

“IT IS WRITTEN”

by

PASTOR RAY VIOLA

Dear Saints in Christ Jesus,

These notes were taken from our Old Testament and New Testament Bible surveys at Koinonia on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. The intention was to give an overview of the entire Bible and see how the two testaments “connect.” Within the notes, practical truths were brought out because we know that the study of Scripture without application is like a vehicle without gas...going nowhere.

If the Holy Spirit can use these simple truths to draw you closer to Jesus Christ and develop a more mature love of God the Father, then it will have accomplished its task.

May the blessing of God be shed upon you as you receive, with meekness, His engrafted Word.

Selah,

Pastor Ray

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DAY 1

KINDNESS

Did you ever meet a person with a lot of Bible knowledge and yet an edge in their character as rough as sandpaper? I have. I'm sure that I've even been that person more often than I would like to admit. Is it possible to become such a stickler for truth that one can forget that God's truth¹ works to produce fruitfulness?² One of the evidences in a person's life of salvation is the manifestation of spiritual fruit through kindness.³

God tells us in His Word that His agape love is kind.⁴ That is God's very nature. He is kind. In fact, Jesus plainly stated that our heavenly Father "is kind to the unthankful and evil."⁵

The book of Psalms, the nation of Israel's worship song book, refers to God's kindness. Through the Psalms God reveals that His kindness is both marvelous⁶ and merciful.⁷ Isaiah prophesied that Jesus our Redeemer will have mercy on us "with everlasting kindness."⁸ Oh, God's kindness is great!⁹

"What is desired in a man is kindness," Scripture tells us.¹⁰ However, too often our attitudes and actions are harsh, critical, abrasive, and certainly not in harmony with the Spirit of Christ.¹¹ As followers of Christ, we are exhorted to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving, even as God has been towards us for Christ's sake.¹²

Have you recognized and experienced God's kindness in your life? Maybe you have been "going through the mill" lately. Life is tough, and it does take its toll on each of us. However, we must never forget¹³ that God is good¹³ even when life isn't. Perhaps that's one reason why we are exhorted to practice brotherly kindness.¹⁴ We are to be "kindly affectionate to one another"¹⁵ for the benefit of all. Kindness is a powerful virtue, and a Spirit-filled life is one that will display kindness.

Do you know that God's kindness and love brought salvation to you?¹⁶ His love and kindness go hand in hand, and they bring salvation, deliverance, and healing to others as well.¹⁷ Our Lord is loving and kind,¹⁸ and we are to "Go and do likewise."¹⁹

May you both exhibit and experience the kindness of Jesus today and throughout this week. And remember when things get tough, the kindest One who ever walked this earth is with you,²⁰ dealing kindly!

1-John 17:17; 2-1 Thess 2:13; 3-Gal 5:22; 4-1 Cor 13:4; 5-Luke 6:35;
6-Psalm 31:21; 7-Psalm 117:2; 8-Isaiah 54:8; 9-Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2;
10-Prov 19:22; 11-Isaiah 40:11, 42:3; 12-Eph 4:32; 13-Psalm 86:5, 119:68a;
14-2 Peter 1:5-8; 15-Rom 12:10; 16-Titus 3:4; 17-Jer 31:3; 18-Jer 9:24;
19-Luke 10:33-37; 20-Deut 31:6.

DAY 2

THREE TYPES OF SERVICE

The Scriptures tell us that there are three forms of service: eyeservice,¹ lip service,² and heart service.³ While eyeservice merely looks good to others, and lip service only sounds good, service from the heart is true and pure and the only kind that is acceptable to Jesus. You see, God knows our hearts⁴ and our motives.⁵ Therefore, if we find ourselves getting mechanical or needing a crowd to serve before, it's time to go to the throne of mercy⁶ and get our hearts right before God.⁷ Whether we are called to plant or water in the work of the Lord⁸ is unimportant. What is important is the motive behind the service.

The only acceptable motive for serving Jesus is love.⁹ Anything done apart from love may get temporary 'results', but you can be sure that there will be no lasting reward.¹⁰ Jesus said the Pharisees did many wonderful religious things, but for the wrong reasons.¹¹ Every one of us needs to constantly ask our Lord to purify our hearts and motives.¹²

Paul could say that it was the love of Christ that constrained him to serve.¹³ Can you agree with him? If you are serving the Lord from your heart, there will be joy,¹⁴ fruitfulness,¹⁵ and the necessary grace to complete the task He has given you.¹⁶

It's easy enough to talk about serving the Lord, but God wants us to be doers of His Word.¹⁷ Every believer has work to do in the kingdom and for the kingdom. We've all been blessed by God with talents and abilities¹⁸ that are to be used to edify each other¹⁹ and glorify the Lord.²⁰ However, it may be better not to do something than to do it grudgingly²¹ because that kind of attitude gives people the wrong impression about serving Jesus, who clearly stated, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light."²²

Is your walk with Jesus or your ministry for Him becoming a chore? Just a job, or a 'duty'? Then precious saint, get alone with Jesus and renew your marriage vows to Him.²³ Tell Him who or what troubles you.²⁴ And remember, your life is your ministry so whatever you do should be an overflow of a loving, intimate relationship with Him.²⁵

1-Eph 6:6, Col 3:22; 2-Matt 15:8; 3-Col 3:17,23; 4-Luke 16:15, Acts 1:24;
5-Heb 4:12,13; 6-Ex 25:22; 7-Psalm 51:10; 8-1 Cor 3:6-8; 9-1 Cor 13:1-3;
10-1 Cor 3:12-15; 11-Matt 6:1-6,16-18; 12-Psalm 19:12-14; 13-2 Cor 5:14;
14-Acts 20:24; 15-1 Cor 15:58; 16-1 Cor 15:10; 17-James 1:22;
18-1 Peter 4:10; 19-Rom 14:19, 15:2; 20-Matt 5:16; 21-Phil 2:14;
22-Matt 11:30; 23-Rom 7:4; 24-1 Peter 5:7; 25-John 17:3.

DAY 3

SECOND FIDDLE

It seems that everyone wants to be a soloist these days. Second fiddle is a difficult spot to fill because it does not receive the recognition one may think it deserves. It's sad but true that all too many who claim to be servants of Jesus Christ have the same mentality as many 'super stars'. There are those rebels in heart like Korah¹ who do not understand God's design and purpose in leadership. Not content with God's call upon their own lives,² they attack others that God has raised up.³

How different was Jonathan, who saw God's call upon David's life and submitted to his role as 'second fiddle'.⁴ I suspect Andrew got tired of being known as Simon Peter's brother (i.e., second fiddle).⁵ Something in our human nature desires recognition. Our flesh always wants it known that what we say and do is recognizably important and worthy of attention.

It is true freedom to be able to say about our Lord, "He must increase, but I must decrease."⁶ How liberating it is to prefer one another in honor⁷ and esteem others better than myself.⁸ We must all learn how to play second fiddle and submit to one another in the fear of the Lord.⁹ When we realize that there is only one Soloist in the Church,¹⁰ with many other back-up 'instruments,' then beautiful and harmonious music follows.

Every person is under, or more accurately, submissive to others whether it be at home, school, work, or church. We all line up under Christ in every area of life.¹¹ Second fiddles do not get headlines or spotlights. They are not found among the "Who's Who" lists. Just as our Lord Jesus played second fiddle to God the Father,¹² the greater part of Christ's body consists of individuals who, like their Lord, make themselves of no reputation.¹³

Each member of God's orchestra has a melody to carry,¹⁴ without which the symphony is incomplete. May we all keep our eyes fixed on the sheet music on our own stand,¹⁵ keep our attention on the Conductor,¹⁶ and enjoy the beauty of His workmanship.¹⁷ Playing together, in love, is the key to maturity in Christ.¹⁸ If my second fiddle is out of tune, it's because I've gotten my eyes off my sheet music and the Conductor,¹⁹ and that makes the whole band and song sound sour.

Saints, stay focused on your call. Keep looking to Jesus,²⁰ and let's stay in tune²¹ for the glory of the Lord.²²

1- Num 16:1-3; 2-Num 16:9-10; 3-Num 16:11; 4-1 Sam 23:16,17;
5-John 1:40; 6-John 3:30; 7-Rom 12:10; 8-Phil 2:3; 9-Eph 5:21;
10-Col 1:18; 11-Eph 1:22; 12-John 4:34, 8:29; 13-Phil 2:7;
14-1 Cor 12:12-14; 15-Psalm 1:1,2; 16-Phil 3:14; 17-Eph 2:10;
18-Eph 4:1-3; 19-John 21:21,22; 20-Heb 12:2; 21-Psalm 133:1;
22-1 Cor 10:31.

DAY 4

POSITION VERSUS CONDITION

Every disciple of Jesus Christ that I know of wrestles at times with his or her position in Christ while struggling with their current condition. Every believer is a member of the body of Christ.¹ We enter into that position² the moment we trust in Jesus as our Savior.³ However, we are presently in a transformation process carried out by the Spirit of God called sanctification.⁴

While we are in these mortal bodies we are going to be experiencing temptations,⁵ fiery trials,⁶ and fiery darts.⁷ Along with this, we will still miss God's will, fumble in our prayer lives, get "into it" with other people, and deal with the daily and seasonal changes and challenges of life. But Jesus assures us that our position in Him is to bring us peace because He has already overcome the tribulations of this world.⁸

Admittedly, our present condition often gets our eyes off our eternal position, which is why the apostle Paul spent the first three chapters of Ephesians on the issue of position in Christ. How important it is for us to camp in those chapters and soak our souls with an understanding of our position in and identity with Jesus Christ! God tells us we are "complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."⁹ Jesus has all authority and control, and we are secure in Him.¹⁰ One word that is used to describe believers in Jesus Christ is saints,¹¹ "hagios" in the Greek, meaning "sacred, consecrated, holy" - in other words, belonging to God.¹² But another word that could summarize our trek through this life of being conformed into the image of Jesus¹³ is groaning!¹⁴

I've found out that when I concentrate on my position in Christ, I can deal with my current condition and present situation, whatever they may be, with Christ. I also realize that my condition (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) effects my fellowship with my Lord, but not my relationship to Him.¹⁵ Therefore, giving all diligence, I daily desire to add to my faith.¹⁶

I'm confidently "absent from the Lord"¹⁷ while fearfully struggling with my flesh.¹⁸ The grace of God is the source of my position,¹⁹ as well as my condition.²⁰ Dwelling in the heavenlies makes for security,²¹ while walking in my mortality keeps me in constant need of my Lord.²² He is working;²³ I'm abiding.²⁴

So, whether my eyes look up or look out, the only object upon which I am to keep my focus is Jesus.²⁵ In Him my position and condition are one and the same.²⁶

1-1 Cor 12:13; 2-Eph 3:6; 3-Rom 10:8-10; 4-1 Peter 1:2; 5-1 Cor 10:13, James 1:13-15; 6-1 Peter 4:12; 7-Eph 6:16; 8-John 16:33; 9-Col 2:10; 10-John 10:28; 11-Phil 1:1; 12-1 Cor 6:19,20; 13-Rom 8:29; 14-Rom 8:23; 15-John 1:12; 16-2 Peter 1:5-8; 17-2 Cor 5:6-8; 18-Rom 7:18-24; 19-Eph 2:8-9; 20-1 Cor 15:10; 21-Eph 1:3; 22-Psalm 86:1-3; 23-Phil 2:13; 24-John 15:1-5; 25-Isaiah 26:3,4; 26-Rom 8:30.

DAY 5

TRUTH - THE FOUNDATION OF PERSPECTIVE

The surest way to discover a counterfeit is to put it alongside the original. In the arena of life it is necessary that we go back to the original pattern and move out from that blueprint, using the original (I'll call it truth) as the foundation of perspective. What Christians need more than anything today is truth. When the Lord Jesus prayed that believers be sanctified through truth, He told us what truth is - God's Word.¹ In fact, Jesus Himself personifies that truth.²

Truth and freedom go hand in hand, for when you know the truth, it sets you free.³ Therefore, truth is needed for freedom. Jesus indeed teaches us "the way of God in truth".⁴ The very beginnings of our faith stem from being "begotten with the word of truth".⁵

However, as the contemporary proverb goes, "Truth hurts." How many times have you been angry with someone because he or she has told you the truth? God wants us to be set free, but His freedom cannot be obtained at the expense of truth. If we are to grow in our relationship with God, we must walk in truth.⁶ That is the supreme desire of the Lord, and it brings Him His greatest joy.⁷ David said, "Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me".⁸ May that be our prayer and desire as well!

As the Lord works in our lives,⁹ the Holy Spirit is actively conforming us to the image of Jesus¹⁰ with the end result being a "manifestation of the truth".¹¹ The world system, under the rule of Satan,¹² is continually "changing the truth of God into a lie".¹³ The struggle that exists today comes from conforming to the lie (which results in bondage) as opposed to walking in the truth (which results in freedom).

The Spirit of the Lord grants liberty¹⁴ - not a self-centered liberty that gives occasion to the flesh,¹⁵ but a God-centered liberty that gives a genuine expression of love.¹⁶ Truth sets people free who have been bruised by divorce, loneliness, fear, drugs, abuse, etc., and the values of a godless society based on greed, looks, selfishness, and lies. I'm amazed that so many of God's people are still walking "as the rest of the Gentiles walk".¹⁷ The whole world system can be boiled down to "fleshly wisdom"¹⁸ that stems from a "fleshly mind"¹⁹ and feeds "fleshly lust."²⁰

How we dearly need God's Truth today! Jesus indeed is "Faithful and True";²¹ therefore, He can be trusted. "Whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he."²² The happiness that God gives has its basis in truth; in fact, agape rejoices in truth.²³ Truth is a very important ingredient in true worship.²⁴ What a sign of our depraved nature - that God has to repeatedly tell us that He is telling the truth!²⁵ In your daily life, as well as in those times when you must make important decisions, do you take into account what Scripture says and use that as your final say? Is the Word of God the final authority in your life? In your home? In your business?

Jesus Christ was the model for freedom on this earth, was He not? If we desire the freedom of God in our lives, then we must endeavor to imitate Him.²⁶ What was the source of our Lord's freedom as Son of Man? It wasn't in His financial security, for He 'needed' help too.²⁷ It was not in His looks,²⁸ nor did it come from His popularity.²⁹ No, the true freedom that Jesus Christ enjoyed came from a close relationship with His Father and a supreme desire to please Him.³⁰

If your aim in life, saint, is to know Christ better and glorify His name,³¹ then you too will enjoy the truth that sets you free and lasts forever.³²

1-John 17:17; John 14:6; 3-John 8:32; 4-Matt 22:16; 5-James 1:18;
6-3 John 3; 7-3 John 4; 8-Psalm 25:4,5a; 9-Phil 1:6, 2:13; 10-Rom 8:29;
11-2 Cor 4:2; 12-1 John 5:19; 13-Rom 1:25; 14-2 Cor 3:17; 15-Gal 5:13;
16-Gal 5:22-23; 17-Eph 4:17-18; 18-2 Cor 1:12; 19-Col 2:18;
20-1 Peter 2:11; 21-Rev 19:11; 22-Prov 16:20; 23-1 Cor 13:6;
24-John 4:23,24; 25-John 8:40,45, Prov 8:7,8; 26-1 John 2:6, Eph 5:1;
27-Luke 9:58; 28-Isaiah 53:2; 29-Isaiah 53:3; 30-John 8:29;
31-Psalm 86:11,12; 32-Psalm 117:2.

DAY 6

INSTRUCTION - A FORGOTTEN NEED

The Hebrew word for instruction means correction resulting in education. The word also carries the thought of discipline or chastisement. We must not forget that God's Word is given "for doctrine, reproof, correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."¹ Let's face it; we don't do a very good job of governing our lives. We need God's Word, like a compass, to direct us.

The book of Proverbs deals quite a bit with the subject of instruction. For example, Solomon wrote that God's instruction can be known,² received,³ or rejected.⁴ Parental instruction is endorsed,⁵ provided that it is "in the Lord".⁶

One of the rebukes spoken against Israel and Judah was, "they have not listened to receive instruction."⁷ God rebuked the wicked for speaking His words while rejecting His instruction.⁸ Sexual immorality, Proverbs teaches, will lead to the mournful confession:⁹ "How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised correction! I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me!"¹⁰ Much pain and sorrow can be avoided if one heeds the admonitions to: "Flee sexual immorality"¹¹ and "Flee also youthful lusts".¹² It's a simple fact that "reproofs of instruction are the way of life, to keep you from the evil woman".¹³

God instructs us as a father through His Word.¹⁴ He knows us completely.¹⁵ "He knows our frame...that we are dust."¹⁶ Therefore He clearly instructs us about spiritual, eternal matters as well as practical, temporal things. It is imperative that we possess absolute confidence in God's Word for our lives. He tells us that His instruction, knowledge and wisdom are better than silver, gold, or rubies.¹⁷ To refuse His words is spiritual suicide!¹⁸

God's instruction is perfect, sure, right, pure, true, desirable, 'sweet', and rewarding.¹⁹ His commandments²⁰ are not grievous.²¹ Therefore, be wise and heed your heavenly Father's instructions.²² That is the one thing that is needful,²³ and it will indicate that you are on "the way of life".²⁴

1-2 Tim 3:16-17; 2-Prov 1:2; 3-Prov 1:3; 4-Prov 1:7; 5-Prov 1:8-9;
6-Eph 6:1-3; 7-Jer 32:33; 8-Psalm 50:16-17; 9-Prov 5:3-11;
10-Prov 5:12,13; 11-1 Cor 6:18; 12-2 Tim 2:22; 13-Prov 6:23-24;
14-Prov 4:1; 15-Psalm 139:13-16; 16-Psalm 103:14; 17-Prov 8:10,11;
18-Prov 8:32-36, John 6:63,68; 19-Psalm 19:7-11; 20-Matt 22:37-39;
21-1 John 5:3; 22-Prov 13:1; 23-Luke 10:39,41,42; 24-Prov 10:17.

DAY 7

REGENERATION, NOT REHABILITATION

In our efforts to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ,¹ let us never allow our intellect to interfere with the “sword of the Spirit,”² the living Word of God.³ There can be an intellectual approach taken in evangelism that makes “the cross of Christ...of no effect.”⁴ Even the apostle Paul did not preach “with excellence of speech or of wisdom”⁵ “but in demonstration of the Spirit.”⁶

Perhaps in our attempts to be ‘sensitive’ to hurting souls both within and outside the church we’ve forgotten a basic truth: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”⁷ Man has a very serious problem called sin.⁸ Only the cross of Jesus Christ⁹ can wipe away the guilt of the past¹⁰ and make us new creatures in Christ.¹¹

As I see it, many believers are turning more to programs for help than to Jesus. Now I’m not questioning the existence of a problem, or a personal conviction that the Lord could use a program to bring about deliverance. What bothers me is that any person, saved or unsaved, can enroll in a rehabilitation program and with sheer determination kick the habit which enslaves them.¹² Born-again Christians are not the only ones who have quit drinking, doing drugs, gambling, etc. There are many rehabilitated pagans! But overcoming one bad habit does not empower a person to avoid others.¹³

The gospel of Christ, however, is not a mere ‘spiritual rehab program’, but “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”.¹⁴ Rehab programs are fine as long as they’re not seen as alternatives to the gospel. I fear, though, that many ‘disciples’ of these programs see them as ‘God-sent’ while remaining strangers to Jesus and His church family. Perhaps some, who may even say they “used to be Christian”, were hurt by careless, insensitive words, but the plain truth is that Jesus came to “save His people from their sins.”¹⁵

Modern psychology calls alcoholism a disease (that is licensed and taxed?). God says drunkenness is sin, one of the “works of the flesh”.¹⁶ How does one overcome this sin? Through the cross.¹⁷ Now the discussion about alcoholic tendencies being genetic may sound convincing, but God would not prevent someone from entering His Kingdom because of a disease! Cancer has not kept saints out of glory, but sin not covered by the blood of Christ,¹⁸ resulting in a “new man...created...in true righteousness and holiness”,¹⁹ will.

Regeneration does not mean perfection,²⁰ and saints struggle with their sin nature.²¹ A rehab program cannot solve the sin problem! Regeneration²² is not rehabilitation. Only rebirth²³ gives new life, and those whom the Son (not rehab programs) sets free, “shall be free indeed.”²⁴

1-Rom 15:1-4; 2-Eph 6:17; 3-Heb 4:12; 4-1 Cor 1:17; 5-1 Cor 2:1;
6-1 Cor 2:4-5; 7-1 Tim 1:15; 8-Rom 3:23, 6:23a; 9-1 Cor 2:2; 10-1 John 1:9;
11-2 Cor 5:17; 12-Rom 6:16; 13-Luke 11:24-26; 14-Rom 1:16;
15-Matt 1:21; 16-Gal 5:19,21; 17-Gal 6:14; 18-Eph 1:7; 19-Eph 4:24;
20-Phil 3:12; 21-Rom 7:18-24; 22-Titus 3:5; 23-John 3:5-7; 24-John 8:36.

DAY 8

DELIVERANCE

The Scriptures reveal our God as Deliverer. David recorded this;¹ so did Paul.² The only message in the entire universe that frees sinful, fallen man is the gospel of Jesus Christ.³

As Christians we need to cling to this liberty that Jesus Christ has given us.⁴ Interestingly enough, many people seem to actually 'prefer' bondage to freedom in Christ! The Word of God cites four sources of bondage. Let's look at them.

- (1) The world system: This is typified by Israel while in the land of Egypt. Life for Israel in Egypt was bitter and hard.⁵ The same is often true for people who live for this fallen, twisted world system.⁶ Never forget who 'runs' the systems of this world.⁷
- (2) Death: This bondage is the result of fear.⁸ However for those in Christ, death is dead!⁹ The only cure for the fear of death is faith in Jesus Christ because in Jesus, death is gain.¹⁰
- (3) False teaching: The entire second chapter of 2 Peter deals with this source of bondage. False teaching brings enslavement through fear, exploiting insecurity. Jesus Himself gave warning of false prophets,¹¹ and Paul told the Ephesian elders that these wolves would come in.¹² False teachers beat and intimidate sheep. What a contrast to Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for His sheep,¹³ that we might be enriched by Him,¹⁴ not enslaved by unbiblical rules or expectations.
- (4) Legalism: This may seem a lot like false teaching, but it isn't. A legalist is a person who tries to franchise the kingdom of God into one pattern or opinion - his! Of course, in Christ there are absolutes.¹⁵ Grace does not license sin¹⁶ or unholy living.¹⁷ However, there is room for different convictions on some issues.¹⁸

Yes, the Christian has been set free from the world system,¹⁹ death,²⁰ false teaching,²¹ and legalism.²² Deliverance from these sources of bondage is truly reason to rejoice!

1-2 Sam 22:1,2; 2-Rom 11:26; 3-1 Cor 15:1-4; 4-Gal 5:1; 5-Ex 1:14;
6-1 John 2:15-17; 7-1 John 5:19; 8-Heb 2:15; 9-1 Cor 15:54-57;
10-Phil 1:21; 11-Matt 7:15; 12-Acts 20:29,30; 13-John 10:11;
14-John 10:10b, 2 Cor 8:9; 15-Gal 1:6-9; 16-Rom 6:1,2; 17-Titus 2:14;
18-Rom 14; 19-Gal 6:14; 20-1 Thess 4:13-18; 21-1 John 2:20,27;
22-Col 2:16-23.

DAY 9

I'VE HAD IT!

When God saw the extent of the wickedness of man in the days of Noah, He essentially declared, "I've had it!" Man's unchecked flesh had thoroughly corrupted his way upon earth,¹ which had a devastating effect upon the entire planet and all that lived on it.² Mankind's vile human nature³ was in such total control that he was beyond repentance. He had so completely rejected God's way that God in His justice and mercy had to put an end to such wickedness.⁴

We Christians need to become fed up with the sin in our own lives, and take to heart Paul's exhortation: "Be angry, and do not sin"⁵. We must say to our unredeemed,⁶ Christ-hating flesh,⁷ "I've had it!" God told Noah that His Spirit would not strive indefinitely with the sinful nature of man.⁸ Likewise, if we are going to have productive lives in God's kingdom, our spirit must not strive with our Creator!⁹

Are you content living with unsundered (read that, 'rebellious') areas in your life? Have you taken all you possess - your dreams and regrets, your future and past, your 'rights' - to Calvary and declared: "I've had it, Jesus! Take it all; take me, no reservations"¹⁰ Have you taken those easily besetting sins¹¹ - wrong attitudes, lukewarm service, or sins of the tongue - to Jesus and said, "I'm sick of this, Lord! I hate these sins; I've had it!"?

You see, it's not until we've 'had it' and repented of our sin that we can begin to see the proverbial 'light at the end of the tunnel.'¹² Is there really any sin or habit that we hang on to that is worth the grief or "wages" that it pays?¹³ The fact is that even as believers we still possess an unredeemed body with unredeemed emotions, and we are in a civil war.¹⁴ However, as we respond by the grace of God to the Spirit of God, then we'll bear His fruit.¹⁵

My friend, where are you habitually sowing your seed?¹⁶ I'm afraid too many have jumped from the Ark¹⁷ of Christ, or have turned back to Egypt¹⁸ (which depicts worldliness). Oh, they may not be involved in adultery or pornography, but there's worse. Many have been lulled into a spiritual amnesia, forgetting God's Word, or have become indifferent to the needs of others. Sad to say, but these are typical descriptions of the nominal American Christian.

Jesus went all the way to the cross and died for you.¹⁹ Won't you die to your flesh for Him?²⁰ Won't you stop striving with God? When I remember Calvary I'm angry for allowing "the little foxes"²¹ of compromise to spoil the Vine.²² I've had it! Will you join me in a holy rebellion? After all, we are in days comparable to Noah's,²³ and it's later than we think!²⁴

1-Gen 6:5,12; 2-Gen 6:7,11; 3-Jer 17:9; 4-Gen 6:13; 5-Eph 4:26-27;
6-James 1:14,15; 7-Rom 7:18,21-25; 8-Gen 6:3; 9-Isaiah 45:9a; 10-Heb 10:39;
11-Heb 12:1; 12-1 John 1:5-7; 13-Rom 6:23a; 14-Gal 5:17; 15-Gal 5:22-23;
16-Gal 6:8; 17-Gen 7:16,17; 18-Num 14:4; 19-Heb 2:9; 20-2 Cor 5:15,
Rom 12:1; 21-Song 2:15; 22-John 15:5; 23-Luke 17:26-27; 24-Rom 13:11-14.

DAY 10

ETERNAL LIFE - A GIFT OR A REWARD?

With regards to evangelism it is vital for Christians to understand that an unsaved person's only defense is a system of works or performance, based on a comparison with others. For example, a family member, when presented the gospel,¹ may cite areas in your life where you are not 'measuring up' - poor handling of finances, or something like that. The implication is that you as a believer are failing in some way, whereas I, who have 'my own belief system' am not. In other words, the unsaved person is implying he or she is as good a person as you are, maybe even better.

Devilish religion is always centered around man's works, not the work of Jesus.² Let's face it; unbelievers will be able to see areas in our lives where we fall short (and we'll see areas in theirs where they do well). No Christian is a perfect parent, child, employer, employee, etc. The amazing thing is that if unbelievers prefer to stand before God on the basis of works, they must conclude that they are perfect, because perfection is what God demands³ if one is to gain eternal life.⁴ Perfection has set foot on this planet in the Person of Jesus Christ and in Him alone.⁵ There will never be a duplication of Jesus on earth.

Scripture declares that all men have fallen short of God's glory⁶ and have failed to meet His standard of performance.⁷ It doesn't matter to what degree we've fallen; the fact is that we all have. It seems, though, that our society has become so distant from the true and living God⁸ that we've reduced the gospel to a teaching that merely equips people to become better citizens. Most people who live 'normal lives' think the call to repentance⁹ is only for the alcoholics, drug dealers, homeless, or those without a college degree, those who have great difficulty coping in life. How sad! How blinded! How self-righteous! How far from the truth of God's Word!¹⁰

Our society revolves around financial, social and educational segregation. We are not so concerned with a person's relationship with Jesus and eternal life as we are with their 'value' to society. The conclusion that the unsaved reaches is to compare their performance with the Christian, with the result something like this: 'I believe in God too, and I'm as good as that person (or so the devil would have them believe). Therefore, IF there is a heaven, I'll get there, based on my performance.' In reality, that's not much different from the account Jesus gave of the Pharisee and the publican.¹¹

Reader, you may be a better person than I in many areas. However, on Judgment Day you won't be able to compare our lives and gain entrance into heaven by out-performing me.¹² No, you'll stand before the Perfect, Holy, Righteous Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. Then how will you measure up?

1-1 Cor 15:1-4; 2-Heb 9:14; 3-Deut 18:13, Matt 5:48; 4-Matt 19:16-26;
5-John 1:14, Heb 2:9,10; 6-Rom 3:23; 7-Rom 3:10-12; 8-Jer 10:10;
9-Mark 1:15b; 10-Luke 13:1-5; 11-Luke 18:9-14; 12-Rev 20:11-13.

DAY 11

SAFETY IN CHRIST

Proverbs 21:31 tells us that “safety is of the LORD.” I might add that there is only true safety in the LORD. However, there is a counterfeit safety too. The end-times message of antichrist is one of “peace and safety”.¹ By contrast, David humbly prayed to God, “Hold me up, and I shall be safe”.²

With so much uncertainty surrounding our lives, the need is urgent to remind ourselves that : “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”³ Our God has declared: “Whoever listens to Me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.”⁴ What glorious protection believers have in Jesus Christ! “Whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.”⁵

Now you may have a security system in your home, car, or business, but do you realize that, just as a horse (a symbol of strength and security) was a vain thing for safety in the past,⁶ likewise today anything in which you trust for security apart from Christ is vain? Some people are trusting in their religion,⁷ or their ‘good works’,⁸ or their “uncertain riches”.⁹ How foolish to build a life on such unsure things! One thing is for sure: “Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust”.¹⁰

Yes, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses”,¹¹ some trust in their wealth;¹² but as for me, I have put my trust in the LORD God¹³ rather than in Egypt,¹⁴ which is symbolic of the world system. There exists an immovable faith when we trust in Jesus.¹⁵

Where is the source of your security today? Can your security withstand an economic recession, ill health, nuclear war, loneliness, death? Trusting in Jesus Christ¹⁶ and acting upon His word,¹⁷ provides a lasting security.¹⁸

May the stronghold¹⁹ of Christ’s love grant you security today!²⁰

1-1 Thess 5:3; 2-Psalm 119:117; 3-Prov 18:10; 4-Prov 1:33; 5-Prov 29:25;
6-Psalm 33:17; 7-Phil 3:4-6; 8-Luke 18:11,12; 9-1 Tim 6:17; 10-Psalm 40:4;
11-Psalm 20:7; 12-Psalm 49:6; 13-Psalm 118:8,9; 14-Isaiah 30:1-3;
15-Psalm 125:1; 16-Eph 1:13; 17-Matt 7:24-25; 18-John 10:27-30;
19-Nahum 1:7; 20-Rom 8:35-39.

DAY 12

DON'T GO DOWN TO EGYPT

In the Scriptures Egypt symbolizes the world system and, to the born again¹ believer in Jesus Christ,² it is a type of the old life.² It pictures a place of bondage and affliction,⁴ a place where life is ruled by a cruel taskmaster.⁵ Our heavenly Father, however, has a plan of redemption⁶ that has many phases, among which is deliverance from Egypt, from the old way of life, and from this present evil, fallen world system.

The prophet Jeremiah delivered God's message to the remnant of Judah, saying, "Do not go to Egypt!"⁷ Isaiah had to deliver God's rebuke to His children for going down to Egypt to seek counsel, strength and security.⁸ The apostle John warned: "Do not love the world or the things in the world."⁹

From time to time in our walk,¹⁰ we may get faint, weary, or disillusioned. Our prayers don't seem to be answered, and God's Word isn't as exciting as it once was. You know what I'm talking about - a 'dry' season. Satan, like a predator, patiently sits at the door of your thoughts whispering, 'Go back to the old life.' You see, the devil loves it when we take matters out of God's hands back into our own. We must remember that anything Satan says is a lie,¹¹ and the world that he rules over¹² is a web of deceit. As our soul's enemy,¹³ the devil wants us to be devoured in and by Egypt. Saints, when the flood of compromise or temptation arises, God's commands are clear - submit to Him and resist the devil!¹⁴

We resist the evil one by agreeing with the Word of God. God's Word is truth,¹⁵ and truth is reality. God desires that we live in reality, but Satan wants us to walk in confusion, darkness, and unreality. One reality that we must face is that, even as Christians, our flesh¹⁶ is unredeemed and absolutely good for nothing,¹⁷ totally void of a love for Jesus or God's kingdom. It is our spirit that is redeemed, which means there is continual warfare.¹⁸ But in this battle called life, thank God that we can rely on Jesus' strength when we are weak.¹⁹ Thank God that we can talk to our Father and cast all of our cares, big or small, at His feet.²⁰ Thank God that we have each other during those difficult times.²¹

Satan will never stop harassing the child of God this side of Glory. Moreover, he's very experienced and a master at deception. However, who has ever prospered by resisting God's will²² and returning to Egypt? So when the enemy starts tickling your ears with the promise of an 'all expense paid trip back to Egypt,' remember that Jesus says, 'Don't go there.' "Come to Me."²³

1-John 3:5-7; 2-John 20:31; 3-Eph 4:22; 4-Deut 26:6; 5-Ex 3:7;
6-1 Peter 1:18-19; 7-Jer 42:19; 8-Isaiah 30:1-3; 9-1 John 2:15-17;
10-2 Cor 5:7; 11-John 8:44; 12-1 John 5:19; 13-1 Peter 5:8; 14-James 4:4-7;
15-John 17:17; 16-John 3:6; 17-Rom 7:18; 18-Gal 5:16,17; 19-2 Cor 12:9;
20-1 Peter 5:6-7; 21-Gal 6:2; 22-Job 9:4; 23-Matt 11:28-30.

DAY 13

THE ILLUSION OF PLEASURE

No, I'm not ascetic! I'm thankful for the many ways that Jesus, my Creator,¹ has blessed me. He has saved my soul² and given me many pleasures, both spiritually and materially. I'm truly grateful for His good gifts.³

However, we often reverse our order of pleasures, relying too much on physical things for satisfaction. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well: "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."⁴ Likewise, we too need to be reminded that the physical pleasures of this life will not bring total or lasting satisfaction. Only the living water of the Spirit of Jesus⁵ can do that. Our only reliable, continual source of pleasure⁶ comes from walking in fellowship with God.

In a society that is so materially oriented, the Church needs to be reminded of its purpose. We need to delight ourselves in the Lord,⁷ and be diligent in seeking Him.⁸ That's the road to pleasure and prosperity, for God graciously prospers those who seek Him.⁹ While there is no guarantee of financial wealth, or even physical health, we do experience daily renewal¹⁰ and have a Spiritual guarantee¹¹ of better things to come.¹²

However, many in the Church today are trying to have 'the best of both worlds', but it just cannot happen.¹³ While God does want us to gratefully enjoy all the blessings He gives us,¹⁴ we must not forsake Him to focus on temporary worldly pleasures.¹⁵ We are told not to walk as the unsaved do, "in the futility" (or literally, illusion) "of their mind".¹⁶ Seasonal, passing pleasures¹⁷ can never substitute for the lasting, living water of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

To the one who would hear and heed God's call,¹⁹ let Jesus, not the world, grant the fulfillment of your needs and pleasures in life.²⁰

1-John 1:1-3; 2-Psalm 86:13, Titus 3:5; 3-James 1:17; 4-John 4:13-14;
5-John 7:37-39; 6-Psalm 36:8; 7-Psalm 37:4; 8-Isaiah 55:6; 9-Heb 11:6,
2 Chron 26:5; 10-2 Cor 4:16; 11-2 Cor 5:5; 12-2 Cor 4:17-5:1;
13-Matt 6:24; 14-1 Tim 6:17; 15-Jer 2:13; 16-Eph 4:17; 17-Heb 11:25;
18-John 4:10; 19-Isaiah 55:1-3; 20-Matt 6:32,33.

DAY 14

POSSIBLE OR IMPOSSIBLE?

Oftentimes we Christians in casual conversation speak words that convey our lack of faith in the Lord. We communicate doubt, excuses, and downright displeasure with what He's doing in our lives. We also talk about God as if He were a mere mortal like ourselves. We say things like: "It's an impossible situation" or, "I couldn't possibly do that for the Lord!" The one statement declares God's inability to work things out, and the other denies His ability to work through me. They both deny God's Word and deify our own way of thinking. Instead, we need to change our way of thinking¹ with God's Word.²

The Scriptures tell us that it is impossible for God to lie.³ Thus, we can conclude that since God's Word is truth,⁴ it can be trusted as the final authority in our lives. God keeps His promises,⁵ and not one word He speaks fails or returns void.⁶ Since I can trust God, I need to seek His will for my life and live accordingly.⁷ His Word will reveal His will to me.⁸ So, if I find myself overwhelmed by contrary circumstances, feelings, temptations, or whatever, I must choose whether to believe God's truth⁹ or my subjective emotions or contrary condition. In other words, if God promises strength¹⁰ but I feel weak; if God promises His supply¹¹ and my resources are depleted; if God promises perfect peace¹² but I feel all bound up, what am I going to allow to shape my thinking and determine my speech and actions? I must choose whether to listen to the evil report of 'giants in the land'¹³ or enter the Canaan of rest in God's Word.¹⁴

Now I have a tendency to dash to God's "throne of grace",¹⁵ speak my piece and leave, but I find that kind of prayer profits me little because I'm not really casting my cares upon Him as I'm told.¹⁶ But if I pray believing¹⁷ that nothing is impossible for God,¹⁸ then prayer becomes the arena where impossibilities become possible.¹⁹ The situations in my life that I consider to be impos-sible are largely due to the fact that the agent I'm counting on to do the work is not God, but man. If my eyes are fixed upon the Creator of all,²⁰ then even if nothing else changes, I will. I must believe Christ's words that "with God all things are possible."²¹ I must also remember that I cannot please Him without faith,²² but if I believe Him, then all things are possible.²³ In other words, our Lord is telling us that He, without any help from us, is able to do what seems impossible in our lives - in our health, finances, relationships - whatever the need may be.

So take that one prevailing 'mountain' in your life today to the Lord in serious (not merely emotional) prayer, as in Luke 18:1-7. See if this will not transfer the burden from your shoulders to Christ's, where it should be! Recall the seemingly impossible situations in your past with which Jesus has successfully dealt. It may also help to talk with (not complain to!) a mature believer about your 'impossibility', seeking godly wisdom and counsel. And always remember God's love, which recognized the impossibility of mankind's salvation²⁴ apart from the cup of Calvary's cross that Jesus had to drink.²⁵

Saints, if you are walking in the Lord's light²⁶ but today are being troubled by disturbing circumstances, remember that nothing is too hard for God to do.²⁷ "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."²⁸

1-Rom 12:2; 2-Psalm 19:7; 3-Num 23:19, Heb 6:18; 4-John 17:17;
5-Heb 10:23, 1 Kings 8:56; 6-Isaiah 55:11; 7-James 1:22-25;
8-Psalm 119:105; 9-Psalm 119:30; 10-Psalm 29:11, Phil 4:13; 11-Phil 4:19,
12-Phil 4:7, Isaiah 26:3; 13-Num 13:32,33; 14-Heb 3:4-9; 15-Heb 4:16;
16-1 Peter 5:7; 17-Matt 21:22; 18-Luke 1:37; 19-Jer 33:3; 20-Acts 4:24;
21-Mark 10:27; 22-Heb 11:6; 23-Mark 9:23; 24-Heb 10:4;
25-Matt 26:39,42; 26-1 John 1:7; 27-Jer 32:17; 28-Luke 18:27.

DAY 15

THE GIFT OF COMFORTING

So often we associate words with the wrong meaning. This holds true with the topic of comfort. When I think of comfort my mind begins to play a tape of leisure, ease and abundance. However, when God speaks of comfort, what does He mean? After all, God's definition of comfort is the true one.

In Psalm 119 we read that God's Word was the psalmist's comfort in his affliction,¹ and he searched the Word of God asking for comfort.² The Bible is spiritual medicine³ as well as spiritual food.⁴ God has designed a 'comforting mechanism' within His Word for those who have ears to hear what He is really saying!⁵

If you are afflicted or distressed, God desires to speak comfort to you today. Jesus wants to say to you, "Be of good comfort; your faith has made you whole."⁶ It isn't the absence of problems, but a knowledge of the presence of God that comforts our souls. God Himself promises, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you".⁷ The Scriptures were written to give comfort.⁸ The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter,⁹ and our heavenly Father is the "God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."¹⁰

Do you see the reason Paul gives for God's comforting? It's not to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters like God is! More than once Paul exhorted the saints to comfort one another.¹¹

It is interesting that the Greek word for 'comfort' means, 'to call near, invite'. Therefore, as we draw near to Jesus through prayer, meditating on His Word, and fellowship with one another, He draws near to us,¹² giving us comfort.¹³ Yes, the comfort of God is a heavenly gift bestowed upon all those who believe in Jesus Christ.

"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."¹⁴

1-Psalm 119:50; 2-Psalm 119:82; 3-Psalm 119:25,28; 4-Luke 4:4;
5-Psalm 85:8, Jer 13:15; 6-Luke 8:48; 7-Isaiah 66:13; 8-Rom 15:4;
9-John 14:16,26, 15:26, 16:7; 10-2 Cor 1:3-4; 11-1 Thess 4:18, 5:11,14;
12-James 4:8a; 13-Psalm 23:4; 14-2 Thess 2:16-17.

DAY 16

BE PATIENT

I find that between being hyperactive and living in the 'microwave generation,' being patient is not the easiest thing to do. Isn't it funny that we often accuse God of having poor timing? I mean, we just know that the Lord has fouled up this time, don't we? Yet, time after time, God's Word whispers firmly but gently to me, 'Be patient.' However, I can choose not to be patient. I can strive and try to out-muscle and out-wit God (which stems from pride). The end result of doing things my way is always disaster and never peaceful.

Frank Sinatra sold a million records declaring, "My Way". Jesus Christ sweat drops of blood in Gethsemane declaring to His Father, "Thy way".¹ My way is the way of impatience; God's way is the patient way. Psalm 37:7 tells us to, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him". In other words, trust in Him and His timing.

Now being patient does not encourage inactivity, but there are many times when God might speak a promise to your heart and yet the fruition of that promise may not occur until years later. (Remember Abraham's promised son?²) We often need to exercise patience after we have done God's will because rarely are the promises fulfilled immediately (or 'microwave style'). In fact, I have discovered that the Lord, in between the time of my petition and His answer, is just as concerned with my attitude and response to Him during the waiting period as He is about granting my request.

Quite often tribulation comes during this time; the devil attacks immediately.³ Winds of adversity and clouds of gloom overcome me. I hit the 'eject' switch and the panic button at the same time, and cry out to the Lord, "Help! I can't last! I'm going to fall!" His response? 'Child, be patient. Don't confuse how you feel with what I am doing.' I say, convicted, that when I get impatient with the Lord, my heart's prayer should be, 'Lord, be patient with me!' Thank God, He is! In fact, He's more than patient; He's longsuffering.⁴

God's Word exhorts us to patiently continue in well-doing;⁵ be patient in tribulation;⁶ be patient toward all men;⁷ patiently await the return of Jesus;⁸ and be patient when wrongly accused.⁹ In fact, our experience with Jesus is be as running a race with patience.¹⁰ How can we possibly do this? The only way is by "looking unto Jesus".¹¹ If you trust Him as the Lord of your life, instead of seeking to escape from the trials,¹² come to His throne of grace.¹³ You'll find that as you wait on Him, He will renew your strength.¹⁴

So, saints, be patient! God's timing is always right, and very beautiful.¹⁵

1-Luke 22:42,44; 2-Gen 12:1-7, 15:1-4, 16:1-3, 18:10-14, 21:1-5;
3-Mark 4:15; 4-Ex 34:6, Num 14:18, Psalm 86:15, 1 Tim 1:16, 2 Peter 3:15;
5-Rom 2:7; 6-Rom 12:12; 7-1 Thess 5:14; James 5:7,8; 9-1 Peter 2:20;
10-Heb 12:1; 11-Heb 12:2; 12-James 1:2-4; 13-Heb 4:16; 14-Isaiah 40:31;
15-Psalm 31:15a, Eccl 3:11a.

DAY 17

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

How do you react to the blessings of God in another person's life? Do you get upset, hurt, envious, angry at God? Or do you react with joy and praise to our Lord Jesus? He asked: "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I wish with My own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?"¹ These queries were brought about by some laborers who were upset because the 'new kid in the Kingdom' got the same pay that they did. They didn't think it was fair that God looked upon all of His workers equally, especially since they had borne "the burden and heat of the day." They obviously thought they deserved more than those 'eleventh-hour' servants.² Our Lord's words give us some helpful insight, as well as some timely counsel.

The first thing that we must fix in our minds is that in God's eyes, all of His "sheep"³ are equal.⁴ There are different degrees of calling, different ministries and types of ministering, different talents and abilities,⁵ but no rank whatsoever.⁶ God is no respecter of persons,⁷ but "He is Lord of all",⁸ and dispenses His gifts and blessings as He chooses.

This prerogative He has as God, is the second thought we must fix in our minds. He, and He alone, grants favor, benefits, and rewards to His people. If you are feeling 'short-changed' by God, let me remind you that He does reserve rewards for heaven. (See Isaiah 62:11, Matt 5:12, 16:27, 1 Cor 3:8, Col 3:24, Rev 22:12.) In fact, the apostle John exhorts us to keep laboring in order to receive "a full reward."⁹

Being human, though, we often look at things from a purely earthly perspective. We might associate good times, health, and riches with divine blessings, and think of ill health and poverty as evidences of disapproval. The example Jesus gave in Luke 16:19-25 refutes this way of thinking. However, this raises another issue. It is disturbing and vexing to us to observe the wicked in their prosperity while fellow Christians struggle to provide food for their families. We may wonder why the unsaved enjoy good health while some sold-out saints suffer with physical maladies. Again, we must remember that God has the right to do what He chooses. Also, keeping a heavenly perspective will enable us to see beyond the temporary afflictions,¹⁰ and view the inequities of life in the light of eternal values.¹¹

You may be wondering, though, why some Christians are showered with blessings while other saints appear to be overlooked. Once again, we must trust in God's sovereignty and goodness. Hebrews 11:6 assures us that, "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." However, those rewards are not always given to us while here on earth. Perhaps therein lies much of the problem.

Is it possible that we've looked to circumstances as signs of God's approval? For example thinking, 'Today I feel great; therefore Jesus loves me' as opposed to: 'I'm ill, but brother Ray is healthy, so it must be that Jesus loves him more than me.' How foolish! Perish the thought that God would love one saint more than another when Jesus Himself has told us that the Father loves us as much as He loves Jesus!¹²

Our Lord's blessings have nothing to do with receiving more or less of His love. We are all His friends,¹³ as well as His family.¹⁴ God's blessings upon us are all tokens of His goodness, love, mercy, and grace; and, although we are all equal, He deals with us as individuals according to His knowledge of what is best for each one.¹⁵ Remember, in His parable Jesus assured those who had labored all day that He did them no wrong by paying them what He did.¹⁶

For you see, we are not on a works or merit system here on earth. We don't earn God's blessings; nor can we just push some button and have them fall upon us. God doesn't owe us His blessings! Now the Scriptures do teach principles of sowing and reaping,¹⁷ but because of His great love for us, God often blesses us beyond what we might expect our meager sowing to produce.

The Lord's questions to the laborers at the beginning of this study are a prompt to us to examine our motives and perspective lest we, like the church at Ephesus, do the right things but with the wrong motives.¹⁸ We must beware of assessing our earthly 'returns' for serving God, and avoid comparing them with what others are receiving, for this can lead to an attitude of complaining that accuses God of being unfair. We can certainly enjoy our relationship with God in spite of our circumstances, but if I find that joy fading away when I see 'with an evil eye' God's goodness toward another saint, then I must remember that all I really deserve is death!¹⁹ Oh, how thankful I am that God has never dealt with me according to what I deserve!

It is God's goodness that leads me to repentance.²⁰ His goodness is the fountain of every good thing.²¹ His goodness controls His blessings on earth.²² So learn to enjoy and be content with what you have,²³ saints, knowing that the Lord will not overlook your labors of love.²⁴

1-Matt 20:15; 2-Matt 20:1-14; 3-Psalm 95:7, 100:3; 4-Gal 3:28;
5-1 Cor 12:4-6; 6-1 Cor 12:11-13; 7-Eph 6:9, Rom 2:11, Acts 10:34;
8-Acts 10:36; 9-2 John 8; 10-2 Cor 4:17-18; 11-Psalm 73; 12-John 17:23;
13-John 15:15; 14-Mark 3:34,35; 15-Rom 8:28; 16-Matt 20:13; 17-Gal 6:8,
2 Cor 9:6; 18-Rev 2:1-4; 19-Rom 3:23, 6:23; 20-Rom 2:4; 21-James 1:17;
22-Matt 5:45; 23-Heb 13:5; 24-Heb 6:10, 1 Cor 15:58.

DAY 18

THE STING OF PRIDE

Pride is perhaps the gravest sin in humans. It overestimates self and underestimates God and others. The Bible tells us quite a bit about this ugly sin. For one thing, God hates pride and arrogance¹ in any area of life, whether it is spiritual pride² (like the Pharisees exhibited³), mental pride (exalting intelligence), social pride (a personal caste system), or physical pride (worshipping beauty, athleticism, etc.).

Mark it well, saints; God hates pride⁴ and will judge it.⁵ One reason is that, “By pride comes nothing but strife,”⁶ meaning pride always leads to interpersonal problems. Another translation of this verse reads, “Only by pride comes contention”; therefore, whenever there is contention, pride must be present. Pride starts quarrels, sows discord, and puts others down in order to lift up self.

We’re all familiar with the ‘proud as a peacock’ image of pride, when a person ‘struts his stuff’. However, a proud person can also be one who is very quiet and calm, never admitting to having any problems or needs. This type of pride even denies the need for Christian fellowship⁷ and prayer,⁸ contrary to the exhortations of the Bible. This form of pride makes it a point to act holy, disguising itself behind a mask of strength, and is always doing ‘just fine.’

However, in reality pride is the path of destruction.⁹ A new believer who has ‘skyrocketed’ spiritually is cautioned against desiring a place of church leadership lest he be lifted up with pride.¹⁰ Scripture declares more than once that God is actively opposed to the proud,¹¹ and will destroy his house.¹² Again, this is because, “He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife”.¹³ Pride has caused heartaches, divorces, and wars, destroyed businesses and split churches, and was even the downfall of an exalted, angelic worship leader!¹⁴

Pride puts self - ‘rights’, dreams, goals, and even ministries - on the throne instead of Jesus Christ. May we all continually repent of every trace of pride in our lives¹⁵ and follow the perfect example of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who clothed Himself with humility.¹⁶

1-Prov 8:13; 2-Matt 6:1,25,16; 3-Matt 23:1-12; 4-Prov 6:16-17;
5-Isaiah 2:11,12,17; 6-Prov 13:10; 7-Heb 10:24-25; 8-James 5:16;
9-Prov 16:18, 11:2a, 29:23a; 10-1 Tim 3:6; 11-James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5;
12-Prov 15:25; 13-Prov 28:25; 14-Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezek 28:13-17;
15-Rom 12:3; 16-Phil 2:5-8.

DAY 19

PLEASING GOD

Pleasing God doesn't sound very theological, does it? The fact of the matter is, though, that it is the very essence of our theology. We would probably all agree that we like to be pleased, but how about doing the things that please Jesus?

Our Lord said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."¹ Obedience to the Lord is pleasing to Him. In fact, the Bible tells us that when children obey their parents, God is pleased² (as well as the parents!). Jesus said that He always did what pleased His Father.³ As Christians, we should aim for that mark also.⁴ Think of your daily routine. How much of the dry, repetitive, mundane duty would be made glorious if done wholeheartedly to please your Lord?⁵

Actually, we are pleasing someone with all that we do. The important question is, 'Who?' Should we compromise our faith due to some kind of fear, that we subsequently please men?⁶ Should we ignore or refuse a direct command of Scripture to satisfy our carnal nature in order to please ourselves?⁷ "Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"⁸ What we should do is submit completely and unquestionably to the Lord, that we may walk in a manner pleasing to Him.⁹ We must choose to please God continually, with our lips and our lives.¹⁰ However, it is impossible for us to please God without faith.¹¹

Pleasing Jesus is an act of the will. It is not a good feeling or a peaceful thought, but a deliberate choice to live, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the Lord each day. We will all fail at times. We may even be tempted to 'throw in the towel.' If, however, in spite of our failures and our feelings, we truly desire to please our Lord, He will make victory inevitable, "for it is God who works in (us) both to will and to do for His good pleasure."¹²

1-John 14:15; 2-Col 3:20; 3-John 8:29; 4-1 John 3:22; 5-Col 3:23;
6-Gal 1:10; 7-2 Tim 4:3-4, 2 Peter 3:3; 8-Rom 6:2; 9-Col 1:10, 1 Thess 4:1;
10-Heb 13:15; 11-Heb 11:6; 12-Phil 2:13.

DAY 20

LABOR IN REST

Now if that doesn't sound like a contradiction in terms! But it's Biblical. In Hebrews 4:11 we're exhorted to "be diligent" or "labor" to enter into the rest of God's salvation. In fact, Jesus told the people who followed Him: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you".¹

However, nowhere does God suggest that once we are saved we are to simply fall asleep! While we indeed do rest in Christ,² there is also a harvest to reap, which Jesus said is "plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."³

The Greek words most frequently used for "labor" in the New Testament mean, "to feel fatigue, to work hard, toil, be wearied", and they carry the idea of "pains". It is not coincidental that the usually painful process of bringing a child into the world is termed "labor"! Likewise, laboring for the Lord is not painless. Thrilling? Yes. Rewarding? Yes. But to tell others that serving the Lord is without effort or fatigue or discomfort is not being totally honest.

The apostle Paul noted other believers who labored on behalf of the saints,⁴ and he talked about his ministry as a labor.⁵ He told young Timothy to especially acknowledge those elders "who labor in the word and doctrine."⁶ Paul gave recognition to Epaphroditus as a "fellow worker,"⁷ and to Epaphras as one who labored fervently in prayer.⁸ Furthermore, Paul taught the Corinthian believers that our rewards at Christ's judgment seat⁹ will be according to our "own labor."¹⁰ Now that should make us break out in a spiritual sweat! Even agape is called a "labor of love".¹¹

Sometimes we push ourselves for Jesus and it doesn't seem to make any difference at all. In fact, things may even 'go sour' at times. Then the devil plies his tools of discouragement, lack of vision, and frustration. In essence he whispers, 'Give up. Quit now. It's not going to succeed, and you'll just make a fool of yourself.' If that's you today, saint, stop right now. Check your motives and confess any self-centered desires. Ignore the 'apparent failures' and get back on the job, for "your labor is not in vain in the Lord."¹²

1-John 6:27; 2-Heb 4:9,10, Matt 11:28,29; 3-Matt 9:37,38; 4-Rom 16:6,12; 5-Gal 4:11, Phil 1:22; 6-1 Tim 5:17; 7-Phil 2:25; 8-Col 4:12; 9-2 Cor 5:10; 10-1 Cor 3:8; 11-1 Thess 1:3; 12-1 Cor 15:58, Heb 6:10.

DAY 21

WHAT IS YOUR DESIRE?

The Scriptures have a wealth of information regarding different desires that exist in humanity. For example, the desire of a righteous man is for good,¹ but the greedy desire of the slothful is deadly;² and “the desire of the wicked shall perish.”³ In other words, it will either not be fulfilled, or, even if temporarily achieved, it will fail to be fulfilling or bring lasting satisfaction.

An individual’s desires shape his will and motivate his actions. Before we were “born again” by the Spirit of God,⁴ we used to spend our lives in trying to fulfill the desires of our flesh and mind.⁵ King Solomon decided to indulge all his desires, but came to the conclusion that, “all was vanity and grasping for the wind.”⁶

Needless to say, if we desire (that is, purpose in our heart) to live a life that honors God, then we need to establish godly, Christ-centered desires in our lives. Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Desire to know Jesus more than anyone else.⁷
- 2) Desire the spiritual gifts to empower you for service.⁸
- 3) Desire God’s Word so you may mature spiritually.⁹
- 4) Desire Christian fellowship.¹⁰
- 5) Desire to be clothed with immortality.¹¹
- 6) Desire to be in the New Jerusalem.¹²

Since daily we are bombarded with the ungodly desires that abound in our world, we need to prayerfully and diligently apply our will to the way that leads upward.¹³ Satan desires our downfall,¹⁴ so we must keep our eyes on Jesus, and earnestly apply His Word, “lest we drift away.”¹⁵

I asked at the beginning what you desire. Perhaps it would be more to the point to ask, ‘Who is the author of your desires?’ The Lord promises that if we delight ourselves in Him,¹⁶ He will not only put His desires in us, but He’ll then also bring them to pass.¹⁷

Let’s desire God’s will for our lives, because His desire is for us!¹⁸

1-Prov 11:23; 2-Prov 21:25,26a; 3-Psalm 112:10c; 4-John 3:5-7; 5-Eph 2:3;
6-Eccl 2:10,11; 7-Psalm 73:25; 8-1 Cor 14:1,12,39; 9-1 Peter 2:2;
10-1 Thess 2:17, 3:6; 11-2 Cor 5:1,2; 12-Heb 11:16; 13-Prov 15:24;
14-Luke 22:31; 15-Heb 2:1; 16-Psalm 37:4; 17-Phil 2:13; 18-Song 7:10.

DAY 22

PERFECT PEACE

When we hear the word “peace” we may instinctively think of a calm summer night with a beautiful sunset covering a quiet lake. No phone calls, noise, or responsibilities to disturb our tranquility. Pretty peaceful, right? And thank God for those occasional vacations when such fantasies become reality! However, the point I want to make is that nearly anyone can have this kind of peace. A rich person can ‘buy’ this peace. Biblical peace, however, is quite different. You see, the peace that God gives is beyond understanding.¹ God’s peace is not the absence of trouble; it’s the presence of God.²

Jesus our Lord is called, “Prince of Peace.”³ In fact, Jesus also said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.”⁴ How does the world give peace? Externally. How does Jesus give peace? In the human heart. That’s the peace that enables one to be calm in the midst of a storm.⁵ Being a Christian doesn’t stop the storms of life from occurring. Even Jesus testified that the storms will come, even when we’re obeying His words!⁶

We must understand that peace is a facet of Spiritual fruit,⁷ not a vacation in Hawaii, or even the absence of pressures and turmoil. Only as we realize our peace with God⁸ can we experience the peace of God. God’s peace is meant to rule in the heart,⁹ even when it is lacking in the circumstances.

The gospel is a message of peace,¹⁰ and God desires His peace to be multiplied to you.¹¹ Even when God needs to discipline us as a loving Father, the result in the obedient believer’s life is peaceable fruit.¹²

In a world full of darkness, chaos and confusion, it is essential that we be Spiritually minded people.¹³ Only as we keep our eyes on the Lord¹⁴ and our affections on things above¹⁵ can we victoriously face the changes and challenges of life. Only as we commit our troubles to the Lord¹⁶ can we experience peaceful sleep.¹⁷ In fact, when we walk with wholehearted devotion to Christ, He promises to even cause our enemies to be at peace with us!¹⁸

God’s peace is unchangeable - even when it rains in Hawaii at sunset.

1-Phil 4:7; 2-Rom 15:33; 3-Isaiah 9:6; 4-John 14:27; 5-Mark 4:37-39;
6-Luke 6:47-49; 7-Gal 5:22; 8-Rom 8:1; 9-Col 3:15; 10-Acts 10:36,
Rom 10:15; 11-2 Peter 1:2, Jude 2; 12-Heb 12:11; 13-Rom 8:5,6;
14-Isaiah 26:3; 15-Col 3:1,2; 16-1 Peter 5:7; 17-Psalm 4:8; 18-Prov 16:7.

DAY 23

HE CARES

I find one of the most frustrating things to deal with in the ministry to be the hopelessness that is sometimes projected by a hurting fellow believer. Certainly life has its bumps, but let's not forget in whom we have believed!¹

What you and I need to get from our head to our heart is the real life-changing truth that Jesus cares about each and every one of us. There's a little song that goes: "He gave His life. What more could He do? Oh how He loves you! Oh how He loves me! Oh how He loves you and me!" It's true, because He does care about us! The problem is we often get so theologically bound up that we forget the simple message² of the gospel.³

Our precious Lord is repeatedly calling us individually⁴ to come to Him.⁵ Scripture promises us that when we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us.⁶ Why? Because He cares. Let's think about this a moment. Who cares? God the Father.⁷ Who cares? Jesus Christ,⁸ God Incarnate.⁹ What is God's attitude toward us? He CARES!¹⁰ Can anything stop Him from caring about us? NO!!¹¹ Remember these precious truths when Satan tempts you to think that God doesn't love you, or has forgotten you, or has given up on you. Reject his lies!¹²

Jesus said that those who are sick are the ones in need of a physician,¹³ and every believer has come to Christ as spiritual beggars¹⁴ with misdirected lives.¹⁵ While it feels good to know that a fellow Christian empathizes with us when we're hurting, how much better it is to know that Jesus Christ cares, and that He knows our deepest needs, hurts, and thoughts.¹⁶

How can we be sure that Jesus really cares? There's a piece of literature that pictures an individual talking to Jesus, and this person asks Him, "Lord, how much do you love me?" The Lord replies, "This much", and He stretched out His arms and died.¹⁷

Christian, Calvary is the proof that He who is Perfect Love¹⁸ cares for you.¹⁹

Non-Christian, Perfect Love is calling you!²⁰

1-2 Tim 1:12; 2-John 3:16; 3-1 Cor 15:1-4; 4-Song 2:10; 5-Matt 11:28;
6-James 4:8a; 7-John 16:27; 8-John 15:12,13; 9-John 1:1,14; 10-1 Peter 5:7;
11-Rom 8:38-39; 12-John 8:44; 13-Matt 9:12, Mark 2:17, Luke 5:31;
14-Luke 18:13, 15-Isaiah 53:6; 16-Psalm 139:1-18; 17-John 19:16-18,30;
18-1 John 4:16; 19-John 15:13; 20-Rev 3:20.

DAY 24

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The body of Christ, the church,¹ is likened in Scripture to the human body;² and just as every part of our physical body (seen and unseen) has to be working together to insure good health and optimum function, such holds true in the church. The church is not as healthy as it can be if some of its 'parts' are not functioning as God intended, or are not contributing to the whole.

There is a danger in thinking that the pastor or the church leadership are what comprise 'the ministry.' This is just not true. While there are the more 'public figures,' such as teachers and worship leaders, that is only the 'skin' of the body. In fact, the most prominent members of our physical body are parts we have never seen (heart, brain, kidneys, etc.)! Satan's strategy is often to try and mold everyone into the public figure, which then opens the door for frustration, criticism, jealousy, and a crippled body of believers!³

God created the eye to be just that - an eye. He created the ear to be only that - an ear. Here is the spiritual analogy. There are four lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Ephesians 4:11; and 1 Peter 4:11. At least one of these gifts is given to every person in the body of Christ.⁴ They are displays of God's manifold grace.⁵ They are not to be a source of pride,⁶ but are to be used to glorify Christ through the building up of His body.⁷ Some have been blessed financially and give to the meet the needs of the saints, while some have a special gift of hospitality.⁸ Others make those encouraging phone calls, or send those notes of edification.⁹ There are many other gifts vital to the local church body, such as: prayer warriors;¹⁰ those who visit the elderly, sick, or inmates;¹¹ typists and receptionists; worship leaders; Sunday School volunteers - the list is endless.

The point I want to make is that you - yes, YOU - have a very special place in the congregation where you regularly fellowship. Remember, we are all equal in rank.¹² However, differences¹³ do of necessity exist in function and accountability.¹⁴ An ear could never replace an eye, even through a transplant. Likewise, you can only be you!¹⁵

So, saints, find your gift(s), and prayerfully and diligently use it (them). You'll find that contentment comes when you use your God-given abilities to serve Him, for "you are the body of Christ, and members individually."¹⁶

1-Eph 1:22-23; 2-1 Cor 12:13-18,21, Rom 12:4-5; 3-1 Cor 3:3;
4-1 Cor 12:7, Eph 4:8; 5-1 Peter 4:10; 6-Rom 12:3; 7-Eph 4:12;
8-Rom 12:13; 9-Heb 13:16; 10-James 5:16b; 11-Matt 25:36; 12-Rom 2:11,
Col 3:11; 13-1 Cor 12:4-6; 14-Heb 13:17; 15-1 Cor 15:10; 16-1 Cor 12:27.

DAY 25

THE PROMISES OF GOD

It's fascinating to examine the Scriptures and unwrap God's promises to us. God's love and perfect will are at the core of each and every promise. Of course, the sureness of any promise can only be measured by the one making it. As mortal beings we, despite our best intentions, do not always keep our word. Somewhere along the path from here to glory we fail, even if it's just showing up late for an appointment. Or, how many times have you made a resolution, even to God, that you found yourself unable to keep? God, though, is consistently faithful,¹ but our humanity often limits or distorts our faith in our heavenly Father's Word because we aren't accustomed to consistent love, unchanging truth, unending grace, or reliable promises. Let's explore God's Word and examine His promises.

First, according to 2 Peter 1:4, these promises are "exceedingly great and precious". For something to be great and precious is spectacular, but for it to exceed that is beyond understanding! And - let's get this fully settled in our spirits - God has given these promises to believers. Secondly, all of God's promises in Jesus "are yes, and in Him amen"² - that is, "so be it". They are affirmed and confirmed through Christ. They are completed in Christ, and we are complete in Him as well.³

Heb 10:23 states that "He who promised is faithful." That's good news! God never goes back on His word. It is absolutely true and unchanging.⁴ We can depend upon His Word and rely upon its complete validity.⁵ But we are to receive God's promises "through faith and patience".⁶ This is how God has set up His Kingdom. His promises are not earned, merited, or purchased. They are offered to whosoever believes. There is tremendous potential to the person who trusts God's promises, for a mustard seed of faith will move a mountain.⁷

It's not 'spiritual' feelings that God demands or strong emotions which He desires from us, but faith in His Word. The Lord wants to remove every 'mountain' that hinders us from serving Him.⁸ We must get to the point where we consistently declare that Scripture is God's truth, and any deviation from that truth is not even to be consulted or considered.⁹

God has given to His Church many great promises. For example, He promises to supply all our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."¹⁰ What is it you need (not lust after) today? Forgiveness?¹¹ Companionship?¹² Salvation for a loved one?¹³ Deliverance from some particular phobia?¹⁴ Do not doubt God's promises. Do all that God requires of you and rest in His sure Word.¹⁵ Remember, He is faithful who has promised!¹⁶

Abraham was given a promise that indeed seemed impossible.¹⁷ I can imagine him saying, 'Lord, do you really mean that Sarah and I will have a child? At our age? Come on now, Lord; let's be practical. We sleep in separate beds.' Can't you just picture yourself in Abraham's sandals? You're 100 years old and your wife is 90, and the Lord states He will give you a son.¹⁸ Yet, Abraham's faith in God was not dependent on his own abilities. Oh yes, when he tried to bring about God's promise by his own understanding, he produced Ishmael.¹⁹ The Israeli-Arab conflict today is partly the outcome of his effort to produce God's result.²⁰

Although Abraham's faith was imperfect, it rested in God's ability to perform what He said. He did not stagger at God's promises, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God.²¹ Many of us today are faced with seemingly impossible situations, those that appear to have no solution, no way out. Let me exhort you, saint, not to look to your own natural abilities, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. As He asked Jeremiah, "Is there anything too hard for Me?"²²

Be assured then that your situation is not too difficult for God. Be diligent in prayer, asking and believing the Lord for the Scripture to provide His solution to your problem, and then do the hardest part - Praise and thank Him and rejoice in His Word before you see it come to pass. That's faith!²³

Turn your doubts into praise and you too, like Abraham and Jeremiah, will be able to declare, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You."²⁴

1-1 Cor 1:9; 2-2 Cor 1:20; 3-Col 2:10; 4-Psalm 119:89,160; 5-John 17:17b;
6-Heb 6:12; 7-Matt 17:20; 8-Heb 12:1; 9-Psalm 119:9-16; 10-Phil 4:19;
11-1 John 1:9; 12-Heb 13:5b; 13-1 Tim 2:3-4; 14-Isaiah 41:10;
15-Num 23:19; 16-1 Thess 5:24; 17-Gen 15:3-6; 18-Gen 17:15-17;
19-Gen 16:2,16; 20-Gen 17:20; 21-Rom 4:18-21; 22-Jer 32:27;
23-Heb 11:1; 24-Jer 32:17.

DAY 26

FEELINGS - FRIEND OR FOE?

At every Italian wedding I've attended (which is plenty!), inevitably the celebration builds to a point when a popular song comes over the P.A. system. The song is called, "Feelings".

What about feelings? Sometimes they're expressed as goose bumps or tears, but can we trust them as a barometer to measure our lives? Nobody will dispute that each person displays and experiences a variety of emotions; after all, we're not robots. The Biblical writers expressed many emotions. However, if we are to be a people who walk by faith, then we must learn how to not walk by sight,¹ or our five natural senses.

Many times faith is illogical, which is why God tells us not to lean on our own understanding.² Sometimes emotions can be very misleading also.³ Multitudes of saints rely upon external conditions to determine their standing with God, or their decision-making. Anything external or of this world is subject to change, whether it be health, finances, relationships, or the weather. To gauge my faith upon the 'wellness' of any of these things is very dangerous because they can be fine one day, and terrible the next.

Stability for the child of God comes as we read, meditate on,⁴ and walk in the light of the unchanging Word of God.⁵ You see, no matter when you read the Scriptures, the message is always the same, for our Savior doesn't change.⁶ His truth is eternally good. Therefore, faith in God's Word shields us from the trap of emotionalism. God is never going to lie to us about anything.⁷ He is at work in our lives,⁸ and will perfect those troublesome matters we face.⁹ He is on our side,¹⁰ and will never forsake us.¹¹ He will supply all of our needs "according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."¹²

Abba says that He is doing these things in my life right now. In fact, all things are working out according to His will and purpose.¹³ Whether it feels like it or not, God has said it, and that settles it. That is reality! Whether I believe it or not will be the difference between peace or unrest, joy or depression.

Faith, not feelings, is the substance that we need to develop.¹⁴ If we are to cultivate an unshattering faith,¹⁵ we must consistently refuse to consider both the size of the difficulty confronting us and our ever-changing feelings. It is only by spending time in the Word that we will develop this faith.¹⁶ Then, no matter what we may or may not feel, we must apply God's Word to our lives.¹⁷

Remember, faith obeys. Feelings, however, usually veto the Word of God. But God says that you are more than a conqueror in life,¹⁸ and He believes that. Do you?

1-2 Cor 5:7; 2-Prov 3:5; 3-Heb 12:16-17; 4-Joshua 1:8; 5-Psalm 119:130,89;
6-Malachi 3:6, Heb 13:8; 7-Heb 6:17-20; 8-Phil 2:13; 9-Psalm 138:8a;
10-Psalm 118:6; 11-Heb 13:5c; 12-Phil 4:19; 13-Rom 8:28; 14-Heb 11:1;
15-Rom 4:18-21; 16-Rom 10:17; 17-James 1:22-25; 18-Rom 8:37.

DAY 27

LET GO AND LET GOD?

“Let go and let God” may be the counsel given at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, but it really doesn’t measure up to sound Biblical doctrine.

There is a beautiful balance in Scripture that is truly amazing and arises, at least in part, from seeming contradictions and theological impossibilities, such as the absolute sovereignty of God and the free will of man. While many through the centuries have wrestled to understand that one, the simple truth remains that while we are in these mortal bodies we “see through a glass, darkly,”¹ and our understanding is limited. However, this in no way should limit our faith in God because He is not bound by our limitations, and He promises an abundance of grace² to do His will. It is a choice, an act of the will, to believe (or disbelieve³).

Let’s look at what God clearly instructs us to do as believers, realizing that He never asks us to do what He hasn’t already empowered us to do.⁴

- Rom 12:9 “Let love be without hypocrisy.”
Rom 13:12 “Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”
Rom 13:13 “Let us walk properly” (or “honestly”).
1 Cor 14:26 “Let all things be done for edification.”
1 Cor 16:2 Let everyone give to the Lord.
1 Cor 16:14 “Let all that you do be done with love.”
Gal 5:25 “...let us also walk in the Spirit.”
Gal 5:26 “Let us not become conceited” (or “desirous of vain glory”).
Gal 6:10 “...let us do good to all”.
Eph 4:26 “...do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”
Eph 4:29 “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth”.
Phil 4:6 “...let your requests be made known to God”.
Col 3:15 “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts”.
Col 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”.
1 Thess 5:6 “Therefore let us not sleep”.
1 Tim 5:4,8 Let us be responsible at home.
1 Tim 6:8 Let us be content.
Heb 4:16 Let us come boldly into His presence.
Heb 13:15 “...let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God”.

In essence, this partial list of exhortations from Scripture presents us with one certain message: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”,⁵ or I can do nothing through excuses which weaken me.

“Let go and let God” never means do nothing!!

1-1 Cor 13:12; 2-2 Cor 9:8; 3-John 20:25; 4-2 Tim 1:7; 5-Phil 4:13.

DAY 28

PRAYER

Let's talk about prayer. "What is prayer?" some ask. Basically, prayer is communication between God and man; a two-way conversation. Prayer is not a particular bodily posture. It's not always done with folded hands and closed eyes. (I like to pray when I jog or ride my bike, and I find that very difficult to do when my eyes are closed and cars are honking at me due to near misses!) Nor is prayer the repetition of some words over and over.¹ It is God speaking to you² and you speaking to God.³ You don't have to speak King James English (Chinese Christians don't!) to speak to your Father⁴ as a son or daughter⁵ would speak to a father they respected and loved (and knew loved them⁶).

There is a difference between just thinking about prayer and actually praying. True prayer is an intimate time with our heavenly Father, and includes devotion and worship,⁷ as well as supplication.⁸ Just as merely thinking about making a phone call doesn't accomplish the communication of an actual call, neither does thinking or talking about prayer do what actual praying does. No, those thoughts must be articulated to God, or become so inexpressible that neither tongues⁹ nor natural language could speak them.¹⁰

Paul instructs us to "pray without ceasing,"¹¹ or literally, with no intermission. This releases prayer out of the chapel and into the kitchen, office, school, and factory. It implies that prayer is to be as natural as breathing. Sometimes we feel rather awkward praying because of our concepts of where and how prayer should be offered, so we limit prayer to our 'closet' or wait to 'feel' like praying. If we are to pray continually, rest assured that our Father knows there will be times when you will be praying in restaurants, on athletic fields, in medical offices, on a bus, etc. No place is ever not the place to pray!

Again, prayer is a cordless conversation between you and your heavenly Father. Cultivate that concept deep in your soul, and remember that the Lord may want to 'dial your number' first. Be still,¹² and listen for His voice.¹³

Jesus taught that persistence in prayer gets results.¹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:1 lists four kinds of prayer that merit study. To pray continually and according to the Scriptures is "good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior".¹⁵ Your prayers are certainly needed and appreciated for this ministry!

Thank God for our access to His presence!¹⁶

1-Matt 6:7; 2-Acts 9:10-17, Jer 33:3; 3-Psalm 5:2, 55:16,17; 4-Matt 6:6;
5-Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6,7; 6-John 17:23; 7-Matt 6:9; 8-Phil 4:6; 9-1 Cor 14;
10-Rom 8:26; 11-1 Thess 5:17; 12-Psalm 46:10a; 13-Isaiah 6:8;
14-Luke 18:1-7; 15-1 Tim 2:3; 16-Eph 2:18.

DAY 29

WEARINESS - IT CAN MAKE OR BREAK YOU

We all experience weariness at times. Because of the many demands that assault us daily, we have a tendency to wear down quickly. Also, there is a physical weariness that is a direct result of hard labor, and that kind of wear and tear, within Biblical limitations, is actually healthy. However, there is also a weariness that is just as real in the spiritual realm, which I want to address.

In “the good fight of faith,”¹ one of our adversary’s² “fiery darts”³ is to wear down the child of God. But God, knowing the nature of Satan’s wiles, tells us to look to Jesus,⁴ “lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”⁵ In other words, we will be assaulted in our walk of faith with the lie that we need to give up before we crack up. The reason that we are exhorted to not grow weary in doing good⁶ is because it’s the enemy’s tactic to get us to become weary! Spiritual weariness is of the flesh. I’ve noticed people fall by the wayside, as well as among rocks or thorns,⁷ because they’ve simply given up doing the things of God. Interestingly, these same people have the amazing capacity to feed their flesh and live for worldly desires after the same hard day’s work that supposedly keeps them from Bible study, prayer, etc. How true are the prophet’s words today for the sleeping saint, “She has wearied herself with lies”.⁸ The devil’s intention is “to speak great words against the Most High and wear down the saints”.⁹

There is, of course, a wearing out due to diligence within the Church,¹⁰ but even this is not always a good thing.¹¹ Trials and distress certainly can make us weary,¹² but there is also a healthy weariness that is tired of kicking “against the goads”¹³ which can produce a sorrow leading to repentance.¹⁴

Spiritual weariness is partly due to a lack of spiritual preparation. The Bible teaches that “those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength... and not be weary”.¹⁵ Can it be that we aren’t making it a priority to wait on God to receive the empowerment of His Spirit that we need? Even though saved and heaven-bound, many saints today are weary in their serving because they do it in their own limited strength. The apostle Paul said he served Christ even “in weariness”.¹⁶ How? By receiving God’s grace.¹⁷ This takes place through prayer.¹⁸

The remedy for spiritual weariness is spiritual exercise. Remember your “first love”,¹⁹ and start your day with Him.²⁰ Allow the dart of weariness to send you to your prayer closet or to God’s Word.²¹ His grace will strengthen you.²²

1-1 Tim 6:12; 2-1 Peter 5:8; 3-Eph 6:16; 4-Heb 12:2; 5-Heb 12:3; 6-Gal 6:9, 2 Thess 3:13; 7-Luke 8:5-7; 8-Ezek 24:12; 9-Dan 7:25; 10-Phil 2:30; 11-Ex 18:17,18; 12-Psalm 6:6, 69:3; 13-Acts 9:5; 14-2 Cor 7:10; 15-Isaiah 40:31; 16-2 Cor 11:27; 17-1 Cor 15:10; 18-Heb 4:16; 19-Rev 2:4; 20-Matt 6:33, Psalm 5:3; 21-Psalm 119:25,28; 22-2 Cor 12:9.

DAY 30

THE ANSWER

Does being a Christian eliminate frustration, disappointment, and difficulties in this life? In the sense that we see their existence as temporal,¹ yes, praise Jesus! And we know that they will be completely done away with in the future.² However, the fact of life is that these unwelcome occurrences happen to all of us.

None of us are exempt from pain in this life. Though usually beyond our control, these encounters with difficulties can prove to be very rewarding.³ For one thing, these trials in our lives remind us of how mortal⁴ and changeable we are.⁵

We can be a hero one day and a 'goat' the next; rich one day and poor the next; healthy one day and sick the next. Man comes and he goes, for our life is but a breath of air.⁶ Does that make life meaningless or vain? Of course not!⁷

King Solomon attempted to fill up the valleys of life with the things of this world.⁸ Jackpot! The ancient "Jerusalem Post" could have read: "Solomon wins lottery!" One might think, then, "Oh boy! No more poverty, no more depression, no more frustration." Solomon had, as the song goes, "the whole world in his hands." Or did he?⁹

You and I may think that if we had what Solomon had our lives would change. And, do you know what? They would. Solomon's did. But not really for the better. He took the riches of the world, but forsook the Lord. The result? Frustration, disappointment, emptiness.¹⁰ No, we cannot eliminate our problems; and only through a vital relationship with Jesus Christ can we successfully cope with them.¹¹

Don't be like Solomon, who looked to quiet the storms of life in an outward fashion. The answer lies not in your pocket, on your back, or in your head. The answer lies in your heart.¹²

1-2 Cor 4:17; 2-Rev 21:4,5; 3-Rom 5:3-5; 4-Eccl 12:7; 5-1 Peter 1:24;
6-James 4:14; 7-Eccl 12:13,14; 8-Eccl 2:4-10; 9-Eccl 2:11; 10-Eccl 1:2;
11-John 15:1-7; 12-Prov 4:23, 3:5-6.

DAY 31

KEEP WATCHING

There are some key Scriptural passages that we would do well to heed in light of current trends in the evangelical circuit. These verses contain a singular, all-encompassing command of Christ to “watch”. The Greek word used in this command means, “to keep awake; rouse from sleep or inactivity”. It’s all too easy for a believer to be spiritually lulled to sleep, for apart from the strength of the risen Jesus, we fatigue easily.¹ Yes, we want to do right, but the problem stems from an uncrucified, unrelenting enemy that we carry around, called “the flesh”.² Therefore, we must constantly keep watch, for our flesh doesn’t sleep, and neither does our adversary,³ who readily stirs up our flesh.

Mark 14:38 records these words of Jesus: “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” What if you are not alert? What if you’re not praying? The inevitable result is that the carnal will overcome the spiritual in your life, but it doesn’t have to be this way. Although we can’t always avoid temptation, we can successfully resist it when we are spiritually alert and morally aggressive. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”⁴ Our defense against fleshly lusts and spiritual attack is to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”,⁵ who is God’s Armor for us.⁶

Notice that watchfulness is linked together with prayer.⁷ In other words, we keep alert by praying. Is it surprising to see the Church in America by and large so cold and ineffective when the weakest part of many believers’ lives is prayer? We can collect tapes, videos, books and various Bible translations, but without a fervent prayer life⁸ we are only functioning in intellectual energy.

While knowledge is useful in tearing down demonic strongholds,⁹ power from the Holy Spirit usually comes when one is in an attitude of prayer¹⁰ and worship.¹¹ We need this holy power in order to combat the wave of hedonistic living that is part of a Christ-less society. We literally need to, “Be awake to all the dangers; stay firm in the faith; be brave and strong.”¹² Remember, the enemy we fight is unseen and crafty, and the spiritual warfare is real.¹³ “Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.”¹⁴ To do this we need four vital ingredients recorded in Acts 2:42. Does this describe you?

“Watch!”¹⁵ Jesus’ coming is closer than we think!¹⁶ Will you be ashamed when He comes,¹⁷ or are you ready?¹⁸

1-Matt 26:41; 2-Rom 7:15-25; 3-1 Peter 5:8; 4-James 1:13-15; 5-Rom 13:14;
6-Eph 6:10,11,13-18; 7-Col 4:2, 1 Peter 4:7; 8-James 5:16; 9-2 Cor 10:4-5;
10-Acts 1:8-14, 2:1-4; 11-Eph 5:18-20; 12-1 Cor 16:13; 13-Eph 6:12;
14-1 Thess 5:6; 15-Mark 13:37; 16-Rom 13:11,12; 17-1 John 2:28;
18-Rev 19:7.

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