than 5000 or 10000 per month, etc.

Let us figure out which part of the church has grown or not grown. Then make a plan to build up the parts that are not growing and build up the part that is growing so it can grow more.

Only when we do a survey like this we will get to know the cracks in the building and we can fix them. We will personally be able to see which part or group of the church is neglected and we can turn it around.

2. CHECK OUR PERSONAL GROWTH

A church growth mostly is in proportion to the individuals growth especially the leaders growth.

In other words if we are not growing, then the church will not grow.

The Bottom-line of church growth is our own personal spiritual growth.

If we are not growing, means we have become stagnant, so the church become stagnant.

If we are stuck in our spiritual life the church is stuck, and church can't move forward.

We must be convinced that if we are growing we will call others to grow with us. If we stop growing we will stop others from growing.

If we are growing we will have more faith and hope that others can grow and change. If we are stuck we will get the church feel stuck.

Let us check our growth in the last 6 months. Have we grown? What have we grown in or not grown in?

a. Grow in our love for God and people. Being more passionate. [*2 Th 1:3-4 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*]

b. Grow in our wisdom and knowledge.

c. Grow in our understanding of ministry and ministry principles.

d. Growing in our character - confidence, Boldness in evangelism, joy, weight, purity,

responsibility, financial discipline. [2 Pet 1:5-8 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 .]

e. Growing in our maturity - distinguishing right from wrong.[Heb 5:14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.]

f. What about Personal Fruit? Have we been fruitful yet?

Let us examine and test our ways, return to the Lord[Head] of the Church, to ask for wisdom to plan for Explosive Growth in our churches.

49. Church Growth [Part #2]

How can we make our churches grow?

1. EXAMINE OUR WAYS

2. CHECK OUR PERSONAL GROWTH

3. CHECK THE PULSE

a. Sensitive discipling.

Are people happy? Specifically focus on every group in the church and find out are they happy? Check the family group, zone, sector, Malayalees[language group], old x'ns , young x'ns, teens, campus students, the newly weds, married people with kids, physically disabled, the poor disciples, pregnant women, bereaved families, mothers with new born babies, widows, etc.,

b. Training of disciples and leaders

(i) Scriptural Training - leaders and disciples need to learn Guard the gospel. The first 5 studies - Who is God, Who is Jesus - I, Who is Jesus - II, Word of God and Discipleship. Most of our people only need to know these 5 studies to start studying with non-x'ns.

(ii) Ministry training - Ministry training can be done in different ways.

Watching and learning

Listening and learning

Teaching and learning

Experiencing and learning

Making mistakes and learning,

Asking and learning

Imitating and learning

There is nothing like people being with you and around you to influence them and train them. In general people need lot of specific instructions to make them victorious.

(iii) Character training - has to be done sensitively with out being harsh. Many people have limitations in how much they can change their character weaknesses. Being patient with them and lovingly addressing their weaknesses can motivate them to change. Some brothers in their zeal to change an another person has often left them crushed and bitter. Work with people on their - Joy level, confidence, reliability, self-control, purity, humility, marriage, financial discipline, punctuality without crushing them.

c. Group Needs and Identity.

Luke 6:13 When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: In each of our churches we have different sizes groups with their own individual identity and influence.

CHURCH = CELL + CLAN + CONGREGATION

CELL = a small group as a nucleus of the church [SIZE = 3-12 disciples]. This group provides an environment for personal intimacy in relationships. This small CELL[family group] can and must meet all the needs of the disciples. The ideal group size should not increase more than 12. This group can imitate the group of Apostles that Jesus led of 12. Where their individual needs was met by Jesus himself as the CELL[family group] leader. In this group there should be a great heart of openness of any struggles, can focus on evangelism, and the group to feel like a family just like that of Jesus[John 13:34-35].

CLAN = A large family or group with strong common interest or identity. [SIZE = 25 - 200 disciples] This group gives a sense of belonging to all members and all the members can easily know each other's names. A zone, sector, campus, teens gives a special identity for disciples and they can have a sense of pride in belonging to this CLAN[sector/zone/campus/single/Mighty men]. Jesus had this group when he met with the 72 [Luke 10:1,17] and Peter had a group like this when he met with the 120 believers[Acts 1:15] after the ascension.

CONGREGATION = A crowd or mass gathered together for religious worship [SIZE = 200+] This is our Sunday worship service. Where the disciples may not know all the

members names but there is a spirit of Celebration and joy as all the Cell and Clans come together to worship God. This group builds up the faith of everyone else who come. This is the group that Peter preached to on the day of Pentecost and 3000 were baptized [Acts 2:3,41]

In our churches our groups are divided as follows

Family groups[3-12 disciples] - CELL

Zones[2 familygroups, upto 25 disciples] - CLAN

Sectors [2 or more zones, 50 upto 200 disciples] - CLAN

Regions [2 or more sectors, 200-500 disciples] - CONGREGATION

Church [All members] - CONGREGATION

Also we have Campus Ministry, Teens ministry, Music Ministry, Pre-teens ministry,Singles ministry, Marrieds ministry, Golden Age ministry, Mighty Men/women, Malayalam Ministry, Telugu Ministry etc. - all these groups are type CLAN.

In our CHURCHes all these groups [CELL + CLAN + CONGREGATION] need to do well. Each of the meeting of these groups should be inspiring and if they all function well will produce Great Church Growth.

d. Everyone's participation.

1 Pet 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. Every disciple must be ACTIVE. We need to make every disciple feel important and useful for God and His kingdom.

e. Consistency or Too many changes?

Consistency brings a sense of security and clear direction to our disciples. Too many changes and confusing dates of events produces insecurity and bad attitudes among the disciples.

Also the Rhythm of the church should not be changed randomly and emotionally. Reactive leadership people can't trust and follow. A consistent leader people appreciate and wholeheartedly follow. Every month there should be consistent focus on Baptisms, Restorations, counting out people who are unrepentant, encouraging the weak, marriage, family, singles, marriage planning for singles etc. So we can see a consistent growth in the church and not just erratic growth. As we see in the New Testament Acts, there was a consistent explosive growth in the church. As we see even in Acts 6:1-7, even with problems within the church, because the apostles were consistently focused on the Ministry of the Word and Prayer, the Churches grew rapidly[Acts 6:7].

Let us examine and test our ways, return to the Lord[Head] of the Church, to ask for wisdom to plan for Explosive Growth in our churches.

50. Forgiveness [Part #1]

'Cross' has to be an experience to live out every day. It's not some story; it has to be an experience of what Jesus did for us. It is something that should keep us alive as Christians, nothing else. The only thing that keeps us alive as a Christian is that, we are saved. We are Christians only by His grace. Our sins were forgiven when we got baptized.

And the only thing that is going to keep us going for the rest of our life, if God willing, is that experience of forgiving. That experience of God taking away all our sin. He cleansed us, purified us, washed us and renewed us. He put a new spirit in us. He gave us a new purpose. He gave us a new life. He gave us a new hope. He gave us a reason to live, one day to go to heaven, being one with him forever. That is why we all hold on to our faith.

Are we enjoying our Christian life, are we enjoying the fellowship? Why are we not enjoying if we are not enjoying? What is hurting us? What is bothering us? What comes our way to enjoy the relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters? Or do we feel a wall between us and God? We know what a wall is?

Sometimes when you have problem with husband or wife you feel there is a wall between both of you. I am saying something but he/she is rebounding back and he/she is not getting across and you feel there is a wall. And when there is a wall between both of you, you just can't get through. You can't feel close. You can't enjoy your relationship. You can't be united. You can't be happy. Isn't that true, it is still between both of us. When there is a wall the only thing that bonds us is, when you break that wall. So that you can have honest communication, relationship, you can listen to each other so that you can forgive each other.

Is there a wall between us and God? What should be the reason? There are two main reasons.

1. Sometimes it is our sin. Sin creates a wall and Bible says in Isaiah there is a wall between us and God. What is that wall made of - 'sin'? *Isa 59:1,2 Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

2. And the other reason there is a wall is, sin of others. When others sin against you, you face a wall between you and the other person and even between you and God.

You got to ask your self what is hindering you? How are you dealing with it? Are you dealing with this wall that you are facing in your life? How serious are you in dealing with this wall? Sometimes we know there is a wall and we keep the wall growing, becoming stronger, putting more bricks, putting more concrete in it so it can never be broken. We just don't take the heart and the seriousness to deal with the wall. We destroy our faith, our precious faith, more precious than the gold. It is much, much precious than all gold put together in the entire world.

Our faith is much more precious than the gold that we all give so much value to. So the good news in the Bible is God always shows a way out whatever trails and struggles we are going through, whatever wall we are facing. The Bible says God will always give you a way out of any struggles, any pain, any wall that you are facing. That's the promise of God.

So when it is our sin that is blocking our relationship with God and holding us in enjoying our Christian life then we have to deal with that sin. We have to confess our sin. We have to repent of our sin before God. We have to ask forgiveness from God and from others and restore our fellowship with God and others that is what we got to do. The beauty of fellowship and our family group that we are part of it helps us to talk and share our heart with one another and disciple each other, teach each other and instruct each other. Why? Because God knows we on our own cannot deal with the mess in our life. We need some body.

God sends some one to guide us that is why it is so important to be part of a small group and fellowship. We call it a family group, house church or even bible talk. Why we need to attend? Not just to come and show our face and go, for us to enjoy the fellowship. And we can share honestly with brothers and sisters in the group and we can take help with the sin in our life that is burdening us, that builds the wall.

Sin of others affects most of the people. When sin of others, what does it do to you? The number one debate of Satan, the trap of Satan, destroys people's faith in the fellowship, in their life is the sin of others. Why do people leave the church? Think about it, the same reason why people walk out of the marriage. Why do people walk out of marriage? Why do children walk out of the house? Why do people resign from work? Why? Somebody hurt them. Isn't it that is the number one reason, even in the church!

And we think it is a normal thing, we think it is an acceptable thing. Okay just like that it happened in the world it happened in the church. No church is the place where we need to deal with it in a godly way. We can deal with it in the world too because this is part of life. Others will sin against us, why? We all fall into sin and we are living together. We are trying to make things work and we are going to hurt one another. We do some thing knowingly or unknowingly, purposely not purposely whatever it may be but we have to face it. We have to learn to deal with it because the number one reason people leave the church, even God because they get offended. To be continued.... 1. Offences Will Come 2. What You Give Is What You Receive.

51. Forgiveness [Part #2]

1. Offences Will Come

(Luke 17:1-5 NIV) Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

We are living in a dream world saying no body is going to offend us; nobody is going to hurt us in the church. We are living in a dream world, why? It is impossible. Jesus says we will be offended. Somebody is going to step on our toe someday. If it didn't happen today or yesterday it is going to happen tomorrow. We will be offended. Things like that will come. And the Greek word for offence or things that cause people to sin is the word called 'scandalon', what is scandalon? Scandalon is basically that part of a trap, in the rat trap there is a little part that is very sensitive. The place we tie the food for the rat to come and eat. It has to be kept open. The rat has to simply touch the sensitive place where the food is attached to the little part that is so sensitive. If we touch it the spring will come off. Then immediately it shuts and it traps the rat. That part of the rat trap that is so sensitive, that gives way to trap the rat is called scandalon.

In different version that little word is translated differently. In other words it means 'fall away'. Jesus is saying blessed are those who don't fall away on account of me. The word is 'scandalon'. So here basically we are trapped, the way Satan traps is through this scandalon, he is just waiting for us to get offended, for us to get hurt, for somebody to hurt us. Then what happens, we get hurt? What we are supposed to do when we are hurt? We are supposed to forgive the other person isn't it? So what does Satan say? Don't forgive; it is wrong what the other person has done. Let the other person better repent and say sorry. Ask for forgiveness or pay back for what the other person has done and then we will feel better. That is how we deal with it. We get bitter and we become unforgiving.

When we have this sin of unforgiveness or when we get offended and if we keep that offence in our hearts we develop bad fruits in our Christian life. We are supposed to produce good fruits, the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, etc. But instead of that what becomes our fruit? Anger, rage, malice, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, quarrel and hatred. All these fruit are result of what? Offence, that some body hurt me. And that is the number one trap of Satan.

Sometimes we walk inside the church saying, 'what a loving church'; 'every one is perfect' isn't it? we feel that way in the beginning. It's like our family, initially all the kids in their family think that their mother and father are perfect. Then they get little older and become pre-teens age oh! My father is not the way I thought he is. My mom has got some problems here. Isn't it? And that is the truth with every one, any family. We come to God's family, same thing we think in the beginning. Every thing is perfect! What an incredible leader we have in the church. Look at the brothers and sisters, they are so loving. They call me every day; they always reach out to me.

It is just like dating. We are getting to know about your wife or husband that's how we feel, what a perfect human being. After getting married then we think, oh my God there is some major problems here. That is natural. We are living in a dream world. If we are totally in love with somebody we will think that she or he is totally perfect. The one who is experienced in marriage will think, wait for few more months after marriage then they will figure it out. Why? We think its not going to happen to us and so we are not prepared spiritually as we become Christians and live out a Christian life. How are we going to face this offence? And when offences come people are just blown away and many of them leave.

I can't bare this, I thought all are perfect and you are a perfect church and you all are super loving and kind. Now all of them become very busy and have things to do. Taking care of their family and taking care of their children and don't attend my call and you don't do this and you don't do that, you don't follow up.

We just get all mixed up and we don't realize that we got offended and we think how dare that they offend me. So we feel we have right to do what ever we want, to walk out of the relationship, to walk out of the friend ship, walk out of the marriage and even walk out of the church and even sometimes walk out of God. We think God has offended us. He has not answered our prayers. He has not loved us.

I really prayed to him saying if you are really God give me this job. If you are really God you should pull me out of this sin. If you are really God you have to rescue me from this terrible situation I am in and the terrible storm I am in. God I am sorry to say that you didn't answer my prayers and I don't believe that you are there so I am walking out. This is the number one problem and reason why people leave God and they don't hold on to their faith and they fall. Satan has found a best way to trap us all.

We will be offended. Jesus is talking to his own disciples; suppose a person offends you seven times in a day and seven times he comes and tells you I repent what you should do? Forgive now in this case the person is repenting seven times. It's good if somebody is repenting seven times, but would we have that much patience to endure seven times offence. Seven times in a day if the person comes and says sorry, would that make us happy? May be not. We will be saying like, you should have repented the first time why you are repeating? But Jesus is making some thing very clear here. So we have to learn to deal with it in a very godly way.

There are two categories of offended people.

1. First category are those have being treated unjustly, truly being treated unjustly.
2. The second categories are the people who believe that they are being treated unjustly they are not being treated unjustly but they just feel they have being treated unjustly, because they judge by assumption and appearance. Did they treat you like that; you are just waiting for some body else to get offended for you to get offended. Somebody is getting offended why are you offended? That's our human sinful nature we just go on with the tide if everybody in the church is offended. I am also offended if every body is hurting and throwing stones on the leaders. I should also throw stones on the leaders, if everybody is accusing, we also should join the party of accusation. No, this is about our heart and these are the two kinds of people.

So what we do when we feel like we are offended? We blame, we point a finger and accuse and then we condemn. Who accuses according to the Bible- Satan. Satan is an accuser and he is the one who condemns. What did Jesus come for, John 3 for God so loved the world that he sent his one and only son to do what? He came to save the world not to condemn the world. Jesus never came to condemn us. He came to save.

How come as Christians we are condemning each other? Some of us we think that's how we are called to do - no, we are called to imitate Jesus. We are called to forgive just like He forgave us. He calls us to forgive. Some of us feel we have the right to condemn because some body offended, somebody hurted us. Some body has to pay the price. No, Jesus paid the price and Jesus came to save the world. He did not come to accuse and point the finger at you. He came to lift that accusing finger and to give you a new life that is why Jesus came.

Church is not perfect. Bible says every church is imperfect that is why letters were written to the churches. If we read the letters what does the letters contain all the problems in the church. Every letter, Corinthian letter, Roman, Ephesians, Galatians, personal letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon all dealing with mess.

Somehow we think our church should be perfect. It will never be perfect. We know who will be perfect only Jesus. The only thing that is going to remain perfect all our life is Jesus, because the Bible says, that Jesus is the same yesterday today and for ever. If our foundation is church then we are going to get offended because that is not going to be stable because we are the church. If we are not stable as Christians, church is not going to be stable, But who is stable, who is the same, Jesus, yesterday today and forever.

Foundation has to be built, our Christian faith has to be built on Christ. No other foundation is going to survive because times are going to come, it is going to beat on our house that we are building on. If we are not going to build on the solid foundation the rock Jesus, we will fall. Guess what foundation is the church built on. If the church foundation is not Christ it is going to fall. If it's built on leader, if it's built on relationship, that's not gong to last long. When one person becomes unloving, that's all finished.

The church is just us not the leadership, we are part of the same church and we have to realize that our foundations has to be Christ, no other foundation we should build it on. If we have built it on any other foundation, if we have become Christian for any other reason, God is going to shake it so that He can test us what we are really built it on. He is going to fire at us. He is going to make us to walk through fire and find out what are we really made of. If we are made of any other material it is going to get burnt and gone. If our foundation is not the truth of Christ, Christ being the center of our faith, life and hope then we are going to fall.

52. Forgiveness [Part #3]

1. What You Give Is What You Recieve

We live in a culture where we don't mean what we say. We say some thing and people take it for granted. Our boss is telling us that we will be fired if we come late tomorrow. And then we say, our boss keeps saying this. But the next day we get a letter that we are fired from the job. And we say what! I thought he was joking, he had a smile on his face when he told me yesterday. That's the problem they just say something they just don't care about it. That is what the world, nobody means what they say. We say, 'We will do this for you' and we make lot of promises and we don't really keep it. We made lot of promise when we got married but we don't keep many of them. We keep breaking the promises.

(Mark 11:25 NIV) And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

(Mat 6:14-15 NIV) For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

There is a conditional statement. Only if we forgive other peoples offence then our heavenly father will forgive us. Jesus means what He says, we are the one who take it lightly. We think He keeps saying many things. No Jesus is not another human being. Jesus is Lord. That is why we worship him. He means what He says. If we don't forgive men when they hurt us He will not forgive us.

What did Jesus teach us to pray? *Mathew 6:12 forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.* The way we should pray is, as we forgive our sinners we are also going to be forgiven, we also need your forgiveness that is the prayer Jesus did. There is no other option. Jesus is not saying, its okay even if we don't forgive. Its true some may really hurt us, they really abused us, tortured us, they didn't care for us. They promised us many things but they didn't keep up to it. So we have every right to keep up that offence

against them. Jesus is not going to say it's been really hard for you, keep that offence in your heart its okay. No, Jesus is not going to say that. Jesus is saying, "what you give is what you are going to receive if you are not going to be forgiving somebody else you don't expect that from God".

How many of us want God to forgive us the same way we have forgiven those who have offended us. Would you like that to happen? No. We don't want God to treat us the way we treat other people. We give all excuses saying you don't understand how this person behaved with me it's terrible and we have all records of wrong against the person who hurt us. But God, I need your forgiveness, God, I am a terrible person I need your forgiveness. How dare we ask God?

God is willing to clear all our offences and many more to come in future. Jesus cleared them all, billions of offences what you have done against God. Jesus is willing to clear. But we hold on to some little thing that others do against us and we expect God to forgive us even though we don't want to forgive. Do not expect that from God what we give is what we will receive.

Mathew 18 the parable of unmerciful servant. V. 21 Peter came to Jesus and asked God how many times I should forgive my brother? Peter remembered Jesus telling if some body sins against you seven times forgive him seven times. Peter must have thought, Jesus must have got impressed with me. I remember the scriptures He taught me. Jesus said no, not seven times brother but seventy-seven times or seventy times seven. So Peter must have been shocked. To explain about forgiveness Jesus tells a story of an unmerciful servant. Here was a master, he had two servants and one of the servant owed the other person lot of money, approximately five billion dollars worth today. Imagine we owing five billion dollar that's a lot of money. Now master is expecting to pay back. That's what God expects. God will judge us and He wants us to pay back. But we go to him and say God we cannot pay back there is so much of debts. There is no way I can pay back, please have mercy on me.

V.27 the master had pity on him and cancelled the debt, that is forgiveness. Forgiveness is canceling all the debt. What is debt means? You owe me something back, you owe an apology, you owe an understanding of my pain, and you owe an acknowledgment of what you have done to me. That is pay back. That is the debt we expect somebody to owe. Till this we expect sorry from the person who treated us bad. When God cleared our debt he expected nothing from us - no pay back. When we expect pay back in any form even an acknowledgment of somebody else coming and asking apology - that is not forgiveness. Forgiveness is we cancel all debts just like Jesus did for us. He cancelled every debt. Do we expect any pay back from them, any acknowledgment, any sorry, any way, that they had to clear their debt any way they need to come back and acknowledge and say I realize now. Or we expect them to go through some suffering then we feel better. If that's how our heart is then you haven't understood forgiveness. That's what I realized, I did not understand forgiveness till I got to understand this parable.

This parable explained what true forgiveness is - canceling of all debts. Can we look at our brother and a sister in our church, in our fellowship, family group, our husband or wife and say I cancelled all debt? You owe me a lot but I cancelled - can we release them, can we release them from the prison of our heart. Forgiveness is nothing we have to pay back, every thing is cancelled, all debts are canceled and that is how we can truly enjoy our Christian life. We may struggle to forgive. That's why we have fellowship. We can talk to brothers and sisters. We can talk to the leaders who can guide us through the process of forgiveness. People would have hurt, we don't know how to forgive, and we don't know how to handle it. That is where through the power of prayer and fellowship we can guide and help each other. That is the Bible and church is all about, to guide and help out each other to make it to heaven one day. We all need to go to heaven but this is where the process helps, we need each other to get there. May God help us to forgive others as God himself has forgiven us!

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