

The Christian Disciple

Christ's call to discipleship is ultimate and urgent. All those who are drawn to Him by the Father are marked out to be His disciples. Disciples think differently, see differently, desire differently, talk differently and walk differently.

This book aims to show how a Christian disciple lives by the word of God. The life of a disciple is designed by God. His word dictates and directs the disciple's whole life. Some of the topics covered in this book are essentials of Christian discipleship. It is an effort to inspire the "called out ones" of Christ to live according to their calling and fulfill His commission.



P. Upender is founder and director of Victory Bible Ministries. He is an evangelist and revival speaker. He is also a pastor and an author. He has published five books in Telugu and English for the edification of the body of Christ. He is forever grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ for His grace in saving him and using him in His service.

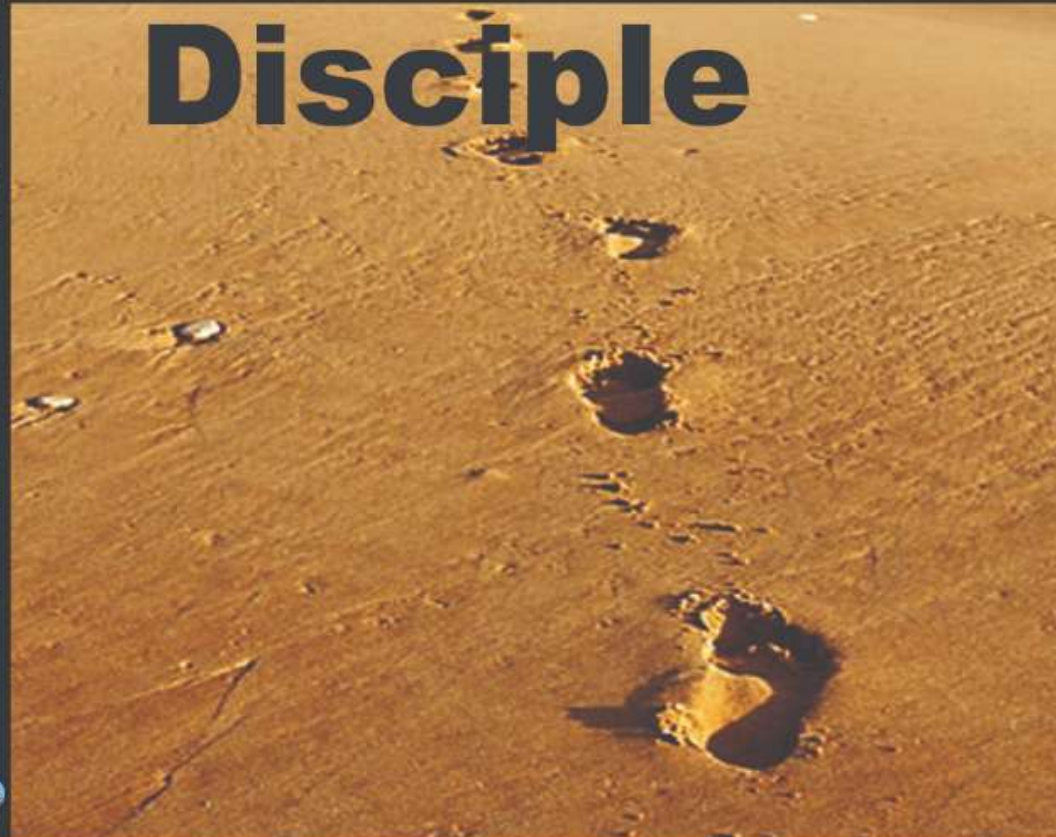
Following the Master is the mission of the disciple!

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P. Upender



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**THE
CHRISTIAN
DISCIPLE**

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***This Book is dedicated to the glory of
God and for the good of His people!***

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FOREWORD

These messages were first given at Victory Worship Centre for the edification of the body of Christ. When people began to request me to put my messages into a book form, upon prayer and consideration this book is printed. With very little editing and revision, all the messages are printed in their spoken form. Discipleship is a varied subject and has great depth to it, as revealed in the Scriptures. I have attempted simply to share a few thoughts and insights from the Word on each subject found in this book. I could cover only a few of the essentials of discipleship. None of the topics are treated in a scholarly manner or in an exhaustive way.

It is my intention to help the lay person to know the Word and be motivated to live by it. It is the desire of our Lord Jesus Christ that we become His true disciples. Our church motto is to “make disciples for the Master!” Hence this small effort towards that end. As we approach the coming of our Blessed Lord and face various challenges in these perilous times, it is essential that we become His dynamic disciples. Only true disciples of the Lord can represent Him to this ungodly generation and can withstand all the onslaughts of the evil forces around. May the Lord God use this book to bless the reader’s soul.

Your Servant in Christ,

P. Upender

1

The Unknown God

“All that God requires of us is an opportunity to show what He can do.” ~ A.B. Simpson

The book of Acts is an amazing book in the New Testament. It clearly shows us many aspects and acts of God in the lives of people. This record of church history has much to teach the believers today. We will look of a passage and try to learn about God’s nature and working in the world. If you read Acts 17:23-31 especially keeping the context (Acts 17:16-34) in mind, you will come to see the glory of God in a wonderful way.

The Apostle Paul was driven away from both Thessalonica and Berea for preaching the gospel by the rebellious Jews. On his way out he stopped at Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him. As usual Paul the soul winner went to the synagogues and the market place to preach the gospel. In Athens he saw numerous idols (one count has 30000) and his spirit was vexed very much!! Athens is still remembered on account of its philosophy. The city of Athens was filled with idols, images and temples on every side. Petroneous said, “It was easier to find a god than a man in the city of Athens.” Athens is named after the **goddess Athena** – the goddess of wisdom. Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle all great philosophers have lived in this city. The **Areopagus** was a court of philosophers in Athens which had authority over religion and morals. The two dominant

philosophies at that time were of Epicurean and the Stoic. They spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing.

They were people with itching ears constantly seeking something exciting to tickle their ears. Some go to church today for the same reason. They are looking for “**something new & exciting!**” Unfortunately for many, the search for **novelty** seems to over shadow the search for **reality!** **The Epicureans** are followers of **Epicurus** a Greek philosopher. The Epicurean philosophy teaches that seeking pleasure and avoiding pain is the chief end of man’s life. They did not deny the existence of gods but believed that these gods do not interfere with human affairs. They were pure materialists. They did not believe in the afterlife. **The Stoics** are the followers of another Greek philosopher **Zeno**. The Stoics philosophy teaches that virtue obtained through self-mastery is more important. This can happen by being indifferent to both pleasure and pain. Their chief goal was to not care, not believe anything...be dead to feelings and emotions, even if you have a death in the family, major illness, catastrophe, etc. The Stoics are pantheists (believing everything is god and god is everything) compared to the Epicureans who are practical atheists. The Epicureans were all about **indulgence** and the Stoics were all about **indifference**. These 2 philosophies are at opposite ends of the spectrum. One said “**enjoy life,**” the other said” **endure life.**”

To two such distinct groups of people the apostle Paul preaches and reveals the true and living God of the Universe in Acts 17:24-31 -

***His Greatness**

Acts 17:24 - Rom 1:19-20 – The world and all things did not come into existence through natural processes but created by God. Gen 1:1 declares “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. . .” Though they were philosophers and intellectual people they were ignorant of God v23. Paul started off by revealing who God is, stating that **God is the Creator, and we are His creatures.**” John Stott writes, “This view of the world is very different from either the Epicurean emphasis on a chance combination of atoms or the virtual pantheism of the Stoics.” The truth is God created man but the gods and goddesses of yours are created by man! What a contrast?

a) He is the Source of all things – Rom 11:36, Col 1:16, Heb 1:2– God **desired** this universe and all things in it in His eternal counsel. God **designed** the universe and all things in it according to His perfect plan. God **developed** the universe and all things in it with His super abundant creative power. He alone is the perfect source and owner of all things. He is the maker and master of it all. Even Napoleon, though his religion was nothing of which to boast, could see in the universe the hand of God. When he was returning to France from the expedition to Egypt, a group of French officers engaged in a discussion concerning the existence of God. They were on the deck of the vessel sailing over the Mediterranean Sea. As they had imbibed the infidel spirit of their time they were unanimous in their denial of this truth. One at length proposed to ask Napoleon his opinion upon the subject. He was standing alone engaged in silent thought. When he was asked the question, “Is there a God?” he raised his hand and pointing to the starry firmament, simply responded, “Gentlemen, who made all that?”

b) He is the Sustainer of all things – Heb 1:3 – God not only created everything with the power of His word but also sustains it with the same powerful word! Look at His world and see its order and beauty! He continually sustains it. He did not create and leave it to chance! He maintains it so marvelously. Lynn Gardner writes in “Christianity Stands True,” “The universe is set up in an orderly manner. When was the last time that one of our planets ran into another one? There are billions of stars and planets in the universe, yet they are all in orderly orbits. The Earth rotates on its axis at a tilt of 23 degrees, which allows for a greater surface of the earth to be tilled and makes possible the seasons. The Earth rotates at 1000 miles per hour. If it rotated at only 100 miles per hour, the days and nights would be ten times longer. The summer sun would burn all vegetation and the winter’s night would be incredibly cold. The earth is at the right distance from the right-sized sun for life as experienced on earth. If the earth were farther away from the sun, the climate would be too cold. If it were closer, it would be too hot. If the sun were smaller or larger we would either freeze or roast. The moon is on an average, 240,000 miles from earth. The gravitational pull from

the moon causes the ocean tides that cleanse our shorelines and clean out the shipping channels. If the moon were only 50,000 miles from earth the gravitational pull from the moon would be so great that the ocean tides would completely submerge the surface of the earth twice per day. A smaller or larger moon would greatly increase or decrease the tides. The layer of gases that surround the earth also shows a designer and a sense of order. The atmosphere contains 21% oxygen. If it had 50% or more, any flash of lightening would ignite a forest into fire. If we had less than 10% oxygen, we would not have enough to light a fire. The fact that water expands when it freezes is also by design. Water expands by 9% when it freezes. Most other things contract and get heavier when they freeze. Water freezes and ice floats. This puts a protective layer on the top of ponds and lakes. If the ice sank to the bottom, all of the life on the pond or lake would freeze and die. The fact that we have water is important also.”

c) He is the Savior of all things – Paul declared God to be the LORD of heaven and earth. He is the Sovereign and the Supreme Being above all. As the Lord God He must be revered, worshipped and served. He is the Savior in a general sense in that He is the protector of all life but also specifically He is the one who redeems everything from its fallen state. Only He can save all the people from their sinful passions and perdition. Someone said, “Every thoughtful person wonders at some point in life, “Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?” Science attempts to answer the first question and philosophy wrestles with the second; but only God offers a satisfactory answer to all three!”

***His Generosity**

Acts 17:25 – He is a living and life giving God. Compare Him to the dead and lifeless gods of idols. The gods of human imagination, the gods of human passion, the gods of human degradation Rom 1:23 are no match to the one and only true God of the universe! Where does your life come from? It comes from God. He has every one of your days numbered, and when the number is up, He will

take your life and you will stand accountable before Him. He gives you your life breath. Someone calculated the number of times we breathe and said, “in the past minute, you drew about 18 breaths of air. In the past hour, you breathed 1,080 times, which adds up to more than 25,000 times in the past 24 hours. If you are 40 years old, you have gulped in more than 365 million breaths of air. Each one was a gift from God. Have you thanked Him for the air He gives you to breathe?” Not just life and breath but God gave us everything! He gave us all that we have. He gave us a family to love, food to eat, clothes to wear, a shelter to stay in, a mind to think, strength to work, eyes to behold the beauty. How many megapixels does the human eye have? You see things one way, and your camera sees things differently. So, what is the resolution of the human eye, at which a camera would be able to truly capture an image the way the eye sees it? The answer is 576MP!

The world’s most powerful camera is a 570MP digital camera used by scientists to capture images of the universe! Nothing could beat the natural power of your eyes to see the beauty of God’s creation, your ears to listen to the serene music, your hands to touch with affection, your feet to move around to finish your tasks, your friends for support, a purpose to live for, forgiveness for your sins through His Son Jesus Christ and eternal life. God has been generous in all things. **“Every good and perfect gift comes to us from God.”** That’s why He doesn’t need anything from us, He will not be served by human hands. Nearly a century ago, a famous English preacher described in vivid detail the practice of one particular lord of the manor. Every year on Christmas day, this lord gave all the poor people who were his subjects a generous basket of food. Every person brought a basket with him and the lord’s custom was to fill the basket completely. Each time they came, year after year, the baskets got bigger and bigger, until the lord wondered how they could stagger away under the weight of all that food on the way home. But no matter how large the basket was, he filled it every time. They came because they knew about his wealth and because they trusted in his free-flowing generosity.

* His Genius

Acts 17:26 – God is the creator of all men. We are not a product of evolution but personal creation of God! God made all people, all races through ONE man, through One Blood. **Is not our God a true genius?** In Mal 2:10 the prophet asks, “Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?” The answer is yes, we have one Father and one God who created us all. We are the offspring of God, said the apostle. The Athenians, the Hebrews, the Romans and the barbarians were all derived from the same source and that source was God. One nation does not have a higher origin than another, if we wish to trace our genealogy far back, all are of one blood. Man was created in the beginning by God. God controls the affairs and destinies of men and nations. God arranges circumstances in such a way that people would be given opportunities to know Him. God has put people where they are with a purpose – for their own good. Do you know that you can tell the temperature by listening to the chirping of a cricket? “The frequency of chirping varies according to temperature. To get a rough estimate of the temperature in degrees Fahrenheit, count the number of chirps in 15 seconds and then add 37. The number you get will be an approximation of the outside temperature.”

Please note the word **“determined.”** It speaks of God’s direct involvement in the affairs of human history. 1. He made the nations. 2. He determined the times they should exist. 3. He determined their boundaries. Many other verses teach the same truth. **“When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel”** Deut 32:8. We are all God’s offspring by **creation** but we must become God’s children by **new creation** Gal 3:26!

* His Goodness

Acts 17:27 – God does not dwell in a particular place on earth, declared Paul. He is not found on Mount Olympus or in the Parthenon or in the temple of Demeter. The whole earth and heaven cannot contain Him. He is to be found in every place where men dwell on all the face of the earth, **“He is not far from everyone of us”** and yet He is also in Heaven. It is futile to think that you can confine Him within any finite bounds. We cannot limit Him as to His place of dwelling or comprehend the bounds of His abode. In our county people believe that a particular god is settled in a particular place and that becomes a pilgrim centre! V23 Paul saw the altar to the unknown God. One commentator writes, “Athens was filled with statues dedicated TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Six hundred years before Paul, a terrible plague came on the city and a man named Epimenides had an idea. He let loose a flock of hungry sheep through the town and wherever they lay down, they would sacrifice that sheep to the god that had the nearest shrine or temple. If a sheep lay down near no shrine or temple, they would sacrifice the sheep TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” The true and the living God loves all men and lives very close to them. He doesn’t want anyone to perish so He is continuously trying to reach out to them through various means. His goodness lies in His willingness to save us wretched sinners. What more can we ask from Him?

* His Generation

Acts 17:28 – Paul was very tactful in dealing with these people when sharing about God. He cites from their own writings and quotes the Cretan poet Epimenides, “in Him we live and move and exist.” Then he cites a Cilician poet, Aratus, “we also are His children.” Aratus’s poem goes like: “Never, O man, let us leave him unmentioned. All ways are full of Zeus & all meeting-places of men; the sea & the harbors are full of him. In every direction we all have to do with Zeus; for we are also his offspring.” This is a good spiritual principle for a Christian to live by. Our God is a personal God. A man visited a friend and noticed a picture of Jesus on the

wall, His eyes looked like they were looking right at him and made him feel uncomfortable so he moved across the room. It still appeared that way so he said, “doesn’t that make you uncomfortable?” His friend said, “no, that picture tells me that He loves me so much, He can’t keep His eyes off me!” (Disclaimer – having pictures, images, relics, and photos of Jesus is unbiblical. The author does not support it in any way.) In times past God overlooked man’s foolishness but now calls all men everywhere to repentance. The point above is that God is not isolated from His people but very much involved in their lives.

*** His Godhead**

Acts 17:29 – Because God is a spirit He does not dwell in temples made with hands nor is He served by men’s hands. We ought not think of God as one graven image by art from gold or silver or stone. Augustine said, “Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.” He also inferred that God is one. It did not require one god to make the world, another to place life in it and another to control it. There is not one God who rules in Heaven and another on earth. The one Almighty God did all this. The problem is not just that the worldly people do not know God, but even many so called Christians do not know Him! “I believe a very large majority of churchgoers are merely unthinking, slumbering worshipers of an unknown God,” wrote Charles Spurgeon.

*** His Grace**

Acts 17:30 – God “**winked**” at times past means that God was very “**patient**” in dealing with sinful people. God mercifully overlooked their faults. God did not immediately punish them for their crimes. God was gracious enough in withholding His wrath against them. It means simply to pass by without noticing. Now God commands all men everywhere to “**repent!**” Repentance is a commandment. The whole world must repent. Have you repented of your sins? If you have trusted Jesus Christ for salvation and repented of your

sins, then you are saved and will not go into the judgment but if not then you will stand before God in judgment and receive grave punishment.

Plato told a story about the Greek philosopher Thales, who lived about a century and a half before him. The philosopher was walking along a road with his head thrown back, studying the stars, when he stumbled into a well. Hearing his cries for help, a servant girl pulled him out, but not without making the observation that while he was eager to know about things in the sky, he failed to see what lay at his own feet! Many intellectuals are like that. They concern themselves with lofty questions, but they never face their own sin and need for a Savior before they die. How foolish? How dangerous?

*** His Government**

Acts 17:31 – God is the righteous judge who will judge the world according to His eternal plan. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof that this would happen on the day already **“earmarked”** by God. John Wesley used to say, “I read the newspaper to see how God is governing His world.” That’s a good biblical outlook. Learn to see the working of God in everything you see in the world. Epicureans did not believe in resurrection. Stoics did not believe in a personal God because for them god is everything and everything is god. So these people had difficulty in believing that God will judge them after their resurrection!

Acts 17:32-34 - There are always one of the three reactions to the gospel. When people hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ they will do one of the three things. Some mocked at him and rejected the gospel, some procrastinated and only some believed and were saved. It is the same today. Are you rejecting the gospel? Are you reluctant to run to the Savior for the salvation of your soul? Are you repentant? Tim Keller, a pastor in Manhattan, New York, said that in 1970 a Sunday school teacher changed his life with a simple illustration. The teacher said, “Let’s assume the distance between the earth and the sun (92 million miles) was reduced to the thickness

of this sheet of paper. If that is the case, then the distance between the earth and the nearest star would be a stack of papers 70 feet high. And the diameter of the galaxy would be a stack of papers 310 miles high.” Then Keller’s teacher added, “The galaxy is just a speck of dust in the universe, yet Jesus holds the universe together by the word of his power.” Finally, the teacher asked her students, “Now, is this the kind of person you ask into your life to be your assistant?” (Timothy Keller, from the sermon *The Gospel and Your Self*). No! You ask Him to be in charge. Why would we in our puny strength want to run the show when we know Someone who has unlimited power? Let HIM run the show! Let God run your life. Then you will be able to enjoy it a whole lot more.

2

The Blessed Church

“The True Church can never fail. For it is based upon a rock.”

—T.S. Eliot

“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase” Acts 9:31. What a testimony of the early Church? It can be repeated again in these end times if we follow the same steps as they did! The church must have certain characteristics to become a spiritual church. Let us learn the principles and put them into practice so that we too can become a blessed church.

The Church is edified, meaning **“built up.”** In the New Testament the word often translated as “edify” or “edification,” which means to build. It literally means, “to build a house.” It is used in the literal sense in many places in the New Testament in reference to a house or other building. Same word is used for Mat 24:1, Mk 13:1-2 - signifying the Temple buildings, 1 Pet 2:5, Eph 2:21-22 signifying a spiritual temple for God. Eph 4:11-12 various kinds of servants of God were given as gifts to the church for its edification. Jesus said, I will build my church Mat 16:18. He is the builder and the blessing of the church.

It is not talking about building the church building (today most of the pastors and people are just interested in the **“building of the stone”** rather than the **“building of the saints”**!)” Kent Crocket wrote, “Build your church to attract God, not people.” The early church was built up from within! Edification is very important otherwise it will die. In a museum at Greenfield village, Detroit, Michigan, there is a huge steam locomotive. Beside this complicated piece of machinery is a sign showing boiler pressure, size and number of wheels, horsepower, lengths, weight and more. The bottom line indicates that 96% of the power generated was used to move the locomotive and only 4% was left to pull the load. Some churches are like that! The early church began as magic but the end times church is almost on the verge of ending as tragic but for the grace of God. The Church is edified in various ways by the mercies of God. Let’s look at some of them –

The Assembling of the saints to worship God

In 1 Cor 14:26 the apostle Paul wrote “.... What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” One of the greatest ways that a local church can edify and strengthen itself is by assembling together to worship our Lord. The coming together of the saints for the purpose of God, is the reason for its blessing. Do you know that you are a part of the church if you are a born again Christian? Look at the word “Church” Ch – ur – ch! You are in the midst; you are the church! According to U.S.A. Today, May 25, 1994 issue, only 48% of church-goers attend an average of once a month. That’s way back now the percentage has gone up! There will come a day when people will realize how much they have lost by neglecting the church! “I am building a church,” said a small boy, playing on the floor with a set of building blocks, “and we must be very quiet.” His father, eager to encourage this unexpected reverence, asked, “And why are we quiet in the church?” “Because the people are asleep!” was the immediate response. Think of the opportunities we have missed because of spiritual drowsiness.

There are three great reasons why we assemble together. To **exalt** God through Worship, to **edify** the saints through the Word, and to **evangelize** the sinners through Witness. The first is obvious and must be our primary focus: to worship God. We must come together in an effort that is not selfish, but to bring adoration, gratitude, praise, honor, and glory to our great Lord. Devotion unto the Lord in truth and spirit is the essence of the gathering of the saints. While we are accomplishing this purpose, our second reason why we are assembling together is also accomplished - that is the strengthening and building up of one another. Thirdly, we passionately go out and win souls for the Lord.

To achieve our goal –

Firstly, we must assemble as a church **regularly** - look at Acts 2:42 they were “devoted” in fellowship, what a testimony? Do you think that God would bless us the same way without us being like them in these matters? Someone talking about the handicap of the Church said - “The great task of the church today is not (only) to get sinners into Heaven, but (also) to get saints out of bed.” How true? Isn’t it? If you want to grow spiritually, if you want to serve the Lord, become fruitful and be a blessing to others then you must make it a habit to attend the church regularly! Brian Kay said, “It is impossible to be a follower of Christ and not be a part of a local church. No one can have God as Father who does not also have the church as mother.” It’s a spiritual discipline which has many benefits. “Once a man was coming out of church one day, and the preacher was standing at the door as he always is ready to shake hands. The Pastor grabbed his hand and pulled him aside and said to him, “You need to join the Army of the Lord!” The man replied, “I’m already in the Army of the Lord, Pastor.” The Pastor questioned, “How come I don’t see you except at Christmas and Easter?” He whispered back, “I’m in the secret service!” We find many ‘over smart’ people like this in the church, whose end is nothing but ruin! Heb 10:25 reminds us ‘not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.’

“Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man,” said Dwight L. Moody.

Secondly, we must assemble as a church **righteously** - the coming together of the saints is for a purpose and righteousness should be their trade mark. Our assembling together to the righteous Lord should motivate us to be examples of righteousness so that the world around can be blessed. Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for not upholding the standard of the righteousness of God. “But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it” 1 Cor 11:17-18. That should never be the case if the church must be edified.

Lastly, we must assemble as a church **rigorously** - assembling for all the meetings and the programs of the church will result in edification. The reason we have a worship service, bible study, prayer meeting, fasting prayer, spiritual retreats etc are for the sole purpose of the edification of the church Acts 2:46. Multitudes of church goers don’t even bother to step into the assembly during the week. They just attend the “Sunday service.” They have no interest whatsoever to participate in mid week meetings to grow into maturity. There is a crude saying about those who rarely come to church, “When you were born, your mother brought you to church...When you were married, your wife brought you to church...When you die, your friends will bring you to church...Why not try coming to church on your own sometime?” Jud 1:21 says that Christians build themselves upon the most holy faith.

The Application of the Word of God

Acts 20:32 and 1 Cor 14:3 tells us that the word of God edifies a person. If you read 1 Tim 1:11, 6:3, 2 Tim 1:13, 4:3, Tit 1:9, 2:8 they all use the words “**sound doctrine**” (healthy word) so many times signifying the important role the word of God plays in church edification! Victory Worship Centre was started with the burden and

mission to “Preach the Word.” Today there is a lack of sound doctrine in many so called churches. Most of them are trying every trick and gimmick to attract people to themselves with everything else but the Word. Because there is a lack of Biblical teaching heresy and false doctrines are taking root and growing rampantly in churches worldwide! “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, there a church of God exists, even if it swarms with many faults,” wrote the reformer John Calvin.

Do you know why Churches Die? The old Baptist deacon from the ranch pointed to the real reason why many churches are dying. He said something like this: “We have been milked and not fed. The preachers expect work and money from us, but they do not feed us the word of God in return. We need to remember that there are two ends to a cow. She will not give milk unless she is fed. Our churches cannot produce unless they are fed.” The word of God is a tool that is able to build up each person. Paul made a similar statement in Col 2:6-7, “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.” In 1945, when American troops were on Okinawa, they found a tiny village named Shimabuku. Thirty years previously, a missionary on his way to mainland Japan had stopped long enough to make two converts. He taught them a couple of hymns, gave them a Bible in Japanese, and encouraged them to live by it. The villagers patterned their lives on Jesus, took the Ten Commandments as their legal code, and the Sermon on the Mount became their guide to social conduct. The Bible was the main literature in school. The result was that for years they’d had no jail, no brothel, no drunkenness, no divorce, and there was a high level of health and happiness. We become built up in Him through the teachings of God’s word. There is never too much time spent in teaching the word of God. The more each of us know about God’s word, the more it can affect our lives and strengthen us to be better servants. Christians are growing fat in the body instead of growing fat in the spirit!

The Absorbing effects of Love

In Eph 4:16 Paul beautifully explains about the effects of godly love in the body of Christ. In 1 Cor 8:1 Paul said, “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” We must grow big in the heart than in the mind. We place lot of importance to knowledge but not to love. The Bible says that the purpose of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, from a good conscience, and sincere faith 1 Tim 1:5. When we are willing to give up ourselves for one another, when we are willing to think of others before we think of ourselves, and when we are submitting ourselves one to another, we exhibit love and such action builds each other up. When we take our focus from ourselves and place it on the needs of others, they will be strengthened by these actions. But selfish people often get caught in the act! It’s like the Lutheran pastor who always started each service with “The Lord be with you.” The people would respond, “and also with you.” But, one Sunday the PA system wasn’t working so the first thing he said was “There’s something wrong with this microphone.” Immediately the people responded by saying, “and also with you!”

When we do things for those who are weak in the faith that makes a big impact in their lives. We have the opportunity to show others the love of God and we must look forward to do such acts of charity. Tyler Watts wrote, “I think I disconnect from the gospel of Jesus Christ when I’m not involved in close relationships with other believers.” The church fellowship facilitates people to know each other and then helps them to learn to love one another. St. Lawrence was martyred in 258 A.D., but we remember him not for his martyrdom. We remember him as the Archdeacon of Rome. His responsibilities included maintaining the sacred vessels of the small, struggling church and distributing alms to the poor. While he was Archdeacon, the Governor of Rome took Pope Sixtus 2 captive and demanded, “Where is the treasure of the church?” The Pope would not tell, and they tortured him to death. Next the Romans took Lawrence captive. “Where is the treasure of the Church?” they demanded, threatening with the same fate that befell the Pope. Lawrence replied, “Governor, I cannot get it for you instantaneously;

but if you give me three days, I will give you the treasure.” The governor agreed. Lawrence left. Three days later he walked into the governor’s courtyard followed by a great flood of people. The Governor walked out onto his balcony and said, “Where is the treasure of your church?” Lawrence stepped forward, and pointed to the crowd that accompanied him – the lame, the blind, the deaf, the nobodies of society – and said, “Here are the treasures of the Christian church.” If today’s church leaders and members can learn this truth it would be glory on earth! Majority of these spiritually dumb and sensibly immature people erroneously believe that church lands, buildings and offerings are the real treasures of the Church and simply ignore the souls of men! O, God give us some spiritual and godly leaders in the church today.

The Astounding gifts of the Holy Spirit

1 Cor 14:12, 12:7 they are given for the benefit or profit of all. Some believe they are ceased and others believe they are continuing. It is a fierce battle between the Cessationists versus the Continualists. That’s a hot issue let’s keep it for some other time. God has given certain spiritual gifts for the edification of His body - the church. It is NOT the intent of the Holy Spirit to gift everyone in the church in the same way, but IT IS the intent of the Holy Spirit to gift every believer in some way. Let’s acknowledge that and apply truth to our lives to do His will. 1 Pet 4:10 says gifts are not given for a Show but for Service; not for Pomp but foreveryone’s Profit; not to Magnify self but to Edify others! Everybeliever must recognize his or her gift and use it to edify the body instead of crying over what others have. A thirty-eight-year-old scrubwoman would go to the movies and sigh, “If only I had her looks.” She would listen to a singer and moan, “If only I had her voice.” Then one day someone gave her a copy of the book, *The Magic of Believing*. She stopped comparing herself with actresses and singers. She stopped crying about what she didn’t have and started concentrating on what she did have. She took inventory of herself and remembered that in high school she had a reputation for being the funniest girl around. She began to turn her liabilities into assets.

A few years ago Phyllis Diller made over \$1 million in one year. She wasn't good-looking and she had a scratchy voice, but she could make people laugh. That's what counts.

The Abstaining from corrupt Speech

The Christian mind and mouth are two very powerful tools God can use to build others and bless them greatly. The mind must be cleansed of stinking thinking and the mouth must get rid of stinking talking. In Eph 4:29 we are commanded to speak in such a way that grace is ministered to the hearers. In Job 4:4 Eliphaz says about Job, "your words have helped the tottering to stand, and you have strengthened feeble knees." When every person in the church speaks for the glory of God and for the good of the people the whole church is edified. Restraining ourselves from evil speech, gossip, lies, spreading rumors, false reporting is the way to edify the church. We need to repent of our gossip and replace it with what John Stott calls "holy gossip." That is, we need to talk enthusiastically about the transforming work that Christ is doing in people's lives. It should be our goal to see people come to Christ and grow in Him.

Growth - The Bible clearly says in 1 Cor 3:6-7 God grows a church and gives the increase. We do the "**planting**" and God does the "**granting!**" Mk 16:20, Acts 2:47, 6:7. Spurgeon said, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down. By faith the walls of this church will be pushed back." The deacons talked to him afterwards and told him he was presumptuous, being only a young man. But during his ministry the walls were pushed back three times and the church grew! Church edification means edification of the nation for the glory of God.

3

Worship

“We belittle God when we go through the outward motions of worship and take no pleasure in His person!” John Piper

What is Worship?

The word worship has created lot of confusion among evangelical Christians. Few people understand what it is and do it appropriately. It is a beautiful word with a beautiful meaning but not all have understood its real worth. The word **“worship”** is an Anglo-Saxon word **“weorth scipe”** and means **“to ascribe worth unto.”** When we worship God, we are saying “God is worthy of all my love, my attention and my devotion. He is worthy to receive all that I can give Him.” The essential idea is that whatever it is that you value most highly or place the greatest worth upon is what you worship.

The word commonly translated ‘worship’ in the NT—though there are several other Greek words—is **“Proskuneo”** (Pros-koo-neh-o) to kiss the hand in reverence! This is thought to be derived from the slave’s manner of salutation and homage when he entered the presence of his master, the act being a mark of reverence and respect, and also implying affection. It’s a picture of a dog licking his master’s hand in

love, trust and devotion. Also it means **“to kneel or to bow down or fall prostrate”** before the Lord. William Temple, the renowned archbishop of Canterbury, defined worship as “quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, feeding the mind with the truth of God, purging the imagination by the beauty of God, opening the heart to the love of God, and devoting the will to the purpose of God.” Absolutely beautiful and apt. True worship **“recognizes”** the value of God, **“reveres”** the greatness of God, and **“rejoices”** in honoring Him through adoration. Worship does not happen just on Sunday mornings amidst four walls but it encompasses our whole life!

Whom should we Worship?

In Mat 4:10 Jesus taught us by saying, “you shall worship the Lord your God ...only.” Exo 20:2-3 the first commandment says, “I am the Lord your God and you shall not have any other gods.” Second commandment says, “you shall not make any graven image... and not bow before them to worship them.” We were not created to worship any object, person, thing, matter, pleasure or self but God! We were specially created to worship God and specifically commanded to worship God alone. Howard Snyder said, “Believers need to know by experience that the Most High God is the Most Nigh God.” According to Jh 4:23 we worship the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. In His book, “Experience God in *Worship*,” Christian Author George Barna says that the main reason millions of people in America go to church every week is not to worship God, but instead to have a pleasing experience. He goes on to say that “most Americans go to church to satisfy or please themselves, not to honor or please God.” Amazingly, few of the people that Barna’s research team interviewed said that worship is something that they do primarily for God. Instead a much larger percentage of those who attend worship services on a regular basis claim that they do so for personal benefit and pleasure. This is something that has got to change. We must forget about ourselves and concentrate on Him. He must be the primary focus of our worship.

We must worship the true and the living God. Our God is the one and only Lord. Otherwise there is a danger of us becoming like what we worship! James Michener, writing in his book, *The Source*, tells the story of a man named Urbaal, who was a farmer living about 2200 B.C. He worshiped two gods, one a god of death, the other a goddess of fertility. One day, the temple priests tell Urbaal to bring his young son to the temple for sacrifice if he wants good crops. Urbaal obeys, and on the appointed day drags his wife and boy to the scene of the boy's "religious execution" by fire to the god of death. After the sacrifice of Urbaal's boy and several others, the priests announce that one of the fathers will spend next week in the temple, with a new temple prostitute. Urbaal's wife is stunned as she notices a desire written more intensely across his face than she had seen before, and she is overwhelmed to see him eagerly lunge forward when his name is called. The ceremony over, she walks out of the temple with her head swimming, concluding that "if he had different gods, he would have been a different man." How true is the Scripture Ps 115:4-8 that is written for our enlightenment?

"Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of man's hands.

They have mouths, but they cannot speak;
They have eyes, but they cannot see;

They have ears, but they cannot hear;
They have noses, but they cannot smell;

They have hands, but they cannot feel;
They have feet, but they cannot walk;
They cannot make a sound with their throat.
Those who make them will become like them,
Everyone who trusts in them."

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "The gods we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that. And a man will worship something—have no doubt about that, either. He may think that his tribute is

paid in secret in the dark recesses of his heart—but it will be out. That which dominates will determine his life and character. Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

People worship various things and persons in life knowingly or unknowingly Jh 4:22. **You must ask yourself the pointed question - who are you worshipping?** During the tenure of the great orator Henry Ward Beecher, a visiting minister (Beecher’s brother) once substituted for the popular pastor. A large audience had already assembled to hear Beecher, and when the substitute pastor stepped into the pulpit, several disappointed listeners began to move toward the exits. That’s when the minister stood and said loudly, “All who have come here today to worship Henry Ward Beecher may now withdraw from the church. All who have come to worship God keep your seats!” Christendom has got some real problems and one such problem is in the area of worship. Gordon Dahl once observed, “Our problem is that we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship.”

Why should we Worship?

God is worthy of our worship. He created us for that very purpose Ps 95:6-7. We worship God because of His grace, His glory, His goodness, His greatness and His great love. Jh 4:23 Jesus said that the Father “**seeks**” for such worship. It is of great importance to God. Do you know what God is seeking? He is seeking sincere worshippers. He is not looking for great singers, great musicians, great leaders, great performers but pure worshippers. Notice how many times the word worship or worshipper is mentioned in Jh. 4:20-24? 10 times in 5 verses in the Telugu Bible! Amazing, isn’t it?

Understanding worship in its right perspective is very essential. Much confusion is around in Christendom regarding worship! There is true worship and false worship and many cannot even discern the right from the wrong. False worship makes God reject the sacrifice, Cain’s case in Gen 4:5. False worship makes people go astray from the true

and living God Exo 32 Israelites worshipping the golden calf. False worship will divide the people 1 Kin 11:31-33. False worship led the people to face the wrath of God Rom 1:25.

How to Worship God?

Let's look at the four facets of worship -

*** Worship is Spiritual**

Worship must be done in spirit & truth Jh 4:23-24. Worship belongs to your innermost being – your spirit. That's why it is important to note that only those who are saved can offer true worship Jh 4:22. Salvation is a prerequisite to spiritual worship. When your spirit is regenerated by the Lord from death to life you become ready to worship. When your spirit aligns with God who is a Spirit and adore Him, love Him and praise Him, you worship. Worship is not sensual as it is made out to be today in most churches and meetings (smoke, colored lights, sound effects, punk style musicians and jazzy choir etc) but it is spiritual. It's like everything else is there but **“He”** is not there. After attending church one Sunday morning, a little boy knelt at his bedside that night and prayed, “Dear God, we had a good time at church today but I wish you had been there!”

Worship is of the heart Mat 15:9. Today much of our worship is ‘heartless.’ We just go through the motions without devotion or proper emotion. I heard about two men who went into business together. One man's name was Jim Heart and the other man's name was Paul Head, Mr. Heart & Mr. Head. So what do you think they called their new business, “Head & Heart.” Well, not long after that began, tragedy struck, heart died. At the funeral, a friend of the family in referring to their business said, “poor heart has died and left head alone.” Friend, when it comes to worship, I'm afraid that poor heart had died and left head alone! And I want to suggest that we need to resurrect the dead heart! We need to put our heart back into worship. Some who get very excited when they happen to meet a celebrity, come to church and sit back and yawn in the very presence of God? What do they think of God? Are they not crazy nuts?

We sing and say things we don't mean. They just fall from our lips but do not come from our hearts. Worshipping in spirit means you don't worship an object, an image, you don't worship an instrument, a person, you don't worship lights, the screen, or the building. God is a Spirit that means you worship Him in spirit. You can worship God anywhere not only here because God is a Spirit. Look at the way Jesus admonished the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. Someone very aptly put it, "To give God the service of the body and not of the soul—is Hypocrisy: To give God the service of the soul and not of the body—is Sacrilege: To give God neither is Atheism: To give God both is Worship." Absolutely true. Deeply immersed in meditation during a church service, Italian poet Dante Alighieri failed to kneel at the appropriate moment. His enemies hurried to the bishop and demanded that Dante be punished for his sacrilege. Dante defended himself by saying, "If those who accuse me had their eyes and minds on God, as I had, they too would have failed to have noticed what I was doing."

*** Worship is Sacrificial**

Gen 22:5 shows us Abraham's worship in sacrifice. The word "**worship**" (shawkaw in Hebrew) is first mentioned in Genesis and it meant sacrifice in the context. Giving our best and most loved thing to God freely and joyfully. 2 Sam 24:24 David's worship involved a cost. How can we ever think of offering cheap, costless worship to a God who is the picture of such a great sacrifice? Mat 2:10-11 the wise men from the east saw Jesus and worshipped Him by offering Him precious gifts. Jh 12:3 Mary worshipped the Lord by her very precious gift. Finally, we can never forget the widow who gave her "**all**" in worship to the Lord Mk 12:44 (Lk 21:1 actually says the Lord looked carefully at their giving). Some are so horrible that they will neither give their silver nor suffer for the Savior. One Sunday morning during a service, a 2,000-member congregation was surprised to see two men enter, both covered from head to toe in black and carrying sub-machine guns. One of the men proclaimed, "Anyone willing to take a bullet for Christ, remain where you are." Immediately, the choir fled, the deacons fled, and most of the congregation fled. Out of the 2,000 there only remained around twenty. The man who had spoken took off his hood, looked at the preacher and said, "Okay pastor, I got rid of all the hypocrites."

Now you may begin your service. Have a nice day!” And the two men turned and walked out.

*** Worship is Surrender**

Gen 22:5 tells us that Abraham was a man who was totally surrendered to God. Because he surrendered himself to God the moment he heard God asking for the sacrifice of his son he could do it without delay or debate. For many of us it is unthinkable to make any sacrifice for God because our basic problem is we have not surrendered our all to Him. Rom 12:1 admonishes us to surrender our body as a living sacrifice. Ps 96:9 exhorts us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Only surrendered people can live holy and worship appropriately. Pure worship is acceptable to God. It means that you live a righteous life and offer worship to the Lord. It is beautiful in His sight.

In Jh 4 the Samaritan woman’s life was not right. It was sinful and she was trying to cover it up when Jesus raised the issue. While living in sexual immorality she was worshipping on Mt. Gerizim! She had the guts to discuss about worship with the Lord Himself. Jesus helped her to come out with her sin, confess it and forsake it before she could worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The OT demanded external cleansing before worship but in the NT it is internal cleansing before worship. Look at the small yet profound word used by the Lord here in Jh 4:23 you must worship with **“sincerity.”** Yes, without sincerity or integrity our worship gets tainted, polluted, and remains hypocritical in the sight of God. Stuart Sacks while serving in Paraguay had an experience, and he shares this story. “A Maka Indian named Rafael came to sit on my porch. I was eating and went out to see what he wanted. He responded, “Ham, henek met.” Again I asked what I could do for him, but the answer was the same. I understood what he was saying but not its significance: “I don’t want anything; I have just come near.” I later shared the incident with a local veteran missionary. He explained that it was Rafael’s way of honoring me. He really didn’t want anything; he just wanted to sit on my porch. He found satisfaction and pleasure just being near me. “What brings you here, my child?” the Lord asks. “Ham, henek met.” Doesn’t that reveal the heart of true worship?

* **Worship is Service**

For many people worship means ‘singing’ nice songs to the Lord or ‘bringing’ nice things to the Lord. Very few understand that real worship is expressed through service! It’s not just singing, bringing but serving and living all is worship. Lk 4:7-8 – Jesus in answering the Devil uttered an important truth related to worship. Satan was not asking our Lord simply to fall to the ground before him. He was asking the Lord to acknowledge him as sovereign and to surrender to him in service. This is why our Lord responded, “It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.” It is a universal fact that whom you worship, you serve! Rom 15:16 Paul says that by offering the sacrifice of the gentiles through the Holy Spirit to God was an act of worship. Here the word **“leitourgos”** means **“minister”** which is connected to the word **“latreuo”** of Lk 4. In Heb 12:29 the word ‘serve’ is the same Greek word that is often translated as worship. We learn from this that service is included in worship of God. We can serve God in various capacities according to the word. When we serve one another, when we serve people, when we serve children, when we serve the sick and needy we worship the Lord. Do you worship the Lord through actions and deeds of service?

Finally, let us make up our minds and hearts to live to worship this great God of ours now and forever. That is our purpose, privilege and blessing. A number of prominent literary men were assembled in a clubroom in London one day a number of years ago. The conversation veered to a discussion of some of the illustrious figures of the past, and one of the company suddenly asked: “Gentlemen, what would we do if Milton were to enter this room?” “Ah,” replied one of the circle, “we would give him such an ovation as might compensate for the tardy recognition accorded him by the men of his own day.” “And if Shakespeare entered?” asked another. “We would arise and crown him master of song,” was the answer. “And if Jesus Christ were to enter?” asked another. “I think,” said Charles Lamb amid an intense silence, “we would all fall on our faces and worship Him!”

Is that what you think too about our blessed Lord God and great Savior?

4

Singing for the glory of God

“It is not sufficient to offer the empty vessel of our joy unto God, or our singing voice in musical tune only; but also it is required that we fill our joyful voice with holy matter and good purpose, whereby God only may be reasonably praised.” David Dickson

Christians and singing is something unique in the entire world. But strangely what we find in the church congregations today is very disturbing -

Some sing as a matter of tradition
Some sing out of courtesy to the leaders
Some sing as a regular church practice
Some sing because they love to sing and be happy
Some sing to show off their talent
Some sing without emotion
Some don't sing at all
Only few truly and heart fully sing praises to God in worship!

We are called and commanded to sing and praise God Ps 98 :1,4-5. We sing to God and we sing about God! David was known as the **“sweet singer”** of Israel in 2 Sam 23:1. In his book, *Psalms of the Heart*, George Sweeting illustrated a great truth from the experience of two Moody Bible Institute graduates, John and Elaine Beekman.

God called them to missionary work among the Chol Indians of southern Mexico. Sweeting reports that they rode mules and travelled by dugout canoes to reach this tribe. They labored 25 years with other missionaries to translate the New Testament into the language of the Chol Indians. Today the Chol Church is thriving. More than 12,000 Christians make up the Chol Christian community. What's interesting is that when the missionaries came, the Chol Indians didn't know how to sing. With the coming of the gospel, however, the believers in the tribe became known as "the singers." Sweeting writes: "They love to sing now, because now they have something to sing about."

In the Bible we learn that Moses sang, Miriam sang, Deborah sang, Hannah sang, Morning stars sang, David sang, Asaph sang, Mary sang, Angels sang, Jesus sang, Apostles sang, and Paul sang! Angels and the 24 elders in heaven are singing continually, the early church sang so we the saints of the Lord must sing. As Martin Luther said, "Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise." Congregational singing had been halted since the close of the fourth century, when the church leaders decreed: "If laymen are not to interpret the Scriptures for themselves, so they are not to sing the songs of the church." Martin Luther declared, "Let God speak directly to His people through the Scriptures, and let His people respond with grateful songs of praise." Interestingly, the vehicle God used to fan these Reformation teachings was a hymn by Martin Luther, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," based on Ps 46. Frederic Henry Hedge translated it into English. This hymn is Luther's great commentary on Ps 46. Martin Luther many years ago was looking for a way to help the people of his day learn to praise God in song. So he went into the pubs to find out what they were singing. He took a popular tune and set words to it... "A Mighty Fortress is Our God..." That's a bar tune – popular music of the day used to communicate truth.

Let's learn from the Bible why we sing and what we sing:

* Singing to Adore the Lord

We sing to God to bless His holy name and we sing to declare His praise among the nations Ps 96:1-3. The word “**sing**” is mentioned 3 times. We sing because of His **Salvation**. Rev 5:9-10 the 24 elders in heaven are singing His praise for His salvation. Although Charles Wesley had been engaged in preaching the gospel with much diligence and earnestness, he did not know what it was to enjoy peace with God until he was in his thirtieth year. Being laid low by an alarming illness, and seeming as if he were going to die, a young Moravian named Peter Bohler, who was undergoing a course of preparation by him to go out as a missionary, asked him, “Do you hope to be saved?” Charles answered, “Yes.” “For what reason do you hope it?” “Because I have used my best endeavors to serve God,” was his reply. The Moravian shook his head and said no more. That sad, silent, significant shake of the head shattered all Charles Wesley’s false foundation of salvation by endeavors. He was afterwards taught by Peter Bohler the way of the Lord more perfectly, and brought to see that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ men are justified. And now in his sick-room, he was able to write for the first time in his life, “I now find myself at peace with God;” and it was on this occasion he composed that beautiful hymn, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise.”

We sing to declare His **Sovereignty**. His glory must be sung by His redeemed a lot. Rev 5:13 reveals the great praise service to God and Jesus in heaven by whole of creation. Eph 5:19, Col 3:16 the first sign of a Spirit filled Christian is to sing and worship. Both verses teach that when we are filled with the Spirit or with the Scripture we sing God’s praise. Spirit filled Christian sings, Scripture filled Christian sings. If you are not a singing Christian, then there is something wrong. “. . . singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” It is a command. In some versions it is “**in your heart**” and in others “**with your heart.**” Both ways it seems perfectly alright because in silent worship and adoration we make melody and sing to the Lord in our hearts. As a church corporately we sing to the Lord with all our heart because He loves real praise from it. Mat 15:9 Jesus’ warning is clear. Also “with your heart” signifies that you mean it and that you feel it. We should sing to praise God because praise should be one of the characteristic activities of the Christian. The

apostle Peter reminds us about our sacred responsibility 1 Pet 2:9. We have been called to belong to God for the purpose of declaring his praises Isa 43:21.

The test of your singing is – Does it exalt and glorify our magnificent God? Does it humble yourself in His holy presence? Does it display a heartfelt gratitude to the lover of your soul? Does it truly reflect the zeal of your faith? Does it sound pleasant to the ears of the Lord God? Does it unite your heart with other saints who are singing praise to the Lord? Does it proclaim the Excellencies of the Lord to the people around? Tell Him that you love Him and that you will live for Him. It is a sin to be apathetic in worship. A couple married for 25 years went to a marriage counsellor. The wife complained that her husband never told her that he loved her. He snapped, “I told you that 25 years ago and I haven’t changed my mind!” That’s not good enough. Love has to be expressed. Even a cold, “I love you” isn’t as good as a warm embrace. Let the Lord know that you love Him and forget about what others around you may think. May David’s attitude, a man after God’s own heart, describe our own Ps 104:33. Because praise is beautiful Ps 147:1.

As we sing, Jesus Christ is not only our Captain, but also the Conductor of our song Heb 2:12. **We sing to our King!** N. T. Wright in his book ‘For All God’s Worth’ writes, “In the Bible, we continually see a nexus between God’s presence and song. In the Old Testament, 2 Chro 5:12-14 describes God’s glory falling upon His people when the priests played and sang their songs of praise to God. The great multitude in Revelation which no man can number aren’t playing cricket. They aren’t going shopping. They are worshipping. Sounds boring? If so, it shows how impoverished our idea of worship has become. Worship is the central characteristic of the heavenly life; and that worship focuses on the God we know in and as Jesus.”

*** Singing to Affirm the truth**

Moses declares the grand truth of the scripture to the whole world through his song in Exo 15:11-13. Moses sang it after the great deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. We too must sing not only to praise our God but also to proclaim Him. Someone

wrote, “Christianity is the only religion that abounds in song. Atheism is songless; agnosticism has nothing to sing about; the various forms of idolatry are not tuneful; but Judaism said, “O come, let us sing unto the Lord;” and when Christ came, the angels greeted His birth with praise, and since then Christian song has gained in fullness and strength of voice with each century.”

The early church was plagued with many heresies and one of the ways they tackled with the problem was to sing spiritual songs declaring scriptural truths. Use songs that fill our minds with God’s character, that form our worldview by God’s truth, and that teach us about the biblical meaning and personal implications of His Gospel. The best of the hymns and the best of the more modern worship choruses are those that direct our focus away from ourselves and onto the character and the gospel of God. Practice discerning the difference, and be careful about what you’re teaching through the music you encourage people to sing.

Paul Lusher gives us a little background of the early church, ‘John Chrysostom often wrote of the church’s responsibility regarding singing psalms and hymns. As you remember, Chrysostom lived in the fourth century, a century that was dominated by a theological rift perpetuated by the early Christian theologian, Arius. (His followers were called “Arians”). Arius regarded as error the church’s teaching of the full divinity of Christ, that is, Christ was “co-eternal with God.” In 323, the Council of Nicea met and overwhelmingly decreed that Christ was “co-eternal with God the Father.” Christ always was and always is God. This remained one of the most important rulings in church history and supposedly, resolved the issue. But in reality, the controversy would simmer for the rest of the century and in some churches, it is still with us today. Surprisingly, music played a significant role in the conflict. The view that Christ was not fully God was perpetuated by hymns- hymns that denied Christ’s deity and were sung by the Arians! Their music was so popular with “ordinary churchgoers” that they increasingly became ensnared in this heresy.

The story is told of how on a Sunday, the Arians pushed their way into John Chrysostom's own church and shouted derisively: "Look at the fools who believe that three make one!" The Council of Nicea had affirmed the truth of the Trinity, but many of the "common folk" were beguiled by the music of the Arians. Thankfully, God raised up a dynamic hymn writer to successfully counter these divisive hymns. His name: Ambrose of Milan, a poet, preacher and an apologist for the full deity of Christ. While only a few of his hymns remain today, at least one or two are found in most modern hymnals. His hymns were a powerful force for truth and made a real difference in this titanic struggle. One of the hymns, "Maker of All Things" ends this way: *Christ with the Father everone, Spirit, the Father and the Son, God over all, the mighty sway, shield us, great Trinity, we pray.* Thankfully, God used the hymns of Ambrose to help turn the tide against the popular but misguided theology.

Today, the Church is again caught in a great struggle. In many parts of the world, the strong truth of Scripture, is being replaced by a tepid, emotion-clad gospel. And once again, music seems to be at the forefront of this deception. Church after church is rejecting strong hymnody as they yield to the dangerous disease of weak music and poor theology.' Now we understand the meaning of Ps 119:54!

In the year 1742 John Wesley gave these five rules on singing in church:

1. Sing all - See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can. Let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you. If it is a cross to you, take it up and you will find a blessing.
2. Sing lustily and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength.
3. Sing modestly - Do not bawl so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation; but strive to unite your voices together so as to make one clear, melodious sound.

4. Sing in time - Whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it.

5. Above all, sing spiritually - Have an eye to God in every word you sing. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound but offered to God continually.

*** Singing to Admonish one another**

Christianity, on the contrary, wakes up the soul with a new life. “The fruit of the Spirit is... joy,” and must find outlet in singing. Corporate worship gives us the platform to bless one another through song. An old German proverb runs: “Wer spricht mit mir ist mein Mitmensch; wer singt mit mir ist mein Bruder” (the one who speaks with me is my fellow human; the one who sings with me is my brother). In the world of Christian community today, nothing defines “brotherhood” more obviously than singing. Singing scriptural songs itself is a teaching ministry. In Deut 31:19-22 the Lord teaches Moses one of the first songs recorded in Scripture. He tells Moses to “teach it to the people” so that when they are tempted to turn away from the Lord, “this song shall confront them as a witness.” God used song as a tool to teach theological truths to His people.

Eph 5:19, Col 3:16 clearly speak about our ministry of exhortation through various songs. Scriptural songs are powerful enough to touch the lives of people and change them forever. In one part of India the maharajah has proclaimed to all who go forth to draw water from a well in any part of his country must go with a song on their lips—and go singing all the way. The reason for this command is that a man was found dying of thirst within a few yards of a well. He did not know the well was there. He never recovered consciousness. And now, if you hear songs on the lips of one walking through the jungle today, you know that there is a well nearby. Through admonition and exhortation through the songs children of God can awaken a dying man and get him to the fountain of life Jesus! We can exhort those that are discouraged, defeated, disheartened once again to hope in the Lord. After the London debut of George Frederic Handel’s glorious Messiah, the Lord Kinnoull remarked to the composer that it was an “Entertaining piece.” Handel responded, “I

should be sorry, my lord, if I have only succeeded in entertaining them; I wished to make them better.”

*** Singing to Acknowledge Scripture**

Carefully look at Eph 5:19, Col 3:16 and you will notice that there is much said here in regard to our singing praises to God. Many think that singing is a waste of time or gap filler or just a church custom but it's not. God's command for us is not optional.

*** Psalms** – This comes from the Greek word **“Psalms”** which means **“a song accompanied with music.”** In the NT the term is often used referring to the OT Psalms. The Psalms of the OT was the Hymn book of Israel. Also, the word in its various forms is used for singing praise to God in general. Those who are merry are to sing psalms Jam 5:13; the collected Christians are to encourage each other with, among other things, psalms 1 Cor 14:26. A body is not crippled ‘til its heart has ceased to praise.’ Louis Albert Banks tells of an elderly Christian man, a fine singer, who learned that he had cancer of the tongue and that surgery was required. In the hospital after everything was ready for the operation, the man said to the doctor, “Are you sure I will never sing again?” The surgeon found it difficult to answer his question. He simply shook his head no. The patient then asked if he could sit up for a moment. “I’ve had many good times singing the praises of God,” he said. “And now you tell me I can never sing again. I have one song that will be my last. It will be of gratitude and praise to God.” There in the doctor’s presence the man sang softly the words of Isaac Watts’ hymn, “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath,/ And when my voice is lost in death,/ Praise shall employ my nobler power;/ My days of praise shall ne’er be past,/ While life, and thought, and being last,/ Or immortality endures.”

*** Hymns** - The word **“HYMN”** which comes from the Greek word **HUMNOS**, meaning **“a song in praise of.”** Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn when they finished the Lord’s Supper, before they went to the Mount of Olives Mat 26:30, Mk 14:26. At midnight in the prison, after having been beaten and placed in severe stocks, Paul and Silas sang hymns so loud the other prisoners could hear them Acts 16:25. Wayne Barber writes, “The word “hymns” however,

was a little different word. The hymns, from all the study that I could do, refer primarily to the songs of praise which, in the early church, did not just exalt God, but exalted His Christ, the Son of God, the One who is the embodiment of the Godhead fully. They exalted Christ, whereas the psalms evolved from way back and exalted the Godhead. The hymns would lift up and exalt the Lord Jesus. There are many people who think that a lot of pieces of the New Testament, a lot of things that are said, are taken right out of some of the early Christian songs or hymns that were sung in the church. Col 1:12-16 is one example that I came across as I was studying. No, it doesn't mean that God didn't inspire it. It doesn't mean that God didn't have a thought there, but some of the thinking sometimes was married with some of the early hymns that exalted the Lord Jesus Christ." Look at the glorious praise scene in heaven Rev 7:10-12!

*** Spiritual Songs** - But since songs can be secular as well as sacred, wicked as well as pious, Paul specifies what kind of songs the Christians should sing to God and each other. They are to be spiritual. This word, of course, is related to the Holy Spirit, and to spiritual truth in general. Putting all these uses together, we can see that spiritual songs are songs which are agreeable to the word of God, and which thus are empowered by the Holy Spirit to praise God and edify the church. It is only by the Holy Spirit that we can sing to Jesus as Lord.

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the farmer, "it was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns." "Praise choruses?" said his wife, "What are those?" "Oh they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer. "Well, what's the difference?" asked the wife. The farmer said, "Well it's like this - If I were to say to you: 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you: 'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, Martha, MARTHA MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, the CORN, CORN, CORN'! 'Oh, Oh, Ooooooooooh, yes, it's true, the whole herd

is in the awesome corn, yes, it's true, the whole herd is in the awesome corn, — weeell, it's true, the whole herd is in the awesome corn! Alleluia! - That would be a praise chorus."

*** Singing to Ambush the enemy**

It is marvelous to know that there is victory over the enemy when we sing true praises to God 2 Chro 20:22-23. The Bible says, "as they began to sing and praise" the Lord set ambushments against the enemy! God used their singing to wage a war and win. Spiritual singing is powerful and can demolish the strong holds of the enemy – the devil. May be they sang the song "In heavenly armor we will enter the land, the battle belongs to the Lord, no weapon that is formed against us shall stand, the battle belongs to the Lord. We sing glory, honor, power and praise to the Lord!" After a great victory the people have gathered in the valley and had a jubilant praise service to glorify their Lord and God. Martin Luther, the 16th century Reformer, wrote: "The Devil takes flight at the sound of music, just as he does at the words of theology, and for this reason the prophets always combined theology and music, teaching of truth and the chanting of Psalms and hymns. After theology, I give the highest place and greatest honor to music." Many underestimate the power of singing praises to God. They do not know that when the church sings in unison, great power is unleashed to counter the tactics of the evil one.

Through song and music, we can not only confuse the enemy but also make them run for their life. The beams of the sun (it is the learned Bochart's comparison) cannot be cut with a sword, quenched with water, or blown out with wind, but, by closing the window-shutters, they may be kept out of the chamber. Singing can stop the schemes of the devil from being implemented in our lives if done in spirit and truth! Satan cannot stand the great Redeemer's praise sung by His redeemed people! John Piper points out that, "God has appointed the use of spiritual songs as an effective weapon against his arch enemy Satan." Mary Schlosser worked for years as a missionary in China. She used to say, "I sing the doxology and dismiss the devil." Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, said, "I believe truly that Satan cannot endure it and so slips out of the room – more or less – when there is a true song." We can get victory over hardships

by singing praise to the Lord. 1 Sam 16:23 David drove away the evil spirit from Saul by playing the harp and praising God. Mathew Henry says in his commentary, “Only his instrumental music with his harp is mentioned, but it should seem, by the account Josephus gives, that he added vocal music to it, and sung hymns, probably divine hymns, songs of praise, to his harp.”

* **Singing to Adjust while suffering**

Acts 16:19-26 incident gives us a beautiful expression of real faith and trust in the Lord. There are **3 odds** here in this passage. First, **Odd Trial** – Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten up, and then wrongfully thrown in prison for no fault of theirs. Second, **Odd Time** – in the midnight they were praying and singing praise to God. Those who don’t sing in the church will they ever sing in a prison? Even in their pain, God was not far from Paul and Silas. Tertullian said, “The legs feel nothing in the stocks when the heart is in heaven.” Thirdly, **Odd Testimony** – prisoners listening, earthquake, foundations shaken and doors open. God has done great things for His people when they suffered for Him. Ps 32:7 look at David how he is strengthened by **songs of deliverance** in his times of trouble. Learn to sing when suffering! **Bathroom singing** is easy but try **prison room singing**. God seems to bring His greatest revelations during times of suffering.

Horatio Spafford wrote, “It is well with my soul” after his 4 daughters were drowned in the Atlantic and His wife Anna survived. Martin Rinkart wrote for his children, “Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices; Who wondrous things hath done, in whom this world rejoices” after he buried his wife along with another 4480 people at the rate of 40-50 per day in Germany’s 30 years’ war! Joseph Scriven wrote, “What a friend we have in Jesus” after the deaths of two of his fiancées and his mother’s illness who was far away in Ireland! Darlene Zschech experienced dark days in her life in 1993. Life seemed to be unbearable. She turned to Ps 96 and wrote “Shout to the Lord.” Don Moen was on a plane going to sing for the funeral of his young nephew who died in a horrific automobile accident. As he read Isa 43:19, “I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert,” God gave Don the song, “God Will Make a Way.” Laurie Klein going through loneliness and financial strain,

picked up her guitar and out of her mouth came, “I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You.” Brian Doerkson moved from Canada to London to become a worship leader of a small church. He had recently lost \$1 million dollars and his home in the collapse of a major ministry project. Three of his 6 children were diagnosed with a form of mental retardation. As he walked and prayed near Wimbledon Stadium, God gave him the song, “Come, now is the time to worship.” Marc Byrd, in deep despair and penniless, spent an entire weekend studying the Psalms. Out of that weekend came the song, “God of wonders beyond our galaxy, You are holy, holy the universe declares Your majesty; You are holy, holy” a song used on 2 of the space flights to awaken the astronauts.

Sing Christian sing, sing child of God sing, sing disciple sing, sing church sing for Him. We sing for our King!

5

Hiding God's word in the Heart

“The Word of God religiously obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual perfection. And we must not select just a few favorite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than the whole Bible can make a whole Christian.” – A.W. Tozer

Mary **‘treasured’** the word of God and **‘pondered’** on these things Lk 2:19. Mary was a thinking woman. She was thinking about the right things. She laid her mind on things eternal, that was her strength and beauty. Unusual for her age, the Bible says she was a young maiden. She was very careful in considering everything. When the angel first came to announce to her that she would bear a son, and met her with the greeting Lk 1:28-29, the Bible tells us that “she was troubled at this saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.” Others might simply be overwhelmed by the fact that an angel would appear to them at all, and still others would be overwhelmed that such a thing would be said of them. But of Mary, we’re specifically told that she tried to analyze this statement and understand what it meant. And when the angel further told her that she would conceive in her womb and bring forth a son, her inquisitive mind moved her to ask a very good question: “How shall this thing be, seeing I know not a man?” v34. There are more indications in the Bible of this aspect of Mary’s personality. In Lk 2:49-51 we read “his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” Mary, again, shows herself to be a thinker, who mulled things over in her mind.

Job 23:12 Job said, 'I have **"treasured"** his words more than my necessary food.' Ps 119:72 Psalmist treasured God's word more than silver and gold. It is important that the word of God be in our hand, in our head, and on our tongue but all the more in our heart. How does one treasure the Word? The first requirement for keeping that treasure is to recognize that it is a TREASURE. A beautiful and touching story is told of a young French girl who had been born blind. After she learned to read by touch, a friend gave her a Braille copy of Mark's gospel. She read it so much that her fingers became calloused and insensitive. In an effort to regain her feeling, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers. Tragically, however, her calluses were replaced by permanent and even more insensitive scars. She sobbingly gave the book a goodbye kiss, saying, "FAREWELL, FAREWELL, SWEET WORD OF MY HEAVENLY FATHER." In doing so, she discovered that her lips were even more sensitive than her fingers had been, and she spent the rest of her life reading her great treasure with her lips. Would that every Christian had such an appetite for the Word of God!

How to hide the word in the heart?

In Deut 6:6 God commanded the Israelites to keep his words in their **"heart."** Col 3:16 says the Word of Christ must **"richly"** dwell in our hearts. There is a clear indication here in the Scriptures. Yes, our hearts must be loaded with the right ammunition for the battles we face in life.

*** Receiving the Word**

Whether it is the angel's message Lk 1:26-38 or Elisabeth's prophecy Lk 1:40-45 or the shepherd's message Lk 2:8-18, Mary readily received it. Jam 1:21 tells us to **"Receive"** simply means, **"to welcome,"** as we welcome a friend into our home we should welcome God's word into our heart. How to welcome it? Receive the word with **Meekness** Jam1:21, meekness means a broken and contrite spirit, with humility, with submissiveness not with argument or resistance or grumbling or unwillingly or with disinterest but with willingness like Mary. There is a funny story that shows

how few actually receive the word and hide it in their hearts. A lawyer, a doctor, and a preacher went deer hunting together when along came a big buck. The three of them all shot at the same time, and immediately the buck dropped to the ground. They all rushed up to examine the deer, but couldn't determine whose shot had actually killed it. They were in the middle of a heated argument when a game warden came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him that they were debating who shot the buck. The warden took one look at the buck and immediately pronounced, "The preacher shot the buck!" They all wondered how he knew that so quickly. To which the warden said, "Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other." Ouch! Is it not what people do with the preaching of the word? It will be a real problem if people allow GOD'S Word to go in one ear and out the other.

We must allow the word to work in our lives by receiving it with love and honor 1 Thes 2:13. Receive the word with **"Eagerness or readiness of the mind"** Acts 17:11, the Bereans were already prepared to accept any word from God. Jas 1:19 says we must be **"swift"** to hear, it comes from the Greek word **"tachus"** from which we get **"Tachometer"** means to hear quickly, speedily! Jews in Jesus time were not ready to hear the word Jh 8:43. George Whitefield was preaching and noticed an old man settling down for his accustomed sermon-time nap. Suddenly he paused. His cheerful expression changed, and changed again, until a thundercloud sat on his brow. "If," he said in measured, deliberate words, 'I had come to speak to you in my own name you might rest your elbows upon your knees and your hands on your heads and go-to-sleep!' (The old man in front dozed on.) 'Once in a while,' George continued, ominously quietly, 'you would look up and mutter, "What does this babbler say?"' But, I have come to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts and' Bang, he clapped his hands and stamped his foot, and the old man woke up – 'I must and I will be heard.' He looked at the old man. 'Aye, aye, I have woken you up, have I? I meant to do it! I have not come here to preach to socks and stones. I have come to you in the name of the Lord God of Hosts and I must and I will be heard!"

We must receive it with **Faith** for us to be blessed according to Heb 4:2. Faith comes by ‘hearing’ the word of Christ Rom 10:17. So hearing and receiving the word is all the more important. Deut 31:10-13 speaks of learning by ‘hearing,’ and by understanding it gains entry into the heart Prov 2:10. Discerning the word is important. Through ‘hearing’ we can understand. “Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me are those I do understand” wrote Mark Twain. Tragically true!

Keep it in mind that 2 things are very important when hearing the word - **1) What you hear?** Mk 4:24 **2) How you hear?** Lk 8:18. How are we to hear? Spiros Zodhiates in his book on James describes four kinds of hearers. “There are those that are like a sponge. They suck up good and bad and let both run out immediately. There are those like a sandglass that let what enters in at one ear pass out of the other, hearing without thinking. There are those who are like a strainer, letting go the good, and retaining the bad. Finally, there are those who are like a sieve, letting go the chaff, and retaining the good.” What kind of a hearer are you? In 2 Pet 3:17 Peter exhorts us to ‘**grow**’ in the knowledge of the word. It is a process and takes time. Many still remain as strangers to it Hos 8:12. The real danger is that Satan steals the word from the heart when it is not rooted or settled Mat 13:19.

*** Reflecting upon the Word**

Mary meditated upon the word of God. Commenting on Mary’s song in Lk 1:46-55 well known Bible scholar John Phillips wrote, “Her hymn consists of ten verses in the New Testament. In those verses, however, Mary cites from memory no less than twenty-three separate Old Testament Scripture passages drawn from twenty-six verses of the Old Testament.” Mary did just what 1 Pet 2:9 says to proclaim/publish/advertise God’s Excellencies. It is possible only through meditation of God’s word day and night. Memorization of the scripture helps us with the meditation. God gave a command to Joshua to meditate upon his word day and night Jos 1:8. In his book Spiritual Formation, Dallas Willard wrote, “Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose

between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it. How does it get in your mouth? Memorization."

We all meditate on something every moment. **"Worrying"** is nothing but meditation on wrong things! What do you meditate upon throughout your waking hours? People meditate about their husbands, wives, children, in-laws, parents, friends, dress, appearance, food, money, career, business, fashions, gadgets, sports, films, politics and fantasies etc. A 95 year old woman at the nursing home received a visit from one of her fellow church members. "How are you feeling?" the visitor asked. "Oh," said the lady, "I'm just worried sick!" "What are you worried about, dear?" her friend asked. "You look rather well and healthy today. Are they taking good care of you here?" "Oh, yes, they're taking very good care of me." "Are you in any pain?" she asked. "No, I'm not in any pain at all." "Well then, what are you worried about?" her friend asked again. The lady leaned back in her rocking chair, sighed a heavy sigh, then slowly explained her major worry. "Every close friend I ever had has already died and gone on to heaven. I'm afraid they're all wondering where I went." We are to meditate on God's word to be successful and fruitful Ps 1:1-3. Our life is a product of our meditation see Phil 4:8. Ps 19:14 says our meditation must be **'acceptable'** to God. Heart is made for God and when you **"hold"** Him and His word in your heart as precious, it will be a sweet smelling aroma to the Lord. "Biblical Meditation will drive away agitation, irritation, hesitation and temptation!" Isa 26:3 God keeps him in perfect peace whose **"mind"** stays on Him! Psalmist knew this secret that's why he stays awake to meditate on God's word Ps 119:148. Read the word when you wake up and start the day meditating, don't start the day reading the news paper or watching the morning news. Selwyn Hughes has described biblical meditation as the digestive system of the soul. As with physical digestion, this is a process which cannot be hurried. We need to be able to set aside at least 30 minutes for meditation, though some may find it requires considerably longer to derive the most benefit from the practice.

Our **‘instant generation’** does not have time for God and His word. In his excellent book, *Pathways to Power*, a book written in the early 1950s, Dr. Unger wrote: Meditation upon God’s Word is fast becoming a lost art among many Christian people. This holy exercise of pondering over the Word, chewing it as an animal chews its cud to get its sweetness and nutritive virtue into the heart and life, takes time, which ill fits into the speed of our modern age. Today most Christians’ devotions are too hurried, their lives too rushed.” It is important to meditate on the word. “Reading brings a truth into our head, meditation brings it into our heart” observed Thomas Watson. Our flesh doesn’t like it, it resists, fights, excuses, and avoids it at all costs. Similarly, “Satan does what he can to hinder this duty. He is an enemy of meditation. The devil tries every trick in the book to divert our minds from meditating the word of God. Hearing begets knowledge, but meditation begets devotion. Adulterer muses on a prostitute; drunkard muses on his drink, covetous muses on his money, proud muses on his position, and a saint must muse upon his Savior God” wrote Watson.

Meditation is action. Someone has described it: “Making words into thoughts and thoughts into actions.” It is mental planning ahead with definite action in mind for accomplishing a job. Andrew Murray describes it: “Holding the Word of God in your heart until it has affected every phase of your life... this is meditation.” Saints must pray for its exposure, the word **‘behold’** in Ps 119:18 is **“nabat”** in Hebrew which means **“to scan”** or **“look intently.”** For example - Doctor scans our x-ray report carefully under the light to see the problem. Similarly, we must scan the scriptures to see God’s wondrous things in it. The World Christian Digest reported that a Haifa policeman who knew his Bible got on the trail of a gang of smugglers. They used to be inconspicuous in ass drawn caravan, or cart to move through the city. The policeman managed to capture some of the asses, though the smugglers got away. The officer let the beasts of burden go without food for many days and then he turned them loose. And just as he predicted from Isa 1:3, the ox knows his owner and the ass his master’s crib, the starving animals led the police directly to the smugglers.

*** Responding to the Word**

Mary was quite young when she had encountered the angelic messenger. Scholars believe that she was between 12-17 years of age when she gave birth to Jesus! Look at her attitude to the word of God Lk 1:38. Beautiful. Simply beautiful. First, the Jewish couple is betrothed for a year and then they get married. They are considered man & wife but stay at their parent's house till wedding. Only reason to break a betrothal is adultery. After examination if found guilty she would be stoned to death, fiancé will throw the first stone! Mary a virgin is going to be with child. That puts her in great risk from all sides. She submitted to God, trusted him, instead of hiding she openly declared it Lk 1 chp. She went to Zacharias house, who is a priest, he should have tried her but God's arrangement saved her. We must praise Mary for her explicit obedience. God shows us how to obey his word? Jos 1:8 says we must meditate upon the word day and night so that we can be careful to observe it all in our lives. We should examine ourselves carefully, to see if we are truly following His word.

In his book *The Inner Life*, Andrew Murray identifies two ways of knowing things. First, through the mind, by thought or idea. Second, through lived experience. The same is true of our Christian Life. The mind can form thoughts about God from reading the Bible and from knowing Church doctrines. But the human heart can only come to know God, His love for us, and His power to save when we experience His love through the love of others, and through our love for others. It is with the heart that man comes to believe. It is with our hearts that we are to seek, serve, and love God. For, it is only with the heart that we can know God and worship Him in spirit and in truth, and it is in our hearts that the Holy Spirit resides Gal 4:6. There the Holy Spirit can teach and guide us to follow the word of God. The true aim of reading and reflecting upon the Word daily is not only what it brings to us, but also what it brings out of ourselves; what we actually put into practice from what we learn. God's word only works when the truth it brings us stirs the inner life and produces trust, love, and worship. Thus, the word of God is no longer void, but does what God intends for it to do. It becomes part of our life.

The good soil in the parable is productive because of its positive response Lk 8:15. The psalmist does the will of God because the word has become an integral part of his being Ps 40:8. The word **“heart”** literally means **“intestines”** in Hebrew. So when the word becomes an internal part of our life it becomes natural for us to obey! The word is in the heart because he loved it, read it, treasured it there and it keeps his steps from slipping, sliding into sin Ps 37:31. Job 22:22 says receive (obey) the word and lay it in your heart. Ps 119:11 shows us that’s the main thing. The word **“doer”** in Jam 1:22 in Greek is **“Poietes”** which means **“poet”** in English. A poet arranges words in an orderly form to express a thought or idea beautifully. Similarly, when we receive the word and yield to it, our lives are also arranged in a beautiful manner just like a poem for the glory of God!

Many years ago the village priest in Kalonovaka, Russia, took a special liking to a pug-nosed lad who recited his Scriptures with proper piety. By offering various inducements, the priest managed to teach the boy the four Gospels, which he recited nonstop in church one day. Sixty years later he still liked to recite Scriptures, but in a context that would have horrified the old priest. The prize pupil who memorized so much of the Bible was Nikita Khrushchev, former premier of the Soviet Union! John W. Alexander, former president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, gives us this warning: “There is little merit inherent in the mere process of memorizing Scripture. One could memorize voluminous portions and be an atheist. Satan memorized enough to use it to tempt Jesus... Memorizing is helpful when we yearn for Scripture to energize our whole lives.... What makes the difference between superficial and beneficial Scripture memorization? I believe it is prayerful meditation. Memorization in itself may sharpen our intellectual capacities, but that’s about all. Memorization with a view to meditation helps us think straight in a crooked world. Nikita Khrushchev did everything to destroy religion in USSR, more than 10000 churches were closed down during his term in 1954 to 1966!!

*Rejoicing in the Word

Mary rejoiced when all that was told came to pass. She was not only greatly blessed but she greatly rejoiced and sang a hymn of praise to God Lk 1:46-55. She rejoiced for being used as a vessel for God's glory. God commanded us to delight ourselves in the word. We delight in so many things but do you delight in the word? Psalmist said, "I rejoice in your word above all the wealth (ex. Lottery or jackpot) Ps 119:14. Jeremiah ate the word and it made him happy Jer 15:16. But this is not the case with all people who hear the word. Jesus shows the reality of many hearers of the word in Jh 5:35. We must be interested not just for a **'season'** but for our whole life. Jesus tactfully shows us what was happening there in that verse. The word **"Hora"** in Greek, which literally means an **"Hour."** Today, we have many hourly Christians who come on a Sunday morning and rejoice for an **'hour'** of preaching and then go away without being changed. That's why they do not grow nor increase in their spirituality. They just **'enjoy'** the message but do not **'experience'** it in their lives. They chose to be that way or they were only willing for that. They do not want to be **'long term'** disciples but short term. How tragic? Today that's the reason why the church is spiritually anemic!

Others do not give **'space'** or **'room'** to the word in their hearts Jh 8:37. It is horrible to see many do not have place for God's word in their hearts because they are filled with others things, crowded with worldly things. Remember Lk 8:14? When you receive the word with gladness it will remain in your heart. Psalmist had great delight in the word of God through out the day Ps 119:97. Rejoicing in His word more than silver and gold or all the treasures of the earth. The Bible admonishes us to desire the sincere milk of the word as new born infants 1 Pet 2:2. Great picture, isn't it? A Jewish Rabbi, when induced by the prospect of a lucrative situation to fix his settlement in a place where there was no synagogue, is said to have resisted the temptation by the recollection of this verse Ps 119:72! A reproof to Christians, who, in choosing "the bounds of their habitation," have not always eyed their Master's rule, Matt 6:33. Many will not realize now what they are losing but when they stand before God then they will see their loss and be ashamed. But it would be too late.

An ancient fable tells of three merchants crossing the Arabian Desert. Travelling in darkness to avoid the intense heat one starless night, they were passing over a dry creek bed when a voice from the blackness commanded them to halt. They were then ordered to stoop, pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them in their pockets. After obeying the strange command, they were told to leave that place, camping nowhere near. The mysterious voice then told them that in the morning they would be both happy and sad. Shaken and confused, and obeying the mysterious intruder, they travelled through the night. When morning came, the men anxiously looked into their pockets, and rather than finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels. They, indeed, were happy and sad. They were happy they had picked up the jewels, but sad because while they had the opportunity they had not picked up many more. This legend beautifully expresses how many feel about the unsearchable riches of God's Word. We are thrilled we have absorbed as much as we have, but sad because we have not absorbed much more. Prov 6:21-22 gives out a very important truth. "Bind them continually on your heart; Tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; When you sleep, they will watch over you."

The world-renowned physician, Dr. Howard A. Kelly of John Hopkins, was once visited by a woman in which the cares of life threatened her physical strength, and even her reasoning. Once she described her symptoms, she was surprised at the prescription he gave her. "Madam," he said. "What you need is to read the Bible more!" He told her to go home and read her Bible an hour each day and then to come back to him in a month. At first the lady was inclined to become angry with him, but she did what he told her. She was a Christian and had neglected the things of God. When she came back a month later he said to her, "I see you have been an obedient patient. Do you feel as if you need any other medicine now?" She said, "No, Doctor, I am a different person. But how did you know what I needed?" He reached over and picked up his well-worn and well-marked Bible and said, "If I omit my daily reading of God's Word, I not only lose my joy, but I lose my greatest source of strength and skill. Your case called not for medicine but for a source of peace and strength outside yourself. My prescription, when tried, works wonders!"

6

Believer's Attitude

“A test of a Christian's character is what he does after he comes to the blockade in the road and what his attitude is after everything has left him except Jesus.” ~ Lester Roloff

The Bible reveals in 1 Thes 5:16-18 3 things regarding the will of God concerning us. We must be joyful, prayerful and thankful because of Jesus Christ. God always keeps us “full” if we walk according to His will. Paul writes to the Thessalonians to excel in their walk with God in chapter 4, both in their external life and their internal life. Externally we may seem to be good, godly and growing but only we and God know our real condition. Internal life and attitudes matter the most because they affect our whole being and life. Christian life is a beautiful expression of the internal reality in the external life. Paul wrote about 3 attitudes of the saint's life. This kind of disposition is a must for devotion to God. Otherwise we will be disturbed in our walk and testimony. What God has done for us through Jesus Christ enables us to have these blessed attitudes. There is a story that explains this truth clearly. Tom carried his new boat to the edge of the river. He carefully placed it in the water and slowly let out the string. How smoothly the boat sailed? Tom sat in the warm sunshine, admiring the little boat that he had built. Suddenly a strong current caught the boat. Tom tried to pull it back to shore, but the string broke. The little

boat raced downstream. Tom ran along the sandy shore as fast as he could. But his little boat soon slipped out of sight. All afternoon he searched for the boat. Finally, when it was too dark to look any longer, Tom sadly went home. A few days later, on the way home from school, Tom spotted a boat just like his in a store window. When he got closer, he could see — sure enough— it was his! Tom hurried to the store manager: “Sir, that’s my boat in your window. I made it.” “Sorry, son, but someone else brought it in this morning. If you want it, you’ll have to buy it for one dollar.” Tom ran home and counted all his money. Exactly one dollar. When he reached the store, he rushed to the counter. “Here’s the money for my boat.” As he left the store, Tom hugged his boat and said, “Now you’re twice mine. First, I made you and now I bought you.” Beautiful story that displays God’s redemptive work in our lives.

These verses present three positive commands, each governed by the phrase **“for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”** This is the second time in the epistle where Paul has declared in specific terms what God’s will is, earlier in 1 Thes 4:3. Every believer must understand that praise, prayer and purposeful thanks giving are mandatory and not optional for a growing Christian.

Joyful

Verse 16 says, “Rejoice always!” It is the will of God and a command that His people should be joyful always. God has been so good to them and has done great works for them so they must recognize and rejoice in Him. Someone pointed out—‘Rejoice always’ is actually the shortest verse in the Bible (in Greek) (2 words/14 letters; vs. Jesus wept 3 words/16 letters)! Joy is the birth right of a Christian. We are to be characterized as rejoicing by **“joy unspeakable”** 1 Pet 1:8. Those who have experienced the love of God and the grace of God will surely be filled with great joy. The apostle himself set the example for this 1 Thes 3:7-9. Paul proved it to be true in his life but

sadly many Christians prove otherwise. Vance Havner put it best when he wrote, “We need a heart warming...The early Christians did

not need a shot in the arm every Sunday to keep them going. They knew Jesus and they upset the world and worried the devil and gave wicked rulers insomnia and started something the jails couldn't lock up, fire couldn't burn, water couldn't drown, swords couldn't kill. You may have little experience and speak of the dangers of emotion, but we are suffering today from a species of Christianity as dry as dust, as cold as ice, as pale as a corpse, and as dead as King Tut. We are suffering, not from a lack of correct heads but of consumed hearts." Jesus desired that our joy might be full Jh 15:11, 16:24. The fruit of the Spirit is joy Gal 5:22. Neh 8:10 says the joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy of the Lord is our mark as disciples of Jesus. So we must consciously decide to rejoice in the day that the Lord has made Ps 118:24. For many people including Christians **"celebration"** involves primarily 3 things – eating, drinking and wearing nice new clothes. They think by having these things they have celebrated Christmas or the New Year. But the Bible says something else. Rom 14:17 gives us the right perspective, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Mat 6 Jesus told what our priority should be – seeking first His kingdom and righteousness and not to be bogged down by eating, drinking and clothing. How to experience this joy? Here are two ways to experience it -

*** Joy of the Redeemer**

In Phil 4:4 Paul wrote, "rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." Joy belongs to Jesus and when we unite with Him we experience it. When Jesus enters our life as our Lord and Savior He brings in great joy. When we experience the forgiveness for our sins and freedom for our soul through our blessed Lord Jesus, great joy floods our hearts and minds. When the Lord Jesus is consecrated in our hearts as our supreme Master we experience immense joy. It reminds me of something Francis Schaffer once said, that 'God intends for Christianity to be fun!' Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy is the power plant of the Christian life. It produces energy. It generates a constant stream of strength.

When you have the joy of the Lord in you, you can keep on going; you're a much stronger person. You're stronger emotionally. You're stronger spiritually. You're even stronger physically and mentally. The joy of the Lord infuses you with strength. When we have a firm foundation in Jesus we would not vacillate and our joy is settled. When Napoleon was sent to Elba, there in proud defiance took as his motto, "**Ubicumque felix**" meaning "**happy everywhere.**" It was not true in his case; but the Christian may be truly "happy everywhere" and always. The world does not give us such joy. In his book, *Your Eternal Reward*, Lutzer told of a time he was bobbing on a boat on Lake Michigan. When he began getting seasick his friend told him to choose a building on the shore and keep his eyes fixed on it. Lutzer writes, I chose the Sears Tower and discovered in a few moments that I felt better. He [his friend] explained that the motion of a boat confuses our balance system if we look at the very object that is causing our movement. But we can handle the ups and downs if our eyes have a fixed object that is unmoved by our own vacillation. That's why the Bible says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, let us run the race that is set before us" Heb 12:1.

*** Joy of Righteousness**

"God has anointed you with the oil of gladness because you have loved righteousness and hated evil" Heb 1:8-9. God the Father anointed God the Son with the perfume of cheerfulness more than anyone else on earth; and God the Son wants to do exactly the same with you. He wants you to wear the cosmetics of inner joy all the time—and to do so instantly improves your personality and mine. True joy can be found only in righteousness and not in any thing else. Many think and believe that there is joy in sin – in all sorts of evil things but it is not true. Even if there is, it is a fleeting pleasure but not true joy. I once read of a man who smelled good wherever he was and whatever he was doing. His skin and clothing and very being seemed to exude a pleasant fragrance; and the reason was that he worked in a perfume factory and he breathed

the aromas every day. They filtered into his clothing, penetrated his skin, and even filled his lungs. He became a walking perfumery. Righteousness in Christian life is essential and it is exuberant. Righteousness gives us boldness, stability, contentment, peace and joy!

Prayerful

Verse 17 says, “pray without ceasing.” The imperative is for all believers and saints in Christ Jesus to pray continually. There is a keen insight into what Paul has written. Christians are supposed to be the most prayerful people. Everything in life must be soaked with prayer. “Life is fragile handle it with prayer.” Why pray continually? Because we need the grace of God, growth in God, guidance from God, and the guarding of God. In preparation for a revival meeting in a large city, the famed evangelist Billy Sunday wrote a letter to the Mayor in which he asked for the names of individuals he knew who had spiritual problems and needed help and prayer. How surprised Billy Sunday was when he received from the mayor a city directory! This sounds exactly like every town and city today. What does it mean to pray without ceasing? To be always on the knees praying? Praying without eating, sleeping or doing any work? Or sitting in a secluded place immersed in prayer? No. It means –

*** Living with an attitude of prayer**

Prayer is related to the spirit, heart and mind of a believer. A Christian must be tuned to constant dependence on God. Praying without ceasing means being in touch with God without a break! For this he must develop an attitude of reliance on God through prayer. Always and in all things we must be “**connected**” to God for our strength, support, and sustenance. When it comes to communication with God, we’re to always be “**online.**” To pray without ceasing means to keep it as our regular habit of life in all circumstances. Again, the apostle sets the example 1 Thes 3:10; 2 Thes 1:11. It is repetitious, continual, and perpetual. This is the same

Greek word that the ancient people used of a **‘hacking cough!’** Spurgeon said, “As you are tempted without ceasing, pray without ceasing!” Oswald Chambers said, “Prayer is not an exercise, it is the life of the saint.” Christians must get this truth into their heart and mind to experience true transformation.

In 1921 a great book was written by missionary Rosalind Goforth who served in China during very difficult days. It had an unusual title and sub-title: *How I Know God Answers Prayer? The personal testimony of one lifetime.* The whole book was simply a record of how God had answered prayer over and over again during the long and productive and dangerous ministry of Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth. Rosalind Goforth had learned the value of answered prayer early in life by listening to some of the stories told her by her family. She says: ‘One (story) that made especially deep impression upon me was about our grandfather, who as a little boy went to visit cousins in the south of England, their home being situated close to a dense forest. One day the children, lured by the beautiful wild flowers, became hopelessly lost in the woods. After trying in vain to find a way out, the eldest, a young girl, called the frightened, crying ones around her and said: “When Mother died she told us to always tell Jesus if we were in any trouble. Let us kneel down, and ask Him to take us home.” They knelt, and as she prayed one of the little ones opened his eyes to find a bird so close to his hand that he reached out for it. The bird hopped away, but kept so close to the child as to lead him on. Soon all were joining in the chase after the bird, which flew or hopped in front or just above, and sometimes on the ground and was almost within reach. Then suddenly it flew into the air and away. The children looked up to find themselves on the edge of the woods and in sight of home.’

*** Living within an atmosphere of prayer**

We must create an atmosphere of prayer around us by the help of the Holy Spirit. To create a prayerful atmosphere, we must learn to seek the presence of God. We must put in conscious effort to recognize

His presence, revere His presence and rejoice in His presence. Practicing the presence of God on a regular basis is the foundation for the atmosphere of prayer. Reading the word, reflecting upon the word on a deep level and realizing it in our personal experience should be learnt. In Mat 28:20 Jesus promised “Lo I am with you till the end of the age.” That tells me to be aware of His presence and be grateful. Tony Evans speaking of abiding in the Vine, Christ Jesus, asks... “How do you stay connected to Jesus every moment? One way is through prayer. Remember the command, “Pray without ceasing?” You don’t have to be on your knees moving your lips to pray. Prayer can be the atmosphere in which you exist. You can bring the Lord to bear on every aspect of your day by staying in touch with Him, communing with Him in your spirit. Prayer is an expression of your dependence on Christ. And because He is also your Great High Priest as well as the vine, He can do something about your situation. The Lord who is sitting at the right hand of God in the place of authority wants to work in your life to bear spiritual fruit. The key to fruit bearing is abiding in Him, and the key to abiding is obedience.”

In 1 Chro 5:18-22 we have a beautiful illustration of the men of God living in an atmosphere of prayer even on the battle field. Because of their trust in God and also their prayer they got the help to defeat their enemies. Twice it is mentioned highlighting the importance of prayer without ceasing. We know the adage **“prayer changes things.”** It is true but more than that true prayer changes the person praying! It brings a lot of change in the one praying at the same time affecting the one for whom it has been done. The movie Shadow lands is about C.S. Lewis’ relationship with his wife Joy. In the movie, Lewis’ colleague’s praise him and affirm that C.S. Lewis’ faithful prayers were getting God to help his wife. In response C.S. Lewis says that he prays because he can’t help himself but not to get any gain from God. He closes the dialogue by saying under his breath, “It doesn’t change God, it changes me.”

* Living with an attachment to prayer

Believers must “**devote**” themselves to prayer Col 4:2. It is not just praying in problems but we should develop an attachment with prayer. Just as the body and breath are connected for life so Christian and prayer must be attached for the flow of spiritual life and power. Samuel M. Zwemer, missionary to the Muslim world, used to call prayer “**the gymnasium of the soul,**” and John Bunyan wrote, “In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without heart.” To put your full heart into intercessory prayer will cost you, but it will also bless you. What a beautiful expression of the heart before God? If we can develop this kind of attachment in our lives, we would experience great transformation. I am not talking about parrot praying but real, genuine, heartfelt praying.

Dr. Michael Guido of Metter, Georgia, who is a great pioneer in radio and television work and whose little program, *Seeds from the Sower*, is one-of-a-kind. Well, Dr. Guido is well up in years now, (at the time this piece is written about him) 92-years-old, but he’s still going strong. He commented on this little verse and this is what he said (in his inimitable style): When I wake up in the morning, I say, “Good morning, Jesus. You and I are going to have a great day today. Just have your way with me.” I slip my feet into my slippers and I pray, “Lord, bind my feet with ties of righteousness.” I wash my hands and I pray, “Lord, don’t let my hands touch anything your hands wouldn’t touch today.” I wash my forehead and I pray, “Lord, don’t let me think on anything Your mind wouldn’t think on.” I brush my teeth and I pray, “Lord, wash my tongue. Keep me from saying anything Your tongue wouldn’t say.” I wash my eyes and I pray, “Lord, don’t let me look at anything Your eyes wouldn’t look at.” As I wash my ears I pray, “Lord, don’t let my ears listen to things Your ears wouldn’t listen to.” As I stand before the mirror to see if I’m presentable to leave the bathroom, I pray, “Lord, as that mirror reflects my image, help me today to reflect Thy image.” I walk from the house to the studio and if I find a pine cone on the sidewalk, I’ll pick it up and pray, “Lord, don’t let anything in my life that will cause another one to stumble.” I come into my study and unlock the door

and I pray, “Lord, as I unlock the door of my heart, teach me Thy Word today. Help me to live Thy Word. Just live Your life all over again in me.” When I look into the mirror in my study I say, “Michael you’re going forth to reveal Jesus today. Let there be nothing in your life that will disgrace Him or deny Him or defame Him in any way.” And then I go from room to room, wherever the staff work, and I pray for each one in his or her office, then I come back to my study and have my devotions.”

Thankful

Verse 18 - Give thanks to God the Father in all circumstances. First, this verse does not say: For everything give thanks. The Lord isn’t telling us to be thankful for the cancer or for the rebellion or for the tragedy. The preposition is **in** all things. In the midst of all things, we still have a basis for thanksgiving. William Hendrickson wrote that ‘prayers without thanks have clipped wings.’ This is a call to give thanks to the sovereign and all-providing God for all things in all circumstances. What a reason this is to rejoice always; and what a motivation it is to pray without ceasing?

*** God’s will is done**

It is God’s will that His children must learn to have a thankful spirit irrespective of the circumstances they are in. Why? Because He wants to be the source of their joy, peace, contentment, and strength. God wants us to solely rely upon Him for everything. Someone said, “If we face the sun the shadows always fall behind us!” If you turn around they’ll always be in front. If He becomes our everything then we would not be disturbed by outward circumstances that may happen against our wish and against our liking and taste. “Billy Bray was saved from a terrible life of drunkenness and sin. After his conversion he experienced one trouble after another, but he never ceased praising the Lord. At last he came to the place where all he had to eat was a mess of very small potatoes which a friend had given him. Billy Bray had bowed his head to offer thanks when the Devil said to him, ‘How can you thank

God for such small potatoes?’ But Billy replied, ‘Go away, Devil—when I was serving you, I didn’t even have small potatoes—I had no potatoes at all!’ Yes, praise the Lord even for small potatoes.”

*** Good comes out of it**

As a Christian when I give thanks to God in all things good, bad, and ugly, God will and can turn them for my good. No matter what bad things may happen to you, no matter what trials you are in the middle of, no matter what tribulation comes your way, you must be joyful, prayerful and thankful to see God changing everything into good for you. In his book, *Church Planting Movements*, David Garrison says that along the infamous Ho Chi Minh trail in Vietnam, the fields are peaceful now, but the landscape is still pockmarked with muddy ponds. He quotes a Cambodian Christian who said this: “Those are bomb craters made by your American airplanes during the war. Last Easter, we baptized 70 new believers in that pond!” Thank God for His grace.

*** God is glorified**

All things happen in a Christian’s life according to the will of God and He gets the glory at the end. Billy Sunday was a famous baseball player who became a world-renowned evangelist, the “Billy Graham” of his day. Billy was happily married to a woman named Helen, who was known affectionately as “Ma” Sunday. On November 19, 1935, Billy suffered a heart attack and he died suddenly in his wife’s arms. The two were deeply in love, and they were life-partners together in the Lord’s work; and “Ma” Sunday was devastated. In one moment, she felt she had lost both her husband and her life’s work; and she felt herself spiraling down into depression. Sometime later, a group of Christians in Buffalo, New York, approached her, asking her to speak at a special service they were planning in Buffalo to honor her husband. At first, she didn’t think she could speak at all; but then she developed an idea for her talk. She entitled it: “Things I’m Thankful for.” She developed a long list of thanksgiving items, and she got up to speak. This is the way she began: Folks, it’s surprising how many things God can reveal

to you to be thankful for, if you really want to know and ask Him to help you. I had no idea there were so many. But when I prayed and asked God to help me write them down, they came into my mind one after the other—and the very first one was: if Billy had to go, oh, how thankful I was to God Almighty that He called him away in an instant.... He just cried out to me, “I’m getting dizzy, Ma” and he was gone. How wonderful to be here one second, and up in heaven the next second? Never knowing any real pain or any real suffering of that type—I think God was so good to take Billy that way, and I thank Him for it.” And she went on to list a large number of items that had come to her mind as objects of praise and thanksgiving; and it lifted her depression and released her for a life of continued usefulness and service. Thanksgiving not only does good to the person also it brings great glory to the Lord God. As a believer are you living a joyful, prayerful and thankful life?

7

The Godly Father

“A man ought to live so that every one knows that he is a Christian, and most of all, his family knows!” D L Moody.

In our society fathers play a dominant role. A father carries lot of weight because of the influence he has on his children. Fathers can become the architects of their children’s future or they can become their executioners. If only the fathers can recognize their potential, they can impact their children beyond measure. Billy Graham said, “A good father is one of the most unsung, un-praised, and unnoticed, yet one of the most valuable assets in our society.” Fathers are very important in the society. They give *identity* to the family, they give *instruction* to the family and they leave *inheritance* for the family. On the other hand, if the father is irresponsible, demeaning and reckless, he will wreck the lives of his children.

A nun had a ministry in prison. A prisoner asked her if she could get him a Mothers’ Day card. She went out and got him one. Soon the word spread and a lot of prisoners asked her to get them Mothers’ Day cards. She got on the phone to Hallmark. They sent her 500 cards, and she gave all of them out. Later in the year, she noticed that Fathers’ Day was coming up soon. She got on the phone to Hallmark

and they said, “Sure, Sister”, and they sent her 500 Fathers’ Day cards. Fathers’ Day came and went and not a single prisoner asked for a card. To this day, she still has all of them. Does it indicate something?

It’s easy to become a **biological father** but not so easy to become a **biblical father!**

Father’s role is to Provide

It is the man’s responsibility to provide the basic necessities to the family. Man is known as the “breadwinner” of the family. Father must provide for the children’s physical needs like food, clothing, shelter and education etc. Jesus while contrasting the heavenly Father with the earthly father, points out the father’s nature in general in Mat 7:9-11 – “Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him.” It is supposed that a father will provide the best for his children. 1 Tim 5:8 says “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. Scripture warns those who don’t provide for the family, saying they are worse than infidels. There are two extremes in the world, some fathers don’t care for their children but take nice care of themselves. Other fathers buy all sorts of goods for their children and their house looks like a ‘toy shop’ but don’t really care for their persons. Both are wrong. A true father makes ‘sacrifices’ for the well being of his children reflecting the nature of God. God can’t bear with fathers who are lazy or refuse to provide for their immediate household. Many fathers have failed in this area today that’s why the wives have to carry additional burden and in the process they go off limits. Two boys were arguing about their fathers. One said, “My dad can beat up your dad” and the other replied, “big deal, so can my mom!” When a dad fails in his responsibility he loses respect. Father’s job is to be the chief provider of the family.

Father must provide for the emotional needs of his children, he must love, care, show compassion, be understanding, give encouragement and support etc. Ps103:13 talks about the compassion of the father. Usually we have this **“picture”** of the father as the tough guy in the family. But it is evident in the scriptures that fathers were compassionate and it is considered as strength. A father can build his home properly according to the will of God. When the husband loves his wife and respects her he creates a beautiful environment for his children to grow. A child who knows that daddy loves mama and is true to her will be far more stable and have greater emotional health than one who is torn by the opposite situation. Creating a secure home where every member of the family can feel safe, secure, sober and serene. Father must love his wife and care enough for his kids to do this.

Father's role is to Protect

Father is the guardian of the family. He must protect the children from physical, emotional, spiritual and social harm. Any father who does not care for the safety of his children is either a fool or a villain. A woman was out walking with her 4-year-old daughter. The little girl picked something from the ground and started to put it in her mouth. Her mother was horrified and took the item away from her daughter, asking her not to do that. “Why?” asked the little girl. “Because it’s been on the ground and you don’t know where it’s been. It’s dirty and probably has germs,” replied her mother. At that point, the little girl looked at her mother in awe and asked, “Mummy, how do you know all this stuff? You are so smart.” “All mums know this stuff,” she said. “It’s on the mummy test. You have to know it, or they don’t let you be a mummy.” They walked along quietly for a few minutes, but her daughter was obviously thinking. “Oh ... I get it!” she exclaimed suddenly. “So if you don’t pass the test you have to be the daddy.” “Exactly,” her mother replied triumphantly. Daddy, don’t be a baddy in your children’s eyes.

He must protect them from both external and internal danger. External – • protect the kids from ungodly things which can corrupt them – movies, music, magazines, Harry Potter books and films, violent video games, TV shows, internet filth, drinks, drugs, smoking, discos, pub culture etc. Anything that is against God and against good is ungodly.

- Protect them from unnecessary burdens which can crush them down – unwanted studies, coaching, tutoring and careers. Discover your child's interests, intelligence, inputs through speech and signs. Let them pursue the passion of their hearts in the will of God. Simply channel their potential in the right direction.

- Protect them from unprofitable friendships which can cripple them – watch their friends and observe if they are those who build character or those who bulldoze your child's character. Take action accordingly. Good fathers are balanced and show an equal interest in such things as their children's grades, games, gadgets, and groups of acquaintances etc.

Internal - Father must discipline his children out of love for their own well being Heb 12:7,9. He must root out every bad weed from his child's heart so that it can grow good fruit. In 1 Thes 2:10-12 Paul says that he exhorted, encouraged and implored the Thessalonians as a father would his own children so that they would walk worthy of their calling and the kingdom of God. This is what a godly father is supposed to do for his children. A godly father prayerfully guides his children into the ways of God. Also children require their father's approval and encouragement for a well-balanced emotional state. A son and daughter look to their father for encouragement and guidance as they mature to adulthood. When he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1984, Harmon Killebrew said, "My father taught me and my brother to play ball in the front yard. One day my mother came out and told him we were ruining the lawn. My father told her, 'We're raising kids, not grass.'" The Amplified Bible puts it this way in Col 3:21, "Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or fret your children [do not be hard on them or harass them], lest they become discouraged

and sullen and morose and feel inferior and frustrated. [Do not break their spirit].” Think about it fathers and consider your behavior. How do you see yourself? Are you a protector or a predator?

Father’s role is to Perfect

God intended for fathers to do more than “bring home the bacon.” From a biblical standpoint, the father is to be a provider, a protector, a priest, and much more. It should be the goal of every father to perfect his children according to God’s will. He must mould his kids according to God’s word and ways. Not according to his desires, whims and fancies but to God’s liking. In Jos 24:15 Joshua took initiative as the leader of the family and gave them direction to go forward. That’s what every father must do for his family. Look at his *conviction*, look at his *courage*; look at his *confidence* in his family that they would follow his example. Eph 6:4 says this is very important because this is the **“greatest investment”** you can make in your child’s life. Some buy gold, some buy land and some buy bonds for their children and that’s all. That’s fine but that’s not the real investment. Some leave the responsibility to the Church. Once a father and his teenage son drove to a church. The father had a golf shirt on, and he evidently was dropping his son off at church while he went to play golf. The pastor could hear the teenage boy complaining and asking why he had to go to church. He replied, “When I was growing up my daddy took me to church every Sunday, and you are going to church as well.” Then the boy replied, “Well, it doesn’t look like it did you any good for you, did it?” How many fathers have failed in setting the right example before their children?

In discharging the duties of a godly father -

Father must pray for his children – Jh 4:46-54 tells us that a father came to Jesus in great distress for his sick son. Notice that Jesus met a need in the life of the son which the father could not supply! Humans have limits. You will find this out during a crisis. Jesus will bestow upon your suffering child or your needy teenager what you are unable

to give. But notice here that you must come to Jesus and ask Him to help your daughter or son. Hand over your children to Jesus. Father must put the Word in his children's mind— Eph 6:4 shows us that instructing the kids is the father's job. Prov 23:22 it is not enough just to give birth but it is the responsibility of the father to teach life lessons to his children. Father must teach his children to love and obey God Gen 18:19. Father must take the children regularly to Church to worship – Jos 24:15. Father must instil the fear of God in his children – Deut 4:10. Father must teach godly morals to his children – Gen 18:19.

An unknown author penned these insightful words. 'Take a look at a Biblical father - He teaches kindness by being thoughtful and gracious even at home. He teaches patience by being gentle and understanding over and over. He teaches honesty by keeping his promises to his family even when it costs. He teaches courage by living unafraid with faith, in all circumstances. He teaches justice by being fair and dealing equally with everyone. He teaches obedience to God's Word by precept and example as he reads and prays daily with his family. He teaches love for God and His Church as he takes his family regularly to all the services. His steps are important because others follow.' Someone wrote: "Last night my little boy confessed to me some childish wrong: and kneeling at my knee he prayed with tears, 'O Lord make me a man like Daddy, wise and strong...' Then while my boy slept, I knelt beside his bed, confessed my sins and prayed with a low-bowed head, O God, make me a child like my child here; Pure, genuine, trusting thee with faith sincere."

Father's role is to Permeate

Jh 5:19 talks about the relationship of God the Father and God the Son Jesus. The Son exactly does as the Father. The Son is following the Father in His footsteps. The Son does not do anything on His own but what He sees the Father do, He does it. What a lesson for all of us fathers to place that kind of godly example and inspiration before our children to imitate? Father's influence is so powerful that it can impact children in a good or a

bad way. Someone has said, “A boy loves his mother, but will follow his father.” Never forget that. It is possible to be a godly father and still lose your children to the world – we see that happening to David, Hezekiah and many others. But that’s not normal. Ungodly example all the more ruins the kids. A father attended church with his small boy. He found fault with everything in the service. As he walked home, he criticized the minister, the sermon, the choir and everything in general. The boy who had noticed what his father put in the offering plate said, “Well Dad, what can you expect for two quarters?” Kids watch adults! So if you want your children to be godly, you must first be walking with God yourself. A father cannot be all he ought to be unless he knows Jesus Christ as Savior. Only Jesus can make the father a solid human anchor in his own family. A father who says he believes the Bible but leaves it to gather dust while he spends hours with the newspaper, with the magazines, with the TV and internet, is really saying, “Kids, The Bible is really not all that important.” Your influence is vital.

Our fathers who are on this earth! Fathers reflect the Heavenly Father so they have a great responsibility. Children form an opinion about God by looking at their earthly fathers. Godly fathers always keep this truth in mind and live before their children. Dr. R.G. Lee tells the story of a father whose young son was stricken with diphtheria and placed in isolation in the hospital. It was necessary for the parents to wear a mask while visiting their son. The little boy inquired, “Why are you dressed that way?” The father replied, “I want to protect others, for you are very sick.” After some hesitation, the little fellow replied, “Daddy, am I going to die?” The dad who had taught his boy never to tell a lie said, “That is what the doctor says.” After a great deal of inward agony, the father put a question to his boy: “Son, you are not afraid, are you?” From the sick bed the little boy replied, “Daddy, if God is like you are, I won’t be afraid.”

Father, live a simple, sincere and saintly life before your kids and then see what happens. Albert Einstein said, “Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value.” Be a godly father and glorify God by doing good to your kids.

8

The Godly Mother

*“There is more power in a mother’s hand than in a king’s scepter.”
- Billy Sunday.*

One of the godliest mothers of the Bible is a woman from the Old Testament. Her sons are well known but she remains unknown to many. Her name is Jochebed and she is the mother of the greatest prophet of the OT - Moses and the first high priest Aaron! We know very little about Jochebed but still that little can teach us a great deal about how a woman can become a good and godly mother. **“Mother”** is a sweet word to many but not all have the same privilege and same experience with their mothers. Generally speaking, mother plays a very important role in the lives of their children and in turn nation building. D. L. Moody said all that he ever accomplished in life was due to his mother. Daniel Webster ascribed his masterful use of English to his mother’s teaching. Robert Moffatt testified that it was his mother’s influence that led him to become a missionary. John Randolph said, “I would have been an atheist but for the recollection of kneeling at my mother’s side while she taught me to say— ‘Our Father.’”

There is no way to measure the influence of mothers, for good or bad, on their children. Henry Ward Beecher wrote, "What a mother sings to the cradle goes all the way down to the coffin." Motherhood is very powerful and must be handled with great care and prayer. Mothers are molders of their children for God. Famed evangelist Billy Sunday said, "I don't believe there are devils enough in hell to pull a boy out of the arms of a godly mother." A mother is the first teacher to the child hence her responsibility is very high. Today's mothers need solid role models and the Bible shows many women whose lives serve as worthy examples for the modern mother. One such godly mother is Jochebed.

Jochebed's Devotion

Jochebed was an Israelite, a daughter of Levi Exo 2:1-10. She was from the family of faith Exo 6:20, Num 26:59. Her name "**Jochebed**" means "**Yahweh is glorious.**" God's glory or God is my glory. She truly lived in such a way to prove it in and through her life. She not only believed in the great God but also feared Him very much. At a time when they were living like slaves under the tyrannical rule of the Pharaoh she could not only keep her faith but also exercised it. She didn't fear the king's edict but by faith hid her son for 3 months Heb 11:23. It was a great risk to the entire family. Then she had a beautiful plan of leaving the boy in the river. She had great trust in the Lord and the rest was taken care of by God. The Bible says that our faith is tested in the furnace of fire. Jochebed's faith was proven to be pure gold. She had 3 children and she influenced all of them to live and serve God. This is a real marvel.

When he was a young lad his teacher sent him home with a note which said, 'Your child is dumb. We can't do anything for him.' Mrs. Edison wrote back, 'You do not understand my boy. I will teach him myself.' And she did, with results that are well known. Who was greater - Thomas A. Edison or his mother? We can see clearly her mark on his mind. "Faithful instruction is on her tongue." This could not have happened without her strong faith and her careful nurture of the children in the fear of God from day one. Some complain about

small things and problems but here we find Jochebed going beyond the normal and raising an army for God. Many mothers' today have failed miserably in this area. Once a little boy asked his father what a Christian was. For a long time, the father sat with the son explaining in great detail exactly what a Christian was supposed to be. When he was finished, he felt like he had done a pretty good job of describing a Christian, as well as himself. His illusions, however, were shattered when his son asked, "Dad, have I ever met one?"

Eze 16:44 teaches the truth about the adage, 'like mother like daughter!' Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Men are what their mother's make them." How true it is? Ian MacLaren, that great preacher of the Word of God, once visited a home and found an old Scotch woman standing in her kitchen, weeping. She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and when the minister asked her what was the matter, she confessed, "I have done so little. I am so miserable and unhappy." "Why?" asked MacLaren. "Because I have done so little for Jesus. When I was just a wee girl, the Lord spoke to my heart, and I did want so much to live for Him." "Well, haven't you?" asked the minister. "Yes, I have lived for Him, but I have done so little. I want to be of some use in His service." "What have you done?" "Nothing. I have washed dishes, cooked three meals a day, taken care of the children, mopped the floor, and mended the clothes. That is all I have done all my life, and I wanted to do something for Jesus." The preacher, sitting back in the armchair, looked at her and smiled. "Where are your boys?" he inquired. She had four sons and had named them after Bible personalities. "Oh, my boys? You know where Mark is. You ordained him yourself before he went to China. Why are you asking? He is there preaching for the Lord." "Where is Luke?" questioned the minister. "Luke? He went out from your own church. Didn't you send him out to Africa? I had a letter from him the other day." Then she became happy and excited as she continued. "A revival has broken out on the mission station, and he said they were having a wonderful time in the service of the Lord!" "Where is Matthew?"

“He is with his brother in China. Isn’t it fine that the two boys can be working together? I am so happy about that. John came to me the other night—he is my baby and is only nineteen, but he is a great boy. He said, ‘Mother, I have been praying and, tonight in my room, the Lord spoke to my heart about going to help my brother in Africa! But don’t you cry, Mother. The Lord told me I was to stay here and look after you until you go home to glory.’ The minister looked at her: “And you say your life has been wasted in mopping floors, darning socks, washing dishes, and doing the trivial tasks. I’d like to have your mansion when we are called home! It will be very near the throne.”

Jochebed’s Desire

Exo 2:2 says that her child was “beautiful.” Heb 11:23 says that the child was “favored” and “uncommonly handsome” see also Acts 7:20. There was something special about the child which led the parents to take extreme steps to protect. She always longed to see her people free and she also knew that God alone can do it. She and her husband knew that God is up to something when they had Moses. She was willing to “risk” her life to submit to the work of God and to bring Him glory, honor and praise. What a beautiful soul? Many women long for beautiful faces but here is a godly woman with a truly beautiful heart.

This mother in Israel imparted her faith to her children. John Wanamaker was one of America’s most successful merchants. Someone asked him one day, “Mr. Wanamaker, what was your most glorious hour in life?” Without hesitation, he answered. “It was when I was a child, and my mother took my two baby hands and folded them in prayer as she pointed me to God.” Then have a look at this tragic story. John H. Starkey was a very malicious British criminal. He murdered his wife, was convicted of the crime, and later executed. The officials asked General William Booth (founder of the Salvation Army) to conduct Starkey’s funeral. At the funeral, Booth faced a crowd of hard, scoffing men, but his first words stopped them and

held their interest. William Booth said, “John H. Starkey never had a praying mother.” What a truth? Surely many can say that of all the influences which had exercised themselves upon our lives, none has been so good and as strong as that which has come from our Christian mothers, united with that of a Christian father, in a home that stressed Christ likeness in each activity.

The only explanation of Moses’ “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” lies in the training which his mother gave to him Heb 11:24. The fact that Moses, after being trained for years in the court of Pharaoh, would renounce the position of a son to Pharaoh’s daughter, or heir to the throne, and identify himself with the Hebrew slave people was due to the faith that was imparted to him by his mother. It was her instruction which governed the lives of Aaron, Miriam and Moses. Miriam and Aaron had been born before the edict of Pharaoh to kill the male children, but Moses lived in the days when the victims were being killed and he was only saved through the faith of his mother. Jochebed’s piety in the midst of the suffering of the Hebrews was an example from which these children could never escape.

The influence of Jochebed on the life of Moses during his early years was so great that all his training in the king’s court could never erase it. In fact, the influence of a mother is so great that it is often said, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” When Grover Cleveland was elected governor of the state of New York, he wrote a letter to his brother in which he said, “You know, if mother were still alive, I’d feel much safer. I’ve always thought her prayers had much to do with my success.” The godly legacy of a mother goes very far. Abraham Lincoln once declared, “All that I am and all that I ever will be I owe to my mother.” No one else is as close to a little child during the tender and formative years of life, as the mother. From her lips we learn to speak; from her footsteps we learn to walk; from her attitudes we develop our character. Henry Ward Beecher used to say, “The mother’s heart is the child’s schoolroom.”

Mothers have a great responsibility on their shoulders. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan had 4 sons and they were all preachers. Someone once came into the drawing room when all the family was there. They thought they would see what Howard, one of the sons, was made of so they asked him this question: "Howard, who is the greatest preacher in your family?" Howard had a great admiration for his father and he looked straight across at him and then without a moment's hesitation he answered, "Mother." Today, most of the Christian mothers emphasize that their children would study well, get into good jobs and live well but don't even take quarter of the trouble to impart divine instruction into their minds. Their heart and soul goes out for the physical well being of the child but they never give a second thought about the child's spiritual life. If mothers are so short sighted that they can think only about their child's transitory life but not about its eternal life, then woe unto us. What a pity? There is a grave need for piety in these so called Christian mothers. O mother are you godly? Are you raising your kids for God or for the world? Think carefully because one-day God will take an account of your motherhood. Aspire good things for your children but above all make them godly – that will be your true achievement.

Someone asked a mother whose children had turned out very well, the secret by which she prepared them for usefulness and for the Christian life. Without hesitation she said: "When I washed their faces, I prayed that they might be cleansed by the Savior's precious blood. When I put on their garments, I prayed that they might be arrayed in the garments of salvation and in the robes of God's righteousness. When I gave them food, I prayed that they might be fed with the Bread of life. When I started them on the road to school, I prayed that their faith might be the shining light, 'brighter and brighter to the perfect day.' When I put them to sleep, I prayed that they might be enfolded in the Savior's everlasting arms." No wonder her children were early led to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and noted for adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Mother bring up your children like that and discipline them properly for their own good and for God's glory. Take heed to one of the greatest mother's in history Susanna Wesley. She has some practical wisdom to impart to all believing mothers.

Susannah Wesley's Rules for Raising Children:

1. Subdue self-will in a child and thus work together with God to save his soul.
2. Teach him to pray as soon as he can speak.
3. Give him nothing he cries for and only what is good for him if he asks for it politely.
4. To prevent lying, punish no fault which is freely confessed, but never allow a rebellious, sinful act to go unnoticed.
5. Commend and reward good behavior.
6. Strictly observe all promises you have made to your child.

What a joy to a mother's heart when her children rise up and call her blessed Pro 31:28. An old proverb says, "Men may work from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." It is never fair to say to a mother, "Are you just a housewife, or do you have a job?" Only empty minds can ask such a question. A godly mother's job is never done till her last breath. George Washington said, "My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her."

Are you a godly mother? Think about it and decide to be one today by the grace of God.

9

Ready to answer

“God desires for you to be involved in drawing people to His Word through a dedicated life to Him and an active witness for Him.” - Paul Chappell

In 1 Pet 3:13-17 Peter talks about our **“witness”** in 2 areas – through lips and life. As Christians we are not just privileged but also are responsible for our belief and behavior. Daily we are called to show God in our life and to share the gospel through our lips. If every Christian decides to live for Christ Jesus in the way, he is commanded to then extraordinary things will happen in our ordinary world. Our distinct life in Christ will create a desire in the minds of the enquirers to know the reason behind our life style. Backed up by such a life if we are eager in presenting the claims of Christ to the one before us, miracles will happen. George Whitefield said, “God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them.”

Peter questions his readers with a straight forward question if you do **“good”** then who will harm you? It is but unnatural for anyone to reciprocate good with evil. Verse 12 of the same chapter tells us that the Lord’s face is set against all evil doers. If we are zealous for good, then we will have the favor of God and also the favor of the people. The Bible says Jesus was growing in the favor of God and of

man in Lk 2:52. The early disciples were favored by all people Acts 2:46. Righteousness and goodness usually earns the good will of all, even our enemies. Sometimes we suffer for doing good, and those times lead us to have a godly experience. At one time in his life, British preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon was so intensely criticized that he became deeply depressed. So his wife printed the beatitude Mat 5:10 along with the other seven on a large sheet of paper and placed it above their bed. The first thing Spurgeon saw in the morning and the last thing he read at night was our Savior's glorious promise. Immediately he was revived.

Peter reminds the words of our Lord Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount here in v14. If you have to suffer for the sake of righteousness then you are blessed. During World War II a Christian boy of twelve refused to join a certain movement in Europe. "Don't you know that we have power to kill you?" they said. "Don't you know," he replied quietly, "that I have power to die for Christ!" He had the conviction that no one was able to harm him. Remember 1 Pet 2:19-20 'you are called to suffer while doing good.' It is an honor of the highest order to suffer for the Lord like that and not all get the opportunity.

We must sanctify the Lord in our hearts or put Christ on the highest place in our heart v15a. He must be set apart in your heart as **"Lord."** Set Christ in your heart on the pedestal and pinnacle that belongs to Him, and then bow down before Him with all reverence and submission. For the early Christians to proclaim Christ as Lord was risky but they were so devoted to Him that they did it anyway. Frequently, we must have a **"heart check up"** for our own good. Ask these questions because they are very helpful in keeping our spiritual balance. Who is the Lord of your Life? Is the Master leading you? Who is driving you forward? In some hearts it is money, in some hearts it is power, in some hearts it is pride, in some hearts it is desire, in some hearts it is foolishness, in some hearts it is the devil, and in most hearts it is self! Who is the Lord of your heart?

Be ready or prepared to give an **"answer"** for the hope that is in you v15b. We must be willing to share the gospel with readiness with

everyone that asks us about our hope. Peter who “denied” Jesus 3 times earlier, is a changed man now. Peter knew how important it was to give a defense to everyone who asks you. He was put on the spot in situations described in Acts 2:14-39, Acts 3:11-26, Acts 4:8-12, and Acts 5:29-32. In each situation, Peter relied on the power of the Holy Spirit and was able to give a defense. The Greek word “**apologia**” means “**to answer**” or “**to defend.**” We get our English word ‘**apology**’ from this word. But it doesn’t mean that we should go around asking for apology for our faith from everyone. To the Greek this word meant ‘to defend.’ We get our term “**apologetics**” from this word. We have some good apologists – defenders of the faith today in the world.

To be a witness for the Lord or to give an answer for the hope that we have in us is not easy always. We must be ready to do so. Readiness speaks of preparedness. Yes, we need proper preparation to defend our faith and also to present the unique claims of Christ effectively. Many fail because they have never tried to prepare themselves for the job. They never thought of equipping themselves with the blessed teaching from the Scriptures. Pro 15:28 says, ‘The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer.’ Every witness of the Lord must be born again. They must be made righteous by God almighty through the blood of Jesus Christ. It also says, the heart of the righteous ‘ponders’ or ‘studies’ or in other words ‘prepares’ how to answer. Bible study is an essential part of our witnessing. We cannot be fruitful in our witness or in our walk with God without daily studying the Scriptures. We help the enquirer to find the right answers for their questions or doubts from God’s word. We help them to come face to face with the truth of God’s word. Knowing the truth with clarity enables them to make the right decision. It is dangerous to try to teach another when we know not what we are trying to teach Mat 15:14.

Pro 16:23 says, ‘The heart of the wise instructs his mouth and adds persuasiveness to his lips.’ We must add Biblical knowledge to our lips – many don’t do this. They do not train their mouths to speak spiritual truth, they do not do anything to impart the knowledge of

God to others! But when you prepare yourself you will see great results. Like Stephen in Acts 6:10, like Paul with Felix in Acts 24:24-25, like Paul with Festus in Acts 26:24-25, like Paul with Agrippa in Acts 26:28-29. When you sanctify the Lord in your heart it will be easy for you to share about Him through your life. Remember, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

How must we answer to those that ask us?

A) Our answer must be **Reasonable** - We have the great “**gospel**” and it’s our responsibility to present it carefully to the hearer. God Himself calls people to come and reason with Him Isa1:18, so allow people to ask questions and reason with them from the word. Clear presentation of the word of God to the mind of the hearer bears the right result. In *Streams of Living Water*, Richard Foster told of Billy Graham preaching at Cambridge in 1955. For three nights he tried to make his preaching academic and enlightened, but with no effect. Graham finally realized that presenting the intellectual side of faith was not his gift and began preaching the simple message of Jesus rescuing us from our problem with sin. Foster wrote, “The results were astonishing: hundreds of sophisticated students responded to this clear presentation of the gospel. It was a lesson in clarity and simplicity that he never forgot.”

B) Our answer must be **Respectable**- Don’t share your faith with arrogance, or with an air of superiority. Don’t be a know-it-all! Don’t make someone to be a fool or naïve if they do not agree with you. Don’t try to shove it down their throats. Don’t ever think you’ll debate someone in to the kingdom of God. We are not called to win arguments, but to win lost souls to Christ. Use gentleness, genuine love, a listening ear, sensitivity, a word of wisdom, and discernment in giving a defense. We are to project Christ while we try to promote Him or proclaim His good news. If the hearer is not convinced or trying to confuse you with unreasonable questioning just commit that person to the Holy Spirit. Never try to undermine them or humiliate them with your spirituality. This is not a ‘spiritual contest’

between you and them to give them your ‘Bible blows’ to knock them out but plead with them with the love of Christ to open up to the gospel.

C) Our answer must be **Reverential** - You must debate in a tone that would be pleasing in God’s ears. We are to be witnesses not prosecuting attorneys! And we must do this with a clear conscience. With due respect to the enquirer we must humbly present the claims of the gospel. We must humbly present the redemptive work of our great God and Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. T. H. Huxley, a well-known agnostic, was with a group of men at a weekend house party. One Sunday morning, while most of them were preparing to go to church, he approached a man known for his Christian character and said, “Suppose you stay at home and tell me why you are a Christian.” The man, knowing he couldn’t match wits with Huxley, hesitated. But the agnostic said gently, “I don’t want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.” The man did, and when he finished, there were tears in Huxley’s eyes as he said, “I would give my right hand if only I could believe that.”

Why many shirk from this responsibility of sharing the gospel?

* **Immaturity** – They are not mature enough to be responsible to do their task of fulfilling the great commission of Jesus. They look to God for “**goodies**” and they don’t do anything for God or for man. These people behave like selfish children whose only interest is to get what they want from others without ever thinking of giving something to them. The churches in our land are filled with such immature men and women. Now, with the advent of the prosperity gospel and the ‘mega church’ delusion, the so called churches are overflowing with them. O, God have mercy on such souls.

* **Incompetency** – They think and feel that they are inadequate to do the job. Either it is a deficiency of their faith and trust in God or their worldly mind set of ‘I am not fit for the job,’ they seem to be fooling themselves into a false belief. Researcher George Barna asked Christians about their witnessing experiences. He found that 9 out of

10 individuals who attempt to explain their beliefs and theology to other people come away from those experiences feeling as if they had failed. The reality of human behavior is that most people avoid those activities in which they perceive themselves to be failures. Many have never tried to share the gospel fearing failure and to avoid facing awkward situations.

***Impotency** – They are fearful and silent; they will not open their mouths to give an answer. They will not try to witness to anyone about the love of God or the life and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Millions have missed the glorious opportunity of being His witnesses by feeling impotent. Moshe Rosen became a Christian at a high cost. He converted from Judaism to Christianity and his own parents disowned him. His father said to him, “You are never to mention Christ, the Bible, or your religion to your mother or to me, or to any of the family.” A deacon in his church told him to be a “**silent witness**,” and that a time would come when they would ask about his faith. Seventeen years after he accepted the reconciliation with his parents, his mother died without ever believing. His father followed in another decade. “They never asked.” There is no such thing as a “silent witness.” Being a silent witness doesn’t work because the focus is on whether we can be good and righteous. Our message should not be who we are but who He is! How true? Many simply do not believe the word of God but their own self. “If you believe what you like in the gospels, and reject what you don’t like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself,” said Augustine.

Peter writes in v16, ‘and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.’ By your **good conduct** in Christ you are vindicated of all allegations. No one can withstand godly behavior. The story is told of a missionary to China who was in a language school. The very first day of class the teacher entered the room and, without saying a word, walked down every row of students. Finally, still without saying a word, she walked around the room again. Then she came back and addressed the class. “Did you notice anything

special about me?” she asked. Nobody could think of anything in particular. One student finally raised her hand. “I noticed that you had on a very lovely perfume,” she said. The class chuckled. But the teacher said, “That was exactly my point. You see, it will be a long time before any of you will be able to speak Chinese well enough to share the gospel with anyone in China. But even before you are able to do that, you can minister the sweet fragrance of Christ to these people by the quality of your lives. It is your lifestyle, lived out among the Chinese people, that will impact them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ! Yes, when our gracious sharing of the gospel is backed up by godly behavior, the results will be great.

The Scripture admonishes us in v17, ‘For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.’ If it is God’s will to suffer while doing good than for doing wrong – so be it. At the end of the day all that matters, is doing the will of God. Be happy that you have done the will of God and the good Lord shall certainly bless your efforts for His glory!

10

Fasting unto God

“If you say ‘I will fast when God lays it on my heart,’ you never will. You are too cold and indifferent to take the yoke upon you.” ~ D.L. Moody

Men of God fasted in the bible and all through the history saints have fasted. Fasting has many blessings. Moses fasted to receive the law. Ezra fasted for a safe journey. Nehemiah fasted for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Esther fasted for the protection of her people. Jeremiah fasted for people to hear God. Daniel fasted to understand the future. David fasted for his sick child. Jesus fasted to start the ministry. Paul fasted to be fruitful in the work of God. These examples not only speak about the **importance** of fasting but also the **impact** of fasting!

Fasting helps us to draw closer to God. Fasting helps us to have unhindered and undistracted fellowship with God. Fasting helps us to deny self and break the power of the flesh. Fasting helps us to avoid the seductive temptations of the world. Fasting breaks sinful bondages and sets us free. Fasting makes us spiritually fruitful. Fasting helps us to do spiritual warfare effectively. Fasting helps us to attempt and achieve great things for God. Fasting results in the salvation of the heathen. Fasting brings revival among God’s people. Fasting demonstrates our practice of self denial. Fasting brings God’s favor upon his people.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline and exercise. Fasting involves a sacrifice of food, and time from other things. The word “**fast**” is *tsom* in the Hebrew and *nesteia* in the Greek. It means voluntary abstinence from food. Adam & Eve sinned because of food so through fasting we can overcome it. An American Doctor said, “After you feast, you should fast.”

Fasting should be done with a right motive, in the right manner, for a right matter. Fasting should not become a ritual it should remain spiritual. During a Sunday service, a woman experienced a miraculous healing in her body - so she wrote a note to her minister to tell him of her experience. As she closed her letter, she wrote, “Do you think, Pastor, that God could do something about my WEIGHT problem, too?” The minister wrote back: “Dear Sister, this kind does not go out except by fasting.”

Fasting is not popular today and not practiced by many! But when fasting is done in the right spirit, it is powerful. Matthew Henry said, “Fasting is a laudable practice and we have reason to lament that it is generally neglected among Christians.” Jesus **endorsed** fasting in Mat 6:16, 9:14-15, Paul fasted often 2 Cor 11:27. Fasting teaches self-discipline. Fasting proves that we mean business. Fasting helps us straighten our priorities. Fasting is not a punishment, it’s a privilege. Real fasting has lasting results. Father God surely rewards us for our sincere fasting Mat 6:18.

“Fasting must forever center on God. It must be God-initiated and God-ordained...Fasting reminds us that we are sustained by ‘every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ Mat 4:4 Therefore, in experiences of fasting we are not so much abstaining from food as we are feasting on the word of God. Fasting is feasting” writes Richard Foster.

There are three types of fasts generally observed in the Church. Traditional food fasts are water-only fasts, in which a person would drink only water through the length of the fast. Liquid fasts are also

commonly accepted, which means a person would be limited to water and natural juices throughout the fast. Another Biblical fast, called the Daniel Fast, is very much like a vegan diet. The length of fasting should be prayerfully considered. However, commonly fasts can range from one meal, 12 hours, 24 hours, 3 days, 7 days, 21 days, and even 40 days. We must fast as we are led by the Lord. We should not fall into the trap of going to the extremes in fasting when we are new to it. People with health problems must consult their doctor before they can go on a fast.

Motives for fasting

a) Do not fast to Impress People Mat 6:16-18 - It is not for a **show**. “It is sobering to realize that the very first statement Jesus made about fasting dealt with the question of motive” wrote Richard Foster. Don’t put a gloomy face when you are fasting and let people know that you are fasting. That’s hypocrisy and useless to God and you both. During my early Christian days in our fellowship one auntie always showed off when fasting and told everyone about it intentionally! Pharisees were spiritual showmen. The Didache, a manual of church instruction from near the end of the first century says, “Let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on Mondays and Thursdays, but do your fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.” Fasting is not for showmanship but for spirituality. Whom do you want to impress God or man? Whatever is not inspired by the Spirit of God is not spiritual and whatever is done in the flesh is ritual! Public fast or corporate fast is seen or known to men Joel 2:15-17 but private fast is unseen by men Mat 6:16.

b) Do not fast to Improve Health - It is not for getting into **shape**. The health conscious freaks use fasting in place of dieting. Some people try to use fasting to lose weight and get back into shape. Their intention is to become slim and trim. If that is your motive, then you miss the whole purpose of fasting which is growing closer to God and growing spiritually. If people are only interested in losing weight through fasting, then they will just concentrate on how much weight

they have lost and how good their figure is! They remain health conscious and figure conscious but not God conscious. It is an insult to God to use His means for our selfish ends.

c) Do not fast to **Impact God - It is not for **selfishness**.** Many use fasting to get what they want from God with selfish motives – spiritual gifts to show off, seeking for popularity, desiring the anointing for personal greatness. Acts 23:12-14 wicked Jews took an oath to fast till Paul is killed! Pharisees had many superstitious fasts. They fasted in order to have lucky dreams, to obtain the interpretation of a dream, or to avert the evil import of a dream. They also fasted often, in order to obtain the things, they wished for. The tract, Taanith is full of these fasts, and of the wonders performed thus by the Jewish doctors. Let us look at fasting as a godly practice which results in godliness.

Fasting helps us to

***To hear from God**

Early church leaders fasted to hear from God Acts 13:2 and the Holy Spirit spoke to them. We live in a noisy and a busy world and we need special times like these to hear from God. Fasting from food helps us to concentrate on God. Our body gathers all its energy to one point and our listening capacity is heightened. They were eager to know the mind of the Holy Spirit and as they fasted and prayed, and He spoke clearly. In the Bible, fasting and prayer go hand in hand just like a husband and wife. Dan 9:3, 20 reveal how Daniel fasted and prayed to hear from God and God sent Gabriel to give him the needed revelation. 1 Sam 1:6-8, 17-18 Hannah was very desperate until she heard from Eli the word of the Lord and she was greatly consoled. Exo 34:28 Moses was supernaturally sustained by God's power. He lived by the word that proceeded from the mouth of God Mat 4:4. A man was walking down a busy New York sidewalk with a companion. Buses and trucks were roaring by on the street, taxis were honking, the roar of a jack-hammer could be heard in the distance. Suddenly he stopped and said, "Do you hear the cricket?" His companion gaped

at him in astonishment. The man, however, walked over to a potted shrub and parted the leaves. Sure enough — there among the branches was a little cricket. Continuing down the sidewalk, his companion asked him, “How could you possibly have heard the cricket in all this noise?” “Because I listened for it,” said the man. “Here, let me demonstrate.” Having said that, he reached into his pocket for a handful of coins and let them all to the sidewalk. At the sound of the dropping/rolling coins every head within a block swiveled around. “See,” he said, “it depends on what you are listening for.”

***To humble ourselves**

Fasting helps us to be humble Ps 35:13. Adam and Eve transgressed because of their pride and lust for food. So to defeat those two things in life we must learn to fast purposefully. In Duet 8:11-14 God tells the nation of Israel that when they are eaten and are satisfied then their hearts are lifted with pride and will forget Him. Hos 13:6 proves that they didn’t heed to Moses’ warning. Bible warns us about some people who are slaves to their belly Rom 16:18. Phil 3:19 tells us that their belly is their god. Ezra 8:21-23 humbling and seeking God in prayer is the way for us to go. Afflicting ourselves with fasting breaks the power of flesh over us and sets us free to serve the Lord in humility. By denying the legitimate need to the body you can have mastery over yourself Isa 58:3. Mat 26:41 Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Martin Luther wrote, “of fasting I say this: It is right to fast frequently in order to subdue and control the body. For when the stomach is full, the body does not serve for preaching, for praying, or studying, or for doing anything else that is good. Under such circumstances God’s Word cannot remain. But one should not fast with a view to meriting something by it as by a good work.”

Fasting may weaken the physical man Ps109:24 but it strengthens the spiritual man 2 Cor 4:16. 1 Cor 10:7 food and pride pave way to sin – fasting is a cure for both. A saint ate one simple meal a day to

keep himself humble. Mat 9:14 John the Baptist's humility could be a result of frequent fasting, humble though he came as a great prophet after 400 years of darkness. Richard Foster found that fasting brought his anger to the surface.

***To honor the Lord through worship**

Anna's wonderful way to worship the Lord through fasting, it was a concentrated worship Lk 2:37. Acts 13:2 they worshipped the Lord undisturbed. Fasting can be an act of pure devotion and dedication to the Lord. It grows intimacy with Him and our dependency on Him. God becomes our central figure of life. Anna did not 'depart' from the temple but served God day and night with fasting and prayers. She was so hungry for the Lord, His presence and His work. She was truly devoted to the Master of her soul. God was her sole desire, God was her joy and her life. Hallelujah! On the other hand, hypocrites and self righteous men boast and exalt themselves in the presence of God because of their fasting than giving glory and honor to the Lord Lk 18:12. Anna served the Lord day and night but these hypocrites served themselves in the name of the Lord. They made a ritual of everything that is spiritual. The Jews of Jesus' day had a teaching that Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Law on a Thursday, and returned with it on a Monday. Consequently, the Pharisees considered fasting on those two days as a special mark of holiness. They ascribed importance to the days but not to the Lord! God is asking the question, did you really fast for Me – for Me Zec 7:5? Any spiritual discipline can be abused. If carefully employed it will enable us to forget ourselves and lift up our eyes, hearts and minds to our great God. Charles H. Spurgeon once said, "Our seasons of fasting and prayer at the Tabernacle have been high days indeed; never has Heaven's gate stood wider; never have our hearts been nearer the central Glory." Praying Hyde forgot sleep & food while interceding – so fully immersed in God.

***To help those in need**

God shows us the kind of fast He desires from His people Isa 58:3-8. Here we see the right and the wrong kinds of fast. Here in this passage the people are insensitive, selfish and utterly wicked though they were fasting. Very few people seem to be doing the right fast. Those who fast must realize the need to feed the hungry because they themselves will feel its pangs while fasting and also to relive the suffering because fasting lets them to taste a bit of it. So basically real fasting makes us sensitive to God and man. We are inspired to love God and our neighbor in fasting. Save it and share it with others, what a turning point to become unselfish. Women in Mizoram, the poorest place, save a glass of rice each time they cook and give it to the missions and the poor. These people are walking examples of the true saints. Helping others in need is a great quality and it can be developed through proper and regular fasting.

*** To heal the land**

Humility with fasting makes way for God to heal the land and bless others 2 Chro 7:14. Help, healing, and honor will follow you when your fast is approved by God. We must work together with God for this to come to pass. Jehoshaphat and his nation's sincere fasting prayer yielded God's deliverance 2 Chro 20:1-3. Satanists are praying with fasting for the destruction of Christian families and churches, how much more should we fast and pray to God for our protection and their salvation? Jon 3:5-8 shows how the King's edict and complete fast turned God's wrath from the nation of Nineveh and they were spared. Jonathan Edwards fasted for 24 hours before preaching the message, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" which sparked a great revival in New England that grew into the first great awakening. Esther's fasting paved a way for God's miraculous provision of protection for the Jews Est 4:16. We can read a story of the early pioneers in Minnesota. The grasshoppers had done much damage, and in 1877 the farmers were very concerned that all the wheat could be destroyed. Governor John S. Pillsbury proclaimed April 26 as a day of prayer and fasting. All shops, schools, stores,

and offices were closed. The next day the temperature soared and the larvae of the dreaded pest were seen everywhere. On the fourth day, the temperature dropped, and frost came. The frost killed the locusts and the grateful farmers remembered the day God answered the fasting and praying of the people. God will always remain true to His word!

*** To harmonize with God**

Repentance of our sins is very essential, nowadays all the more we need to repent with fasting Jon 3:9-10. Reconnection with God is vital for revival and refreshing. The children of Israel repented at Mizpeh 1 Sam 7:6. We must take time and repent for all our heinous sins before God seriously Neh 9:1-2, Neh 1:4-9. God takes sin very seriously and He wants to see whether we treat it the same way or not. In the Bible, sinners often repented with sack cloth and ashes and with fasting. Where in the world can we see such scenes today? A truly stingy painter was contracted to paint the local Church a beautiful white on the outside. The Deacons negotiated a price with the painter and he set to work. He thought to himself, "I can make a little higher profit on this job." So he thinned down his paint, so that the paint to do one side, ended up painting the whole building. As he finished and was admiring his work, it began to rain. And it rained. And rained. And rained. And the white paint ran down the sides of the church, and ran off into the sewer. The painter fell to his knees and cried, "Why me, God?" And suddenly, a voice was heard from heaven, "Repaint, and Thin no more!" Repent and sin no more.

*** To have direction from God**

Paul didn't even think of eating and drinking till he heard from God Acts 9:9-12, 6. Special direction and strength from God at times comes through special times of fasting. When we need some help we go to find the person who can help and spend time and money to meet them. But seldom we take time to fast and seek the guidance, counsel from the Lord. Martin Luther was criticized because he fasted too much. John Calvin fasted and prayed until most of Geneva turned to God. John Knox fasted and prayed and the wicked Mary, Queen of Scots said she feared no weapon like she feared John Knox's prayers.

These men of God have truly sought God for a clear cut direction and action on behalf of their prayers. When you want to know the will of God seek His face with fasting and prayer. Whatever direction you need, go to the Lord and stay there seeking Him with fasting. Nehemiah tells us in Neh 1:4 that he sought deliverance and direction from God for his people's dire situation. We read in Neh 2:12 how wonderfully the Lord God gave the needed counsel and direction to Nehemiah. Someone has compared life to a medical prescription. The pharmacist mixes the ingredients and produces medicine that will help you get well. But if you take those ingredients separately, or if you change the proportions, you might do irreparable damage, or even cause death. God knows how to mix the ingredients of life. We know in part, but God knows fully and completely. And one day, when we see Jesus Christ, God will show us the whole picture. Then we will understand the meaning of the so-called tragedies of life.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote that, "Fasting, if we conceive of it truly, must not...be confined to the question of food and drink; fasting should really be made to include abstinence from anything which is legitimate in and of itself for the sake of some special spiritual purpose. There are many bodily functions which are right and normal and perfectly legitimate, but which for special peculiar reasons in certain circumstances should be controlled. That is fasting."

Fast from newspapers, books, magazines, TV, radio, music, songs, sex 1Cor 7:5, telephone, cell phone, internet, chatting, social media and some specific pleasure like a favorite dish. John Wesley ate just whole-meal bread and took water for many days. You can fast from meeting people just for nothing and use that time fruitfully with God. Thomas Merton observed connections between solitude and love for others. In his book, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote that we must learn to be alone so that we know how to be with people. So that you can spend all of that time with the Lord seeking His face. During the fast **focus** on God and enter into a deep commitment, intimate relationship with the Lord.

Fasting is very essential and productive for all Christians before the coming of the Lord. Fast sincerely, faithfully and humbly for great things.

11

Diakonia

“The true character of ministry is a servant’s heart.”– Harold Warner

Human life is meant to be fruitful and productive according to God’s original plan in the beginning Gen 1:28. Man was made in the image of God to serve him and to bring him pleasure. After the fall this got messed up and every man became selfish to the core and left to serve his own selfish desires! But God offered His dear Son Jesus on the cross as a sacrifice for our sin to redeem us and bring us back into His will so that we could serve Him selflessly. Serving God is an honor and a privilege. This is clearly depicted in the life of our Lord Jesus leaving us an example to follow, in serving God. In Mk 10:45 Jesus makes His mission statement. The very purpose of our Lord’s coming to the world is to save & serve. He is our example in all things so as His disciples we must imitate Him in all areas of life. In Jh 12:26 Christ says, “If any one serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if any one serves Me, the Father will honor him.” The meaning of the word is general here and could refer to a number of forms of service. As we read the Bible to learn how to serve God, many things are taught about serving God but we will consider a few of them in this chapter.

Definition of Ministry

In Mk 10:45 the Greek word used for service is “**Diakonia**” it is translated as ministry, service, administration, relief etc in the New Testament. Primarily it is a service done unto God and then to those that are in need. 1 Cor 12:5 talks about varieties of ministries. A scholar throws light on the attitude and philosophy of service among the early Greeks and Jews. “**To the Greeks**, diakonia service was very demeaning. For them ruling is proper to a man but not serving. The basic Greek mindset was, “How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?” In the Greek mind the concept of serving others never existed! They felt that they were the privileged lot and deserve to be served but will not stoop to serve others. Today, many in the church too carry this egotistic philosophy. **To the Jews**, there was no diakonia in their philosophy of ministry. Unlike the Greeks, the Jews had a different ideology in regard to service. If they were to serve, they would serve out of social obligation or serve someone who is worthy of the service. The Jews fulfilled their social responsibilities to the poor by giving them alms but not by serving them. A man of some stature would not stoop down to serve the undeserving. Only the lowliest would become the servant of the highly placed ones.” This is totally opposite to our Lord’s nature and teaching. Our Lord said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” Mat 20:28. Jesus introduced a radically new approach and attitude to diakonia in the lives of His disciples.

A Roman coin was once found with the picture of an ox on it; the ox was facing two things—an altar and a plough; and the inscription read: “**Ready for either.**” The ox had to be ready either for the supreme moment of sacrifice on the altar or the long labor of the plough on the farm. God’s desire is that we be ready for either. Either to serve as obedient servants, or to be a sacrifice for having done what was right.

Diakonia is not the activity of a lesser to a greater, but is the lifestyle of a follower of the Lord Jesus. “**Serving**” in the form of diakonia pervades the NT, not merely in the frequency of the word’s usage

but in the constant recurrence of attitudes and examples of service. Dave Stone says that **“service is the language of grace.”** Beautifully said. In 1538 Martin Bucer said, “The Church is a congregation of persons assembled in Christ’s Word and Spirit to be one body, put together of various members, each with an office and work dedicated to bettering the whole body and all its members.” How true and apt it is? If only Christians learn to think Biblically they would be doing much good to the cause of Christ. In India, as in other countries that were under British rule, the letters O.H.M.S. (On His Majesty’s Service, or On Her Majesty’s Service) used to be printed on official documents. In those days, a little lad, the son of devoted missionaries in the district now called West Godavari, asked and received from his Canadian parents an explanation of the letters on such official envelopes, which came in fairly frequently. In his prayers with his parents, he used to express his desire in the following way: ‘Lord, I’m just like a Government letter. No matter what becomes blurred or defaced on me, please keep the letters—O.H.M.S.—on me clear.’ Acts 16:17.

Divine order of Ministry

* Saints must be **encouraged** to minister – most people think that ministry is the job of the ministers, pastors, evangelists, missionaries, elders and deacons etc. Mark Twain once said, “that the church is a place where a nice respectable person stands in front of other nice, respectable people and urges them to be nicer and more respectable.” But God planned ministry to be carried out by everyone in the church! The congregation needs to be encouraged by the leadership to serve in various capacities. Eph 4:13 shows us God’s intention in giving various kinds of ministers to the church. We should aim for what was reflected on a church’s letterhead. It stated: 1st line - The name of the Church, 2nd line - “Ministers: The Congregation”, 3rd line - “Assistant to the Ministers”: the name of the Pastor. That is how it should be in every church.

There are many reasons why Christians do not serve the Lord. Some don't serve because their commitment to Christ and His church is half-hearted. They attend church occasionally, but their real interests are in the world. Serving in the church would be an inconvenience for them. Others have tried serving, but they lacked training and grew frustrated and quit. Some quit because other church members criticized them. Others burned out trying to do too much. Some quit serving because they were serving out of the wrong motivation. They were looking for commendation from people, not from God. But for whatever reason, many Christians grow weary of the hassle of serving the Lord and retreat to a more comfortable seat on the sidelines. There are certain qualifications we must have if we would be used of God. These qualifications do not include great learning, genius, riches, executive ability, and other similar assets that many of us will never have. The Bible tells us in 1 Cor 1:26-29 just what they are. D. L. Moody is quoted in the Keswick Calendar as follows: "Paul sums up five things that God uses: the weak things,' 'the foolish things,' 'the base things,' 'the despised things,' and 'the things which are not.' When we are ready to lay down our strength and our weakness before the Lord, He can use us."

* Saints must be **equipped** to minister – it is the job of the pastors and elders in the church to equip the members through proper teaching and training to serve. When they are taught from the Word about their 'role' and 'responsibility' they will understand and get motivated. This is what is lacking in many churches. Vance Havner in his pithy, penetrating style comments on Eph 4:11-12..."Every Christian is commissioned, for every Christian is a missionary. It has been said that the Gospel is not merely something to come to church to hear but something to go from the church to tell—and we are all appointed to tell it. It has also been said, 'Christianity began as a company of lay witnesses; it has become a professional pulpitism, financed by lay spectators.' Nowadays we hire a church staff to do 'full-time Christian work,' and we sit in church on Sunday to watch them do it. Every Christian is meant to be in full-time Christian service ... There is indeed a special ministry of pastors, teachers and evangelists—but for what? ... For the perfecting of the saints for their ministry."

* Saints must be **engaged** in the ministry Acts 20:24 - which is received from the Lord, and be willing to pay any price or do any sacrifice to fulfil it. As Acts 1:17 puts it, just like Judas Iscariot every believer has got a **“share”** in the ministry. A well-known coach was once asked, “How much does college football contribute to the national physical-fitness picture?” “Nothing,” the coach replied abruptly. “Why nothing?” the startled interviewer asked. “Well,” said the coach, “the way I see it, you have 22 men down on the field desperately needing rest and 40,000 people in the stands, desperately needing some exercise.” Writing about the saints non engagement in the ministry M R De Haan II says, “A similar situation exists in many churches today. When you compare the members who actively participate, you often find a rather pathetic situation. It’s not unusual to have a small group of diligent Christian workers struggling **“down on the field”** while others in the congregation are acting like spectators, **“sitting on the sidelines, eating hot dogs and popcorn.”** God’s strategy for the accomplishment of His program is not like a sports event. It does not call for the job to be done only by the “professionals.” In the game of life, all believers have their own positions and spiritual gifts that they must exercise “for the profit of all” 1 Co 12:7. My friend, if you’ve been sitting in the stands, you’re badly needed down on the field.” How true it is?

Too many people make excuses as to why they can’t serve. Can you sweep the floor? Can you dust the room? Can you wash the place? Can you set things in order? Can you cook some food? Can you help someone when that person is sick? Can you call people and give them an encouraging word? Can you help teach children about God? Can you do handy work? Can you donate anything of value? Can you stop along your way and give a smile? Can you take an interest in someone else’s life? The big thing is that you have to be ready to serve. You have to open your eyes and your ears to the needs of others. The individual in Christian service is indispensable. The work of God in the world is like a coordinating effort where every person is valuable and has something to contribute. No servant of God is too young, or too poor, or too ungifted, or too obscure to be a fellow-laborer with Him. Sir Michael Costa was once rehearsing with a

large orchestra and hundreds of voices. Amidst the thunder of the organ, and the roll of the drums, the player on the piccolo said to himself: “In all this din, my little instrument doesn’t matter,” and he ceased to play. Suddenly the great conductor threw up his arms, and all was still. “Where is the piccolo?” he cried. God listens for our share in His orchestra. Saints of old have served the Lord with whatever they had in their hand. Moses served the Lord with a simple rod. Gideon served the Lord with a simple pitcher. The young lad served the Lord with his simple lunch. Tabitha served the Lord with a simple needle. 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.”

Paul writes to Timothy asking him to bring Mark because he is useful to the ministry 2 Tim 4:11. Everyone who is born of God is useful in the ministry. In the Ancient Church, the deacon was called **“the ear and the mouth of the bishop.”** It was the deacon who had the responsibility to bring the stories from the margin, from the lives of the poor and the sick into the Church. The mission of go-between is successful if distances can be bridged. When this happens, diaconal action can contribute to transformation of the Church—both in its center and periphery.

Devotion to Ministry

The early apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word Acts 6:4. Stephanas’ household was devoted to ministering to the saints 1 Cor 16:15, in fact the KJV uses the word “addicted” describing their attitude of service! This family was addicted to the service of the saints. Wow, what a great attitude rarely to be seen in the service of others. Someone asked John Wanamaker: “How do you get time to run a Sunday school for four thousand scholars, in addition to the business of your stores, your work as Postmaster-General, and other obligations?” Instantly Mr. Wanamaker replied: “Why, the Sunday school is my business. All other things are just things. Forty-five years ago I decided that God’s promise was sure:

‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’” Some people have learnt well the truth, that first things come first. God is well pleased with it.

The Bible exhorts us to take heed to the ministry we have received from the Lord Col 4:17. It cannot be neglected, it cannot be overlooked, it cannot be sidelined or it cannot be avoided. We must first -

***find out** our ministry, it has to do with our passion for God and our perception of his work. Too many people come to Church three times primarily. When they’re baptized, when they get married, and when they have their funeral service at the Church. The first time they throw water on you, the second time they throw rice on you, and the third time they throw dirt on you! Many are buried in the grave without doing anything for the glory of God. Hope someone is hearing out there. Disciples must be -

***focused** about their ministry - Col 4:12 tells us how Epaphras was focused in praying for others.

***fervent** in the ministry - Phil 2:25-30 tells us how Epaphroditus was fervent unto death in serving the Lord.

***faithful** to the end in it - Col 4:7 tells us how Tychicus was applauded by Paul as a faithful servant of the Lord.

One Sunday morning the pastor noticed little Alex was staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. The plaque was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, “Good morning Alex.” “Good morning pastor,” replied the young man, still focused on the plaque. “Pastor McGhee, what is this?” “Well, son, it’s a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.” Soberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Little Alex’s voice was barely audible when he asked, “Which service, the 9:00 or the 11:00?” Jesus considered Paul faithful and

put him into the ministry 1 Tim 1:12. Then one day we will get to hear from the blessed lips of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Mat 25:21. The Lord's servant Gypsy Smith shares his experience, "A woman who was interested in Christian work in London wrote to me once and said, "I have a meeting I want you to come to speak to. It is only a small meeting and will take nothing out of you." I answered, "I cannot come, and it would be of no use if I did come. If it takes nothing out of me, it will do nobody any good." It is service that costs, and a cheap religion is not worth preaching.

Dunamis for the Ministry

The Lord Jesus told His disciples in Acts 1:8, "you shall receive **"power"** to be My witnesses. The Greek word for **"power"** is *dunamis*, which means **"miraculous power"** or **"dynamite."** We need this power to live and serve as the disciples of the Lord. We who are the true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ are the ambassadors and representatives of the Lord Jesus in the world. So we **"represent"** Jesus to the world. We **"re-present"** His qualities to the people around us - His love, mercy, grace, forgiveness and most importantly here His service. For this we need to be **'empowered'** and that's what the Holy Spirit does. He empowers us with His *dunamis* power to serve as the Lord's servants. Remember, when they chose the seven deacons to serve at the tables, the apostles said that these people should be full of the Holy Spirit Acts 6:3. To do Christ like service with a Christ like heart and motive we need the Spirit of Christ to empower us. God said very clearly that His works are done only through His Spirit Zec 4:6. Remember this truth.

The great violinist, Nicolo Paganini, willed his marvelous violin to Genoa, the city of his birth — but only on condition that the instrument never be played upon. It was an unfortunate condition, for it is a peculiarity of wood that as long as it is used and handled, it shows little wear. As soon as it is discarded, it begins to decay. The exquisite, mellow-toned violin has become worm-eaten in its beautiful case, valueless except as a relic. The mouldering instrument is a reminder that a life withdrawn from all service to others loses its meaning.

12

One another

“It’s better to tear down pride than allow pride to tear down relationships!” Wesley Furlong

The Church is beautifully described as God’s family in Eph 3:14-15. Because we are family we have this fellowship. The family fellowship knits us together with responsibilities for one another. Sharing and caring are a part of the family. It is pointed out that in the NT we have 58” **One another**” commands outside of the gospels! God placed a lot of importance on this issue. Loving our neighbor (at church) must be quite normal. God desires “**Body life**” for His church. He calls it as His family. There is smartness in this concept, strength in this arrangement and satisfaction in this kind of community living. Very little of this life is visible in the church today. More and more worldly ways have come into the church of the Lord Jesus. For us as God’s children the primary goal is to please Him and do His will. Let us make it our aim to live by the word of God. Let us stick to the plan of God for His family. “This is the most beautiful kind of worship: when God’s people come together as one and do communion” writes Emily. Until unless we learn to see things the way God sees them it will be impossible for us to become godly. Perspective matters a lot in life.

GREET ONE ANOTHER

Rom 16:16 says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.” Greeting is a normal courtesy of life. Usually it is a done thing. Strangers don’t greet one another. But brothers and sisters in the Lord must greet each other. In the NT church they had a custom of greeting with an affectionate kiss on the cheek. It was men to men and women to women. Depending on the culture people greet. Christians must begin their **“koinonia”** life here. There is a purpose behind this salutation. It is not just a custom, habit or a routine thing to do. So to do this and obey the scripture we must do certain things. Don’t rush out after the service; don’t be like an isolated owl. Wait for some time to fellowship with the dear ones of the Lord, take time to be what God wants you to be. Coming to church involves a threefold activity - worshipping God, warm fellowship with the saints and witnessing to the sinners. Look at people in church, smile at them, greet them sincerely, and spend some time to know them, continue this fellowship into a relationship. Learn the **‘love courtesy’** of a Christian. When you go to a restaurant with your family you don’t greet anyone or meet anyone except you all sit together to eat and come out. Church is not a restaurant. The Bible says, all the **“churches”** greet you. 1 Cor 16:20 says, all the **“brethren”** greet you. Do you know about it? Do you practice it? Do you ignore it or disobey as if this is no big deal?

Have you ever been confronted with a message that changed your perspective? One church chose as its Lenten theme, “Forty Days of Love.” Each week members of the congregation were encouraged to show their love and appreciation in different ways. The first week they were encouraged to send notes to people who had made positive contributions to their lives. After the first service a man in the congregation wanted to speak to his pastor. The pastor describes the man as “kind of macho, a former football player who loved to hunt and fish, a strong self-made man.” The man told his pastor, “I love you and I love this church, but I’m not going to participate in this Forty Days of Love stuff. It’s OK for some folks,” he said, “but it’s

a little too sentimental and syrupy for me.” A week went by. The next Sunday this man waited after church to see his pastor again. “I want to apologize for what I said last Sunday,” he told him, “about the Forty Days of Love. I realized on Wednesday that I was wrong.” “Wednesday?” his pastor repeated “What happened on Wednesday?” “I got one of those letters” the man said. The letter came as a total surprise. It was from a person the man never expected to hear from. It touched him so deeply he now carries it around in his pocket all the time. “Every time I read it,” he said, “I get tears in my eyes.” It was a transforming moment in this man’s life. Suddenly he realized he was loved by others in the church. This changed his entire outlook. “I was so moved by that letter,” he said, “I sat down and wrote ten letters myself!”

ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

“Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.” Rom 15:7. Accept one another with all of your heart just as Christ has accepted you to the glory of God. Accept, welcome, receive, and embrace them as they are without impartiality, indignation or iniquity. Acceptance is essential to build relationships with people. Belong to one another – because the Bible says that we are all members of the same body Eph 4:25. Just as you don’t reject your organs whether they are healthy or unhealthy you must not do the same to your spiritual organs. In organ transplantation some bodies **“reject”** the organs which are foreign to them and the patients die. But here the word says we are all instruments of the same body. So we must accept one another and can never reject anyone who is a true disciple of Christ. Rejection of our church members in the mind, with the mouth or in any manner is not right before God. Not good in the spiritual realm too. If Christ accepted people like us who are utterly unacceptable then there is no reason why we cannot do the same. So we must accept one another though we may see some things in the other that are unacceptable. One man was asked, “Are you associating with that brother who is in error?” To which he replied, “That’s the only brother I have!”

We cannot live without accepting one another in a true spiritual sense because that is the way it is arranged by God. Anything less than this will jeopardize the purpose of God. In illustrating the interdependence of one another's spiritual gifts in a local church, Gary Inrig, in 'Life in His Body' shared the following story: Several years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton and, when he received his honor, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kaspryzak. They had met one another in school when the armless Mr. Kaspryzak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance ripened into friendship and a beautiful example of interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After their graduation, they planned to practice law together. No believer is complete by himself, we are to minister to one another, as a family.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" Jh 13:34-35. This is the supreme act of a Christian. Love means seeking others best, serving them to achieve that, sacrificing for their good. Building up one another in love is what we are to do. This is what 'binds' us together in Christ. Love is more powerful than any "glue" in the world!

*The **Statute** of love from Jesus (3 times loving one another is mentioned by Jesus in these 2 verses). That puts things in perspective for His disciples. A child's letter went like this– "Dear God, I bet it's very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it" Nan.

*The **Source** of love is Jesus (If God is love – then we are the disciples of love – love otherwise we are not disciples), Someone wrote, “The more loving you become the more God like you are, because God is love!” Another said, “Love is more than a characteristic of God; it is His character.”

*The **Standard** of love is Jesus. This is no small commandment. A woman wrote a letter - “Dearest Jimmy, no words could ever express the great unhappiness I’ve felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you’ll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you. Yours forever, Marie... P.S., And congratulations on winning the state lottery.” This is pure selfishness. According Rom 12:10 unless we “**devote**” ourselves to love our brothers and sisters in the Lord it is not going to happen.

HONOUR ONE ANOTHER

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves” Phil 2:3. Attitude matters in our relationships. Right attitude leads to right behavior with others, otherwise we despise them. As believers armed with the mind of Christ we must learn to prefer one another. It means to ‘put’ the other person above you. Regard the other person more than yourself. Value the other person. Treat the other person better than yourself. It means to serve that person’s need. Honor the other person by –

***Sharing love**—Loving a person in practical ways is the need of the hour. A miner worked very hard every day in the mines for a living. The overseer of the mine said to him one day, “Thomas, I’ve got an easier berth for you, where there is not much hard work, and where you will get better wages. Will you accept it?” Most men would have jumped at such an offer. But what did this noble fellow do? He said to the overseer: “Captain, there’s our poor brother Tregony; he has a sickly body, and not able to do hard work as I can. I am afraid

his work will shorten his life and then what will his poor family do? Won't you please let him have this easier berth? I can go on working as I have done." The overseer was wonderfully pleased with Thomas's generous spirit. He was a faithful friend.

***Showing grace**— Everyone is in need of grace and we must show grace and strengthen them in Christ. During a spelling contest in which the prize was a fine Bible, the contestants were finally reduced to two—Betty, the daughter of a poor, hard-working widow, and Susan, the daughter of a well-to-do farmer. The sympathy of the school was with the poor girl. Finally, Susan misspelled a word, and Betty won the coveted prize. Going home, Susan's mother said to her daughter, "Couldn't you have spelled that word?" "Yes, Mother." "Then why didn't you do it?" "Well, you know Betty is quite poor, and she doesn't get many presents. She wanted the Bible very much, and she tried so hard for it that I thought I'd let her have it." "What made you do that, Susie?" "My Sunday school lesson, Mother, which said, 'in honor preferring one another.' So I thought I'd try it, and I'm glad I did." A few days later, Susan received as a birthday present a beautiful Bible, and on the flyleaf was written the text, "In honor preferring one another" Rom 12:10.

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" Eph 4:32. Church members make mistakes, they make a mess of things, they cause misunderstandings, they try to manipulate and manage things according to their will. We get hurt in the process but that should not deter us from doing God's will. Self denial is the best way to deal with hurt feelings and seek the Holy Spirit's help to forgive and restore. Do not injure one another. Do not judge one another. Don't complain against one another Jam 5:9. Mk 9:50 but be at peace with one another. Jesus Christ demonstrated that forgiveness is beautiful. How beautiful and yet how rare is forgiveness? Christ taught His disciples to forgive their enemies, and in this respect as in all others, He is our great example. He said amid the agonies of the crucifixion, "Father forgive

them.” A deaf mute being asked, “What is forgiveness?” took a pencil and wrote, “It is the odor which a flower yields when trampled upon,” and Sir William Jones has given us the following extract from the Persian poet Sadi— “The sandal-tree perfumes when riven the axe that laid it low; Let man, who hopes to be forgiven, forgive and bless his foe.” Christ likeness must be developed in every believer and without a ‘forgiving spirit’ it is impossible to achieve it. If we do not prayerfully seek to walk in the steps of the Lord and especially displaying the spirit of forgiveness we miss God’s will.

BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDEN

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ” Gal 6:2. We are called to fulfill the law of Christ, and we can do it by bearing the burden of others. Just as the Lord bears our burdens we must bear others burdens. We try to escape from taking responsibility; we try to avoid getting involved in the problems. We just ignore the real trouble of our people. We can comfort the person by relieving the burden and restoring the hope. The giant sequoias of California have a unique feature. The sequoia tree has roots just barely below the surface but it stands tall withstanding all the fury of the nature! The sequoia trees grow only in groves and their roots intertwine under the surface of the earth. So, when the strong winds come, they hold each other up! There’s a lesson here. In a sense, people are like the giant sequoias. Family, friends, neighbors, the church body and other groups should be havens so that when the strong winds of life blow, these people can serve as reinforcement and can strive together to hold each other up. Are you fulfilling your role as a ‘supporter’ in the body of Christ?

STIR UP ONE ANOTHER

“.... let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” Heb 10:24. Motivating and mobilizing the members of the body of Christ for His glory and for the good of His people is our job, duty and responsibility. To do this first we must set an example and then we must do everything to empower people to do the same.

This is our mission for life. In its fulfilment we find joy and strength. Without having loving fellowship, we cannot provoke one another, stir one another, push one another and motivate one another to do the will of God. Many years ago an accomplished organist was giving a concert. (In those days someone had to pump large bellows backstage to provide air for the pipes.) After each selection, the musician received the thunderous applause of a delighted audience. Before his final number, he stood up and said, "I shall now play," and he announced the title. Sitting down at the console, he adjusted his music and checked the stops. With feet poised over the pedals and hands over the keys, he began with a mighty chord. But the organ remained silent. Just then a voice was heard from backstage, "Say 'We'!" Yes, we need each other very much. Without the other we cannot do many things.

Of all the songs in the book of Revelation, did you know not one is a solo! 4 living creatures sing; 24 elders sing; a multitude of angels sing; every creature sings and it's a colossal congregation. Spurgeon said, "If someone asked what we want the Church to be, we would be pretty close to right if we said that we wanted it to be a choir. We should be anxious to build lives, belonging to Jesus, which harmonize with each other in praise to God!"

13

Test the spirits

“Discerning the deceivers that come in the garb of divinity is the need of the hour!” Upender

Now we come to learn about discernment, Biblical discernment! Jh 4:1-6. Disciples must discern between right and wrong, true and false and light and darkness. A Scripture fed and a Spirit led Christian would easily discern all sorts of falsehood! “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

We are never to assume any spiritual person, or spiritual discourse, or spiritual experience, or spiritual power to be from God. We are **“commanded”** not to believe every spirit but to try the spirits. This is required of every true believer. Many shirk from doing this due to lack of knowledge, lack of courage, lukewarmness, recklessness or fear of judgment! There is a strong **“reason”** for this – **“many”** false prophets have gone into the world. It’s also a sign of the times – Mat 24:11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. The Greek word **dokimazo** meaning to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals; to recognize as genuine after examination, to approve, deem worthy etc. The word is used to describe what a metallurgist does in testing to see if a piece

of metal is genuine or not. Is it gold, or just fools' gold? Don't automatically believe every Christian speaker Jh 1:6. The purpose of **"testing"** is to see if they are of God, not to criticize or argue with them. If they are of God then test their 'message' and see what it says. Paul gives a rule in the church regarding the giving of prophecies – 1 Cor 14:29. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. "Now, you've heard of private detectives, well there's a great need today for prophet detectives - people who will detect the false prophets" warned D. L. Moody. Rightly so.

Like John, Paul emphasized the demonic aspect of false teachers 1 Tim 4:1-2 - Of course, the deceitful spirits and their demonic doctrines teach through people who advocate the false teaching. So we must pay close attention to John's words. He is saying that ... **Believers must be discerning in spiritual matters.** The Bible says, "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" 1 Thes 5:21. John Stott observes as the Reformers insisted, that **"even the humblest Christian possessed 'the right of private judgment'"** ...Moses warned the children of Israel right back there at the beginning Duet 13:1-3. Dr. Norman Geisler once said, "to identify the supernatural with the divine necessarily is a perilous mistake. Of course, things might be divine and not supernatural at all, things might be supernatural and not divine at all, and of course, things might be supernatural and divine." Think about it, apply your mind seriously to such important things for your own well being. Griffith Thomas states, "In every age the false has counterfeited the true: a) In Egypt the magicians imitated Moses; b) In the Apostolic church Simon Magus imitated Philip; c) In the great historic revivals there always sprang up many spurious forms of enthusiasm that were counterfeits of the true. Half a truth is more dangerous than a lie!" L. Palmer wrote, "Those who modify truth have always injured the truth more than those who have denied it openly."

A false teacher may be gentle and loving. He may speak prophecies that come true. He may even perform miracles or cast out demons or speak in tongues Mat 7:22; Exo 7:11. But, the question is, does he lead people to follow a false god? If so shun him immediately. The

unbiblical pastor of the church where “Toronto blessing” happened, John Arnott has said, “Toronto is like a flowing stream. Don’t try to test it or discern it. Just jump in, you’ll understand it after you’ve jumped in.” Rodney Howard-Browne says, “Don’t pray. Just accept. Just receive.” That kind of ‘emptying yourself’ is something dangerous and the Scriptures warn us about strictly. You find that kind of passivity in Hinduism and Buddhism. When Rodney Howard-Browne videos were shown to converted Hindus in London. They said, “That’s Bhagwan Rajneesh. That is what we were saved out of.” Test the spirits. The Toronto people say “Don’t test it,” but God says, “Test it!” False teachers and charlatans don’t like people discerning the truth from error or trying to make judgment or exposing the falsehood. Roman Catholics kept the people in the dark for over 1000 years! False teachers jump to defend themselves and start cursing the people for testing the spirits and their teaching. Remember back when TBN founder & president Paul Crouch during a “Praise-a-thon” program, which aired April 2nd 1991, said to those who came against what the Faith movement was teaching. He said that they were “damned & on their way to hell”... (later said) “I don’t think there’s any redemption for them.”

We get into the mode where we start to trust certain people, and then we simply believe everything they say. Yet I’m not so sure we are to ever get past the point where we are evaluating what we hear against the Word of God. There is a story that Jay Adams relates, and he tells about how on one occasion in his travels he was driving through the state of Texas in the United States of America. He heard a preacher on the radio, and the preacher was inviting his listeners saying, ‘Stay tuned to the end of this message, because if you stay tuned I’ll tell you how to obtain’ - wait for this - ‘an autographed picture of Jesus Christ’ - an autographed picture of Jesus Christ! This is over the radio in Texas. You might think, ‘That’s not possible!’ - it’s factual, this is what’s going on in our world. You might say, ‘Well, that’s obvious.’ and some false spirits are obviously false, but some are not. Indeed, the majority of them are not, and that is why the Lord

Jesus warned that though we may see that so obvious, there are wolves that are in sheep's clothing, and they're there, and they're planted by Satan to devour the lambs, God's sheep. That's why we need to discern and try the spirits, to prove all things and hold fast that which is true - and it doesn't matter what a man claims, and I don't care who the man is. We're to try all the spirits. The Word is the measure by which we test the spirits, but as Calvin points out, "except the Spirit of wisdom be present, to have God's word in our hands will avail little or nothing, for its meaning will not appear to us." So we need diligently to study God's Word in dependence on the Holy Spirit for understanding. Then we will be able to overcome false teachers.

In verses 2 & 3 we learn that "**JESUS**" is the name of the Master's Humanity, and that "**CHRIST**" is the title of His Deity, the Divine anointed One come to be the promised and predicted Messiah, Savior, and King. An acknowledgment, you see, of His Deity 1 Jh 5:1. And the first and fundamental test of every spirit claiming to be of GOD is, "**What think ye of Christ?**" Mat 22:42. If you are satisfied that they believe that He was more than a wonderful, remarkable Man, more than a unique Man, the best ever, that, indeed, they confess to a belief in His true, real, complete Deity - then you can proceed to a further examination. If they do not hold this belief, this passage justifies you - even instructs you - to close the interview. Waste no further time 1 Cor 12:3.

In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily Col 2:9. A little girl once said to her mother, "Mama, I like you better than God." "Oh, you must not say that!" replied the mother. "Yes, but really, Mama, I do like you better than God." Shocked, her mother inquired, "Dear, what makes you say that?" The child answered simply, "Because I can hug you!" That little girl expressed the universal desire of man to have contact with God in a personal, tangible way. A spirit without a body is difficult for us to conceive, but a real "flesh and bones" man is a concrete reality we can understand. In the incarnation, therefore, Jesus brought God within embracing distance. Someone has said, "The kindest thing God ever did was to become a Man!" It is a liberating truth that enables us to have a clear understanding of God and a meaningful relationship with Him.

When John states that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh,” he is referring not only to His true deity, but also to His true humanity. The Docetists taught that matter is evil; thus Jesus was only a spirit-being who *seemed* to be a real man. The Cerentian Gnostics taught that Jesus was a mere man, but that “the Christ,” a divine emanation, came upon Him at His baptism, but left just before His crucifixion. John’s test refutes both of these heresies. Jesus is the Christ (the Anointed One, or Messiah) who was conceived supernaturally by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. He had a human body Jh 1:14, Heb 2:16, although apart from sin. **To deny that Jesus is true God and at the same time true man is to deny the Christian faith.** To deny either Jesus’ deity or His humanity is to deny that He is our Savior. G. Campbell Morgan who wrote this regarding Jesus: He was the God-man. Not God indwelling a man. Of such there have been many. Not a man deified. Of such there have been none save in the myths of pagan systems of thought; but God and man, combining in one personality the two natures, a perpetual enigma and mystery, baffling the possibility of explanation. Many of the cults deny that the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His deity. The Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Oneness group, and the Muslims all fall into the same category! Jesus was virgin born and was truly human. If He was a spirit, Jesus couldn’t die. If He was not a human, Jesus couldn’t shed His blood for sins. If He was not physical, Jesus couldn’t raise from the dead.

Do you know the difference between truth & error? You can’t unless you know the truth. “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth Jh 17:17.” It’s interesting that people want to believe anything but the truth. “George Whitefield, the great British evangelist, was speaking to a man about his soul. He asked the man, “Sir, what do you believe?” “I believe what my church believes,” the man replied respectfully. “And what does your church believe?” “The same thing I believe.” “And what do *both* of you believe?” the preacher inquired again. “We both believe the same thing!” was the only reply he could get. A man is not saved by assenting to a church creed. He is saved by trusting Jesus Christ and bearing witness to his faith Rom 10:9-10.”

The antichrist is not just a single person who is yet to be revealed, but there's a **"spirit"** of antichrist that has been around since the beginning. The 1996 bestseller, "Conversations with God" has sold over 2.5 million copies. The author, Neale Donald Walsch, says that one day he simply started writing down his direct conversations with God. The following conversation between Walsch and God, reveals the core belief of this spirituality.

God: I cannot tell you My Truth until you stop telling Me yours.

Walsch: But my truth about God comes from You.

God: Who said so?

Walsch: Others.

God: What others?

Walsch: Leaders. Ministers. Rabbis. Priests. Books. The Bible, for heaven's sake!

God: Those are not authoritative sources.

Walsch: They aren't?

God: No.

Walsch: Then what is?

God: Listen to your feelings. Listen to your highest thoughts. Listen to your experience. Whenever any one of these differ from what you've been told by your teachers, or read in your books, forget the words.

Look at the kind of deception which is growing rampantly by the day in our world. If we remain ignorant of the truth of God and if we do not discern or test the spirits and the topics, they are teaching widely we are doomed. The hour has come for the church to be vigilant in deciphering the lies of the devil.

The children of God are privileged because they have the Holy Spirit in them to enlighten them and to warn them about the deceptive spirits around them. Through the power of the Holy One in them they can easily overcome the unholy one in the world (verse 4). We need not fear the anti Christ but we must be on guard not to favor the antichrist. We are the Lord's and must remain faithful to Him as He is to us. John Macarthur wrote, "The first thing you look for is their doctrine of incarnation. The second thing you look for is regeneration. In the incarnation God becomes a partaker of human nature. Let me say that again. In the incarnation, God becomes a partaker of human nature. In regeneration, man becomes a partaker of the divine nature."

The cheering news in the passage is that the true disciples of Christ have overcome them. Overcoming means to escape from the trap of the false prophets, escaping the lure of the false prophets, and their teachings. They have escaped their blandishments, and have not been deluded by their error. They have heard all the arguments of the false teachers and have successfully been enabled to see through them and to see the truth. As Christians they were vigilant and vibrant for their Lord so they could overcome all falsehood. 500 years before the birth of Christ, Cyrus, the king of Persia wanted to conquer Sardis and capture its legendary stash of gold. But he first had to capture the fortress which protected this ancient city. The fortress was built on the edge of a cliff and there was simply no way to attack it from the front. Cyrus offered a large reward for any soldier who could figure out a way in. A soldier by the name of Hyeroades determined to watch the soldiers that guarded the cliff side stone walls of this fortress. One evening, a soldier accidentally knocked his helmet off the wall. Hyeroades watched that same soldier carefully make his way down the wall, pick his way down the cliffs, recover his helmet and climb back up. The Persian soldier mentally marked that path and later, as he led a small group of soldiers under cover of darkness, they found depressions cut into the rock. When they eventually reached the top of the battlement, they found the wallsunguarded except for a few sleeping soldiers. Even though one of the world's

most powerful empires was in battle array in the valley below, the soldiers of Sardis weren't concerned enough to even keep watch! This is a warning to all those who are slumbering in the church of God.

How do you overcome?

***By depending on the Spirit** - Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. This gives us a great hope and joy along with real courage. Corrie ten Boom said, "There are two great forces at work in the world today: the unlimited power of God and the limited power of Satan." John says, "you overcame them because greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world." In other words, it was not anything these Christians had that delivered them, it was the One who dwelt within them. It was the greatness of God that kept them straight. It was the fact that God was greater than the spirit that was at work behind the teachers of error. This is what will keep us straight today. God is greater than the enemy. So a Christian has greater wisdom available to him, greater knowledge available to him, greater grace available to him which will enable him to overcome the evil one and all his evil schemes!

***By discovering the Truth** – They know better because they are grounded in the Scriptures – the Word of God. Paul's admonition in Col 2:7 is that every believer is to be, "Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." In Eph 4:14 he spoke of believers growing and maturing, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Believers are to be strong in the Lord and His Word. The more time we spend in the word of God, the more trouble we take to study the word of God, and the more we soak our spirit and mind in the word of God, we will be acquainted with the truth. Knowing the truth alone helps us to uncover all error. Constant communion with the word of God and the Spirit of God is a must to be in a position to do so.

***By discerning the False** – test the spirits whether they are from God or not. We learn to discern by being thoroughly taught by the Scriptures and the Spirit of God. Discernment is a characteristic of the mature believer. God expects all His children to grow in spiritual maturity for various reasons and discerning the falsehood is one among them. It is a very important aspect of our faith. The late A. W. Tozer had some wise counsel on “How to Try the Spirits?” (adapted from, Moody Monthly [12/79], pp. 51-55). He posed seven tests to apply to any teaching:

(1) How does the teaching affect my relationship with God? Is He magnified and glorified, or diminished?

(2) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it magnify Him and give Him first place? Or, does it subtly shift my focus onto myself or some experience?

(3) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward Scripture? Did the teaching come from and agree with the Word? Does it increase my love for the Word?

(4) How does the teaching affect my self-life? Does it feed self or crucify it? Does it feed pride or humility?

(5) How does the teaching affect my relationships to other Christians? Does it cause me to withdraw, find fault, and exalt myself in superiority? Or, does it lead me to genuine love for all that truly know Christ?

(6) How does the teaching affect my relationship to the world system? Does it lead me to pursue the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life? Does it lead me to pursue worldly riches, reputation, and pleasures? Or, does it crucify the world to me?

(7) How does the teaching affect my attitude toward sin? Does it cause me to tolerate sin in my life or to turn from it and grow in holiness? Any teaching that makes holiness more acceptable and sin more intolerable is genuine.

***By distancing yourself from Them** – cut your connections off from such false teachers. Light and darkness cannot mix, truth and error cannot be friends, and what has Christ to do with Belial? Separate yourself from such men without feeling any kind of guilt or remorse. We are called to carry the truth of God’s word; we are also called to counter all falsehood. So take your stand against the agents of the Devil and cut them off from your life. An elementary school class toured a medical facility. A child asked why the doctors and nurses were constantly washing their hands. The nurse replied, “We wash our hands for two reasons: we love health and we hate germs.” The Christian who abides in Christ and walks in the Spirit loves truth and hates error. He discriminates.

The false preachers preach a worldly message to attract the worldly people read verse 5. If you’ve ever wondered why heretics and false religions and false teachers gain such an incredible following, it’s because they speak the same language as the world. A man who owned a city’s newspaper had 3 sons. He offered ownership of the paper to the son who could write the most sensational headline of only 3 words. A) The first son’s headline was, “Reagan Turns Communist.” B) The second son came up this: “Khomeini Becomes Christian.” C) But the third son inherited the newspaper when his headline was submitted. It had only two words, “Pope Elopes.” Now That is how it is with false teachers they know how to push the right buttons to say the right things to appeal to who they are talking to! People fall prey to them.

In other words, the message of false teachers arouses and stimulates the world’s base attitudes and desires. The world is hearing from them what they want to hear 2 Tim 4:3. They always speak about nice things that pamper the hearers and boost their pride. They don’t talk about sin, repentance, holiness, self denial, humility but they always talk about blessings, health, wealth, success, prosperity, to be debt free, ruling and reaping. They become popular over night because they are saying what the world wants to hear. So they click and instantly become “best sellers.” Best selling ‘Evangelical turned heretic’ author Rob bell’s book “Love wins” teaches that there is no

hell, God loves all and will not send anyone to hell has become very popular over night! It is the heresy called universalism. Read 1 Tim 6:3-5. Of course, popularity is not necessarily a sign of falsity. Many a true teacher has been a popular preacher; and some of the biggest congregations today are ministered by faithful pastors. We are only saying that a big following is not, either way, the proof of a sound teacher. The liberal worldly false teachers make everything easy for the world and also lure the church goers to embrace it.

The false teachers may attract to themselves great congregations, they may enjoy a good press, they may get satisfying preferment, and may be reckoned as highly successful - so runs the record, "the world heareth them." The worldly preacher attracts the world. Hank Hannegraph wrote a book on Joel Osteen, "**The Osteenification of American Christianity!**" Joel Osteen the "**self help guru with a smile**" is the most popular pastor in America. Richest pastor too. Denied that Jesus is the only way of salvation on Larry King live on CNN. Associated with Oprah who denies Jesus and does all sorts of sinful things like teaching self deification etc. She is associated with Eckhart Tolle ("**For Tolle, ascribing any unique significance to Jesus of Nazareth is ultimately wrong-headed**" 1 John 4:3) and Deepak Chopra likes! She was involved in many affairs and now is in a live in relationship with a man. She is a proponent of Gay marriage. Joel says nothing against gays but he loves them. He and his wife Victoria have said that they would attend a gay marriage of their church members. What about Rom 1:26-28,32 then? There are many mega preachers and well known pastors in India who are associated with Joel Osteen and the likes! Sadly, this is true.

The liberal worldly false teachers make everything easy for the world and also lure the church goers to embrace it. Christianity Today (March, 2006, pp. 52-54) ran an article on a theologian who was at Bethel College, but now teaches at Regent University. He suggests that the Holy Spirit is at work in the world's other major religions and that Christians should "be open to learning from and being enriched by the Spirit's work in world religions!" With respect to

other religions, he asks, “If others have something to say about God, should we not at least listen both sympathetically and critically?”

In verse 6 “**we**” most probably speaks of the apostles. Jesus made it very clear who will hear Him and who will not hear Him in Jh 8:47. Only His sheep hear His voice and follow Him Jh 10:27. At Vwc we aim to preach only the truth of the word of God, and it will prick many so some will go away unable to accept their sinfulness or digest the truth about discipleship. Some people and families have come to our church initially but then later they went away. All of them have landed in the self pampering and soul hampering false churches in Hyderabad and Secunderabad. They were pricked in their conscience, they had no discernment, they were selfish and wanted something that pleases them rather than that which pleases God and glorifies Him. Only those who follow the apostolic teaching of the NT will be able to discern between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1983 must have been a strange year for the German people. During that year the people observed the birthdays of two notable men. That year marked the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther and the 100th of Karl Marx. Marx was the father of socialism/communism. Its development led to the imprisonment of the human spirit. Luther led people to freedom from the Medieval Catholicism. In our world we see two ideologies at work. One is from the prince of the power of the air who leads people into slavery through his deceptions. The other sets men free by the truth of the Word of Christ Jesus. One works for the downfall of man; the other works for the salvation and spiritual upliftment of man.

14

Beware of False Teachers

“False prophets teach more about hungering for the world than for the word!” Upender

2 Pet 2:1-3 – “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.”

False prophets and false teachers are a danger to the body of Christ. Beware! The danger caused by them to the soul is more than to the body caused by anyone else in the world. Both in the OT and NT you will find them in plenty. **“False”** will always be next to the TRUE. We see that in the beginning in the garden. Satan is the father of fabrication and lies. False prophets were there in Moses’s time, Elijah’s time, Jeremiah’s time, Ezekiel’s time and Micaiah’s time, Peter’s time, Paul’s time and John’s time! Just as light & darkness, sweet & sour, good & bad, joy & sorrow, profit & loss exist side by side. Truth & error co-exist. Ray Stedman writes, “Truth and error

look almost the same, but one is a counterfeit. In these days when we have so many counterfeit and imitation things around we are used to be being deceived and do not feel alarmed about it anymore. Plastic looks like metal. Flowers are made of silk. We are daily touching things that are but imitations of the real thing. But imitations have obvious limitations. If you start regarding them as real you are in trouble!” That is the real danger of deception. Let us learn a few things about these spiritual charlatans from the passage. The characteristics of false teachers are, they -

Deny the Lord

Peter talks about false teachers denying the Lord who bought them v1 – “even denying the Master who bought them . . .!” Here he might have remembered his own experience of denying the Lord 3 times before His crucifixion. Later Peter truly repented and was accepted by the Lord. But there is a big difference in what Peter did and these people do. How do they “deny” Him?

a) Deny His deity –the false teachers deny His divinity, trinity, humanity, virgin birth, miracles, holiness, (say that He is married) death and resurrection. Former Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, Bishop John Shelby Spong grew up as a Bible believing fundamentalist who was very passionate about spirituality but later on he took a 180 degree turn and denied everything the Bible teaches about Jesus from the deity of Christ, the virgin birth of Christ, resurrection, divine inspiration of the Scriptures, miracles and salvation through Christ alone in his best selling books “Born of a woman” and “Rescuing the Bible from the Fundamentalism!” He became a liberal, socially accommodative heretic and in Peter’s words a ‘false teacher!’ Such false teachers or enemies of truth are multiplying by the day!

b) Deny His doctrine – they presume, pervert and pollute the word of God. They do not accept the word as it is revealed by the Lord but either delete from it or add to it. They are masters at twisting the

Scripture to suit their trash. They come up with “**new revelations**” which are revealed specifically to them alone. They concoct weird doctrines that damn men’s souls. They are the agents of the devil which propagate the doctrines of Satan.

c) Deny His dominion - upon their lives and live as they please in gross wantonness. Read slowly Ju 1:4, Tit 1:16. They love sin and live in sin in disguise. They say, “Lord, Lord” but have never submitted to His Lordship. The Lord is honored by their mouth but not in their mind. They have superficial obedience but internally they do their own thing. Their minds are set on things below; they do not mind the commandments of God before their pleasures.

Destroy themselves

The Apostle Peter gives us the accurate condition or plight of such false teachers v1 – “. . . bringing swift destruction upon themselves.” Swift destruction paints a haunting picture, even as the ground literally swallowed up rebellious Korah and Dathan and “...they went down quick into the pit” Num 16:30. This is a serious warning for any false teacher. Any deceiver who plays with God, who plays with God’s word, who plays with God’s work, who plays with God’s purposes, who plays with God’s people will be judged and punished severely. God will not spare any of them who try to destroy His kingdom of truth. Just as the Devil paid a heavy price for his rebellion against God all his agents too will pay a very heavy price for their diabolical deceptions against the children of God. God’s creation has the law of retribution in place so the false teachers will bear the brunt of their own making.

Deceitfully preach destructive doctrines

They cleverly introduce their destructive doctrines to the body of Christ v1 – “as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies.” Just as you mix poison in milk or food they mix error in the truth. The word ‘**secretly**’ is

pareisago, means properly **“to lead in by the side of others; to lead in along with others.”** Nothing could better express the usual way in which error is introduced. It is “by the side,” or “along with,” other doctrines which are true; that is, while the mind is turned mainly to other subjects, and is off its guard, gently and silently to lay down some principle, which, being admitted, would lead to the error, or from which the error would follow as a natural consequence. As we know that medical pills are **“sugar coated”** or **“cyanide is mixed with syrup.”** They earn the trust of men by dubious means and then slowly drop the doctrinal poison down their throats! The poison that ended the life of Alexander VI of Italy was no less destructive because it was concealed in a glass of wine. The virus that sent to the grave, Sir Thomas Overbury was not less fatal because it was hidden in a jelly handed to him by a fascinating lady. The bite of the asp that closed the career of Cleopatra was not less deadly because the reptile rested on roses. S V Leech writes, “Doctrinal poison is none the less mortal because the pen of a prince in erudition inscribes on it the word “scholarship.”

George Barna wrote, ‘The State of the Church’ in 2002. George Barna said, “Americans revere the Bible, but by and large they don’t know what it says. And because they don’t know it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.” Remember this is the country where countless versions of the Bibles are printed in millions, Biblical tools, resources in many forms are available in plenty but it is a nation of Bible illiterates! That’s enough for them to be ditched by the so called spiritual charlatans. In our case many just bring the Bible only till their eyes. They allow it to dangle before their sight. That’s all. They do not take it into their mind, take it into their heart, take it into their spirit, and take it into their being. They do not absorb the word of God into them hence no personal transformation. As long as the seed is on the ground nothing happens but when it is sown inside life springs up.

An unknown author has shed light on some of the destructive heresies that are prevalent in the world today -

1. It is a destructive heresy for a man to think that he can be saved without faith in Christ, while ignoring, or, it may be, denying the redemptive work of Christ.

2. It is a destructive heresy for a man to think that he is safe and in the way of salvation while yielding to corrupt passions and living a careless life.

3. it is a destructive heresy for a man to regard himself as a Christian, and think he is right for heaven, while possessing nothing of the mind and spirit of Christ.

4. It is a “heresy of destruction” for a man to think that if he abstains from great and glaring transgressions he may safely indulge in sins of the heart, and need not be over particular about what has been called “the minor moralities of life.”

5. It is a “heresy of destruction” for a man to think that he is a Christian sheltered by the blood of Christ while he consciously and continually disregards the commands of Christ.

6. It is a “heresy of destruction” for a man to boast that Christ is all in all to him while he withholds himself and all he has from Christ.

7. It is a “heresy of destruction” for a man self-complacently, to suppose that he may “gird up the loins of his mind, be sober, and hope unto the end” while he is conscious of no love to God, and while cherishing hatred of his fellow-man.

False teachers do what the devil did with the scripture when he quoted it to Jesus. They quote true things and lift them out of their context. They always work in disguise to ditch the gullible souls. They promise quick fixes for the problems or needs of life when God works with the person slowly to get His purposes done. D. L. Moody said, ‘Lying covers a multitude of sins— temporarily.’ How do we detect their subtle seduction? Haddon Robinson tells a story in his book, “Biblical Preaching,” a Chinese boy who wanted to learn about jade went to study with a talented old teacher. This gentle man put a piece of the

precious stone into his hand and told him to hold it tight. Then he began to talk of philosophy, men, women, the sun and almost everything under it. After an hour he took the stone and sent the boy home. The procedure was repeated for several weeks. The boy became frustrated. When would he be told about the jade? He was too polite, however, to question the wisdom of his venerable teacher. Then one day, when the old man put a stone into his hands, the boy cried out instinctively, “That’s not jade!”

Debaucherous life style

Many or ‘great crowds’ (shameless, senseless and Spiritless fools) will follow their lascivious ways v2 – “Many will follow their sensuality!” In a way these false teachers seem very successful. They are masters in wooing gullible people to themselves. They do not have the fear of God so they get into all sorts of sinful living. Lavish life styles, sex scandals, adultery, homosexuality, spouse abuse, divorce, swindling money, spiritual abuse etc. They are known for sensuality than spirituality! Steven Cole wrote, “It’s amazing how the Christian world thinks that if a man has a huge following, he must be sound in the faith. If he builds a mega church, the Christian world looks to him as a leader, without questioning what he teaches. These false teachers invariably cater to the flesh. They do not preach against sin. They do not mention divine judgment or hell. They avoid truths like denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Christ no matter what the cost. Rather, they soothe people with uplifting thoughts about how much God loves you and wants you to have your best life now. If they ever mention the death of Christ, they say that He did it because He believed in your great worth. Now you need to believe in yourself and ask God to help you fulfill your dreams.” Don’t hide now if you are hearing and enjoying such worthless messages!

Defame the way of truth

Because of their teachings and life many people criticize the truth and the Lord Himself without realizing that these are deceivers

v2 “and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned.” Due to their misleading many will slander the Lord’s name and His work. The ingredients that make up their ministries are: greed, covetousness, jealousy, lies, and selfishness. Because they are self seeking and self serving their followers are the same. They are greedy, ungodly men who outwardly appear righteous, but the inside of the cup is filthy and covered in slime. Their hypocrisy is on display and the world will blaspheme the true ones. Arthur W. Pink says, “False prophets are to be found in the circles of the most orthodox, and they pretend to have a fervent love for souls, yet they fatally delude multitudes concerning the way of salvation. The pulpit, platform, and pamphlet hucksters have wantonly lowered the standard of divine holiness and so adulterated the Gospel in order to make it palatable to the carnal mind.”

Devour your all

They are super covetous V3 “and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” They are not products of grace but of greed Isa 56:11, Jer 6:13. Look at the difference between false teachers and the true ones 2 Cor 12:17-18. For them every thing is a means of business. They do business with people’s faith, they do business with men’s devotion, they do business with men’s spirituality, they do business with the sacred things of God, they do business openly in the name of God. These spiritual fakers are **“merchants of faith!”** The devil showed Christ all the Kingdoms of the earth and said “All these things I’ll give you if you fall down and worship me” Mat 4:9. Many preachers basically show the church all the riches and wealth of the world and say “All these things God will give you if you reach into your pocket and give to me.” They make ‘merchandise’ with you. They have a **“heart trained in greed.”** They have an MD degree in siphoning your money, meaning **“Masters in Devouring!”** They go about with the intent of doing business. They do not seek to edify others but seek to exploit them. They seek to make a personal profit out of their unwary devotees. They are not concerned one whit for the well being of the sheep, but only desire to fleece the sheep and shear their “wool.” And they are masters at this shady “commerce!”

As they carry out their millions of rupees business, they turn God's house into a marketplace or an **'emporium!'** These hucksters commercialize Christianity (**selling "power" shawls, 'power' bands, 'power' mugs, 'anointed' kerchiefs, prayer mats, blessed mud, power calendars, power song books, healing oils, stickers, formula prayer books, magic chants, Holy land water etc**) and exploit the deceived masses (remember many will follow them). Do we not see this deadly **"virus"** of greed and deception on so-called **"Christian"** television spreading like an out of control forest fire, destroying everything and everyone in its path? The amazing thing is that people will support these false teachers but won't give a penny to legitimate ministries! The people supporting these charlatans are doing so because they think that if they give, they are going to get something back. Whatever happened to doing everything solely for the purpose of glorifying our Heavenly Father? Peter is sounding a trumpet call for the church to wake up: "Oh saints stand fast in the truths in chapter 1 so that you might be able to recognize and resist in the evil day." The "evil day" has arrived.

A New York City couple received through the mail two tickets to a smash Broadway hit. Oddly, the gift arrived without a note, and they wondered who had sent it. But they still attended the show and enjoyed it immensely. Returning to their apartment, they discovered that their bedroom had been ransacked. Valuable furs and jewels were missing. On the pillow was this simple note: "Now you know." Like that nameless thief, a false teacher knows what people want and appeals to their desires. He doesn't wear a lapel pin to warn of his lies, but he comes disguised as a representative of the truth. He claims he will enrich lives, but those who follow him often learn at a high cost that they have been deceived.

Simon Magus tried the same trick when he placed the amount before Peter to buy the gift of God so that he can make money out of it. Money is always a part of their message! Thomas Brooks wrote long back, "They eye your goods more than your good; and mind more the serving of themselves, than the saving of your souls. So they may have your substance, they care not though Satan has your souls. That

they may better pick your purse, they will hold forth such principles as are very indulgent to the flesh. False teachers are the great worshippers of the golden calf Jer 6:13. One Iskcon guru gave an example of earning and saving of various categories of people in today's world, according to him – “an average teacher saves Rs 1-2 lakhs in 10 yrs, a software engineer saves 40-50 lakhs, a corrupt politician saves 30-40, or 50 crores, a religious leader or spiritual guru in India saved 238 crores, another guru saved 1177 crores and another 4000 crores. The guru says sarcastically, “Choose your career carefully baba, what are you earning as a software engineer! Ghar baar choda aur chalo haridwar!” True isn't it?

Preach ‘feigned’ words or **manufactured words**. It is “**plastos**” in Greek which means molded, artificial and feigned. Just as we mold plastic into any shape we want, these buggers mold the scriptures to meet their own ends. Interestingly Peter says, they will “**exploit**” you. They come in the name of God but they are not sent by God. This is a big “**name game!**” It will end up one day in a big “**shame shame!**” **If Satan steals your soul these agents of Satan steal your silver!** Yes, they are of no use to you, they are of no benefit to you, they do not add any good thing to your life, they do not bless your soul. But they will use you to their personal benefit, they slaughter you as sheep for their pleasure, they will sacrifice you on the altar of their selfishness and become fattened wolves. Beware, beware children of God.

Damnable judgment awaits them

God judges everything v3 “their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” Read 2 Pet 2:4-6,10 about the Lord's severest Judgment in the past. No one escapes from the judgment of God. The Lord will not spare anyone from the punishment they deserve for their evil. Surely these people will be judged and punished with the greatest punishment for destroying so many souls by their deception. “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” Eze 34:2.

Have you ever been at Pompeii? Then you have some idea of what Sodom must have looked like when God rained his judgment upon it. The fiery lava transfixed and sealed the people in whatever act or attitude it found them—at the theater, the baths, the kitchen, the market place, or in the haunts of sin. Hearts that had burned that day with unholy flame were now forever still, and pulses that had throbbed eagerly with sinful expectation had now forever ceased to beat.

15

Why don't we pray?

“Negligence in prayer withers the inner man. Nothing can be a substitute for it, not even Christian work. Many are so preoccupied with work that they allow little time for prayer. Hence they cannot cast out demons. Prayer enables us first inwardly to overcome the enemy and then outwardly to deal with him.” Watchman Nee.

Lk 11:1 –It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples.”

The disciples saw Jesus preach but they didn't ask Him to teach them about preaching. They saw Him perform miracles but they didn't ask Him to teach them how to perform miracles. They saw Him ministering to people but they didn't ask Him to teach them how to minister but when they saw Him praying they came to Him and asked Him to teach them about prayer! What does that mean? It means that out of all that Jesus did while He was on this earth; prayer was the most important thing. They saw that prayer was the driving force behind His divinely ordained ministry. That's why the disciples were after Him to learn about prayer. All other things have to do with man but prayer is something unique and special because it was connecting to God. They saw that Jesus gave top most priority to prayer in His

life. What about us? Do we have a place for prayer in our lives? We must learn to pray. We must live to pray but not pray to live! We are too much like Will Rogers' famous comment about the weather, "Everybody talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it." We talk a lot about prayer but we simply don't pray enough. If we follow the Lord, then why don't we pray?

We don't pray because : -

We are Complacent

Amos 6:1 – "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion And to those who feel secure in the mountain of Samaria." Woe to you that are complacent in Zion. Not giving serious thought to that which is important. We are spiritually satisfied with the little. We are spiritually lethargic. We are spiritual sluggards. We are lazy to do anything spiritual. Prayer is often laborious. It was said of Epaphras that he was "Always laboring fervently for you in prayers" Col 4:12-13. Prayer takes effort and work if we are to pray as we ought. Paul requested of the Romans, "... that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" Rom 15:32. We must strive in prayer to God. Therefore, our lack of prayer is often the result of laziness. Remember, the Bible warns us not to be slothful in diligence Rom 12:12 and yet scores of us are disobedient. We go through rituals but do not have anything to do with the spiritual. We do not have a longing for higher things. We don't value the communion with the supreme being of the universe. We have proven again and again that we walk after the flesh and not after the Spirit. Our life is made up of other things so we do not worry much about the spiritual things. The famous English rhyme spells it out for us!

"Pussycat pussycat, where have you been?" "I've been up to London to visit the Queen." "Pussycat pussycat, what did you do there?" "I frightened a little mouse under her chair!" "MEOWW!"

Most of our lives sound like this rhyme. We do not know what is prayer - Many people think that when they need something, need some help, need some miracle, or need some healing or a solution in life they have to pray. They do not know that prayer is an essential thing in a believer's life. It is the vital breath of a Christian. They have never understood the real meaning of prayer. Even if some pray mostly it is a **“thu thu manthar prayer!”** A man prayed fervently every morning at family worship for the poor in the community, but he was never known to give anything to the poor. One morning at the conclusion of family worship, after the usual prayer had been offered for the poor and destitute, his little son said, “Father, I wish I had your corn-crib.” “Why, my son?” asked the father. “Why, because then I would answer your prayer myself.” Prayer is communion with God. It is a part of our relationship with God. Relationship grows with fellowship and for that communication is vital. As we pray so we must live.

Prayer is hard work; it is spiritual labor Gal 4:19. Jeremiah's heart-rending supplication can be seen in the book of Lamentations. Sacrifice is involved in real prayer, at times we feel weary yet we continue with the One who can renew our energy and refresh our soul. “He ... continued all night in prayer to God” Lk 6:12. Spurgeon preached saying, “We never read that Joshua's hand was weary with wielding the sword, but Moses' hand was weary with holding the rod. The more spiritual the duty, the more apt we are to tire of it. We could stand and preach all day; but we could not pray all day. We could go forth to seek the sick all day, but we could not be in our closets all day nearly as easily. To spend a night with God in prayer would be far more difficult than to spend a night with man in preaching. Oh! take care, take care, that thou dost not cease thy prayers!”

We are Careless

The Bible asks some pertinent questions and one of the piercing one is found in Heb 2:3 – “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a

salvation?” If men can neglect such a great salvation, is it not easy for them to neglect prayer? Prayer is a part of life of the saved ones. When they begin to neglect it, that will cause their downfall. Fact of the matter is - we are reckless and do not care for the most important things in life. Even after having a clear warning from God Phil 2:12 “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” we don’t care much. **Careless with eternal things and careful with temporal things!** Penny-wise pound-foolish. We care less about God, care less about His will, care less about the church, care less about the perishing world. But we care more for our education, care more for our employment and care more for our enjoyment! What are we? Are we not habitual hypocrites? Two Frogs dwelt in the same pool. When the pool dried up under the summer’s heat, they left it and set out together for another home. As they went along they chanced to pass a deep well, amply supplied with water, and when they saw it, one of the Frogs said to the other, “Let us descend and make our abode in this well: it will furnish us with shelter and food.” The other replied with greater caution, “But suppose the water should fail us. How can we get out again from so great a depth?” For this reason, Christians need a lot of discernment before they undertake something major in their lives. Therefore, they should consult Heaven through prayer to determine if it is God’s will or not. But we don’t care, we don’t pray. We are not as sensible as those frogs. We don’t pray before the problem arises but we pray after we fall into trouble.

The Bible exhorts us to pray. Jesus commanded us to pray through His example and exhortation. Paul reminded us to pray without ceasing. The Holy Spirit burdens us to pray. Prayer is not a waste of time or a waste of energy as some think but yields great results! There is an old church in Europe in which may be seen a picture of a plowman who has left his plow and turned aside to pray. But while he prays an angel is going on with his plowing for him. The moments that we spend **“looking up”** are not lost time. We work better and more effectively when we return to our ordinary duties after prayer. Your plowing, whatever it is, will not suffer by your taking some moments every day to direct your prayer unto God and to “look up.” “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning

will I direct my prayer unto thee” Ps 5:3. In fact, we are commanded to *pray for sinners* Ps 2:8. Dr. Robert Glover, tells us a powerful story in Gospel Herald. ‘In Ohio, one Saturday evening, a blacksmith sat down to his supper. He was supporting a girl in a mission school in India. On his plate had been placed a letter just received from India. He began to read, but soon said, “Wife, I must pray.” The letter in question told that this girl was not only resisting Christ for herself, but was standing seriously in the way of others accepting Him. Unless a change should come very shortly in the girl, the missionary wrote, they would be obliged, for the sake of the other girls, to send her from the school altogether. The blacksmith entered into his closet and prayed. Saturday night in Ohio is Sunday morning in India. On that Sunday morning the missionary gathered with her class of girls in Sunday school as usual. The lesson, however, had not proceeded far until this incorrigible girl leaped from her seat, flung herself in tears at the feet of the missionary, and wept her way to the Savior. The other girls were deeply moved. One by one they followed her example, and salvation came to the whole class that morning. Vital energy had been put forth by prayer in Ohio, and, as a result, great things came to pass in India.’

We are actually commanded to *pray for saints* Eph 6:18, *pray for servants of God* Col 4:4, *pray for our rulers and leaders* 1 Tim 2:1-2. William Goodell said, “Whoever prays most, helps most.” Prayer is co-operating with God but we don’t want to do it. A little girl came to her mother and said, “I suppose, up in heaven, they think I am dead.” The mother replied, “Why Mary, why do you suppose they think you are dead?” “Well,” said the little girl, “because, I have not said my prayers for a week.” Such people are like the Sardis church, which has a name that it is alive but in fact it is dead. Shun that careless attitude and get on your knees before God because the time is very critical. “Oh brother, pray; in spite of Satan, pray; spend hours in prayer; rather neglect friends than not pray; rather fast, and lose breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper and sleep too - than not pray. And we must not talk about prayer, we must pray in right earnest. “The Lord is near. He comes softly while the virgins slumber” cried Andrew

A. Bonar. Acts 9:11 "Behold, he prays!" That is true about a truly born again person.

We are Compromising

We are compromisers. We compromise a great deal. Do you know that prayer is our responsibility? We don't want to tax ourselves with responsibility so we simply compromise. Martin Luther wrote, "As is the business of tailors to make clothes and cobblers to make shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray." In the garden Peter, James and John compromised prayer and went to sleep at the most crucial hour of their life Mat 26:41 because 'the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.' Is there a way to strengthen your willing spirit and make it strong so that you could break free from the shackles of the flesh and pray? Yes, but we don't try. Peter could stay all night fishing Lk 5:5 but he could not stay awake for 1 hour to pray!? Isn't that compromise? Peter wouldn't have fallen into such terrible sins of cursing, swearing, denying Jesus and quitting the ministry, if only he had prayed. We go sleepless for nights together to study, to work, to do business, to earn, to practice but can't stay for sometime in prayer. Phil 3:11 unless we have Paul's mindset of counting everything as loss for the sake of the Lord we can never rise in our relationship with God and in our spiritual life.

William Barclay offers wise counsel in regard to prayer, "When we pray, remember:

1. The love of God that wants the best for us.
2. The wisdom of God that knows what is best for us.
3. The power of God that can accomplish it."

Very true, is it not? Salt does no good as a seasoning unless it is used. Being His light does not mean we're to sit on the sidelines and glow, either. We must advance His kingdom here on earth. "The best thing we can do for God and man is to pray!" Unfortunately, often our efforts on His behalf are at best half hearted. We get focused on worldly issues, get busy in our daily lives and allow the "*cheap*" bread—money, success, power, and pleasure — to fill us. In the bargain we

may **“fill”** our bag with the things of the world but we cannot fill our soul with His **“presence & peace!”** John Bunyan said it rightly, “He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.” We lose sight of our primary purposes: to salt the area we’re in with His flavor and roll back the darkness by shedding His light in a fallen world. They claim God as their father but don’t like to talk to Him. They claim Jesus as the lover of their soul but don’t like to fellowship with Him. They say He is their shepherd but they don’t like to be in His company. Bunch of hypocrites.

We are Cowards

Prayer is a battle against spiritual darkness and demonic forces. Many Christians are scared to death to fight this battle. In the book of Acts, the disciples prayed for boldness Acts 4:29-30 and prayed with boldness. They were bold as lion after they were filled with the Holy Spirit. 2 Tim 1:7 says, “God has given us a Spirit of power and not a spirit of fear.” Today’s cowards can fight with people all through their lives but they don’t fight in prayer. “When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops studying the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy,” said Corrie Ten Boom. We know how to fight with flesh and blood but we are scared to fight the devil and his foes. It’s a real battle and to be fought with spiritual weapons Eph 6:10-18. Prayer is a medium through which you can use all these weapons. Thomas Brooks exhorted by saying, “Prayer is a shelter to the soul, a sacrifice to God and a scourge to the devil.” God does much through our sincere and constant prayer. Prayer changes much in our world! “God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil” wrote E. M. Bounds. The devil will try his best to keep men from God, to keep us from doing the will of God. He will come against us with all his might. We can succeed in all this only through battling in prayer. In World War II, when German shells were showering their destructive fury upon London, a newspaper carried this charge to its fearful citizens: “If you must fall, fall upon your knees!” Amen!

Remember that there is power in prayer. It is proven in the scriptures and in our world time and again. No one can with stand the power of true faith filled prayer. "...Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons but they are helpless against our prayers," asserted Sidlow Baxter. Finally, only those that are born again can pray to God. The Spirit of God comes into us and helps us to pray. So right now you can repent of your sin, return to your Savior in faith and start calling upon the name of God. Be a prayer warrior and pure worker for God.

16

VWC Core Values

“A core value is a principle without which life wouldn’t be worth living.” - Dave Logan

God called His people out of darkness into His marvelous light. God commissioned the church to be the light and the salt of the earth. It is a great honor and a heavy responsibility. The church is the body of Christ and it must visibly manifest His excellencies to the world around. Victory Worship Centre is ordained by God to play an important role in this generation. We are a church with a specific purpose in mind. It is to be the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilling His mission in the world. We are devoted to Christ, determined to complete the cause, and differ from the present day ‘prosperity’ churches! As a church we stand for certain core values. We not only believe strongly in them but want to make them a part of our life. We must strive continuously to reflect them in our behavior. With God’s help we shall accomplish His will for us as a church. Our Core Values are -

*** Knowing God Intimately**

Human heart is not made for the pursuit of things but for the sole purpose of knowing and enjoying God. Men long to boast in wisdom,

power and riches. That is their natural tendency all the time, across cultures and continents. They make it their life goal to live and die for them. But God reveals His heart for His people Jer 9:23-24 Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows. Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord. He delights in those who boast in an intimate knowledge of God. By knowing God, we know ourselves and can have a correct perspective of life. Elizabeth Eliot said “that growth in the Christian life is the process of destroying our idols one by one. That’s painful because we look to our idols to give us meaning and significance.” We hate the idea of giving them up because we fear we’d be nothing without them. Jesus said in Jh 17:3 knowing God is eternal life. Jh 10:15 says His sheep know Him. Our spiritual growth depends on knowing God. According to Phil 3:10 Paul’s desire was to know Him and the power of His resurrection. Paul knew God and entrusted to Him his life. Dan 11:32 reveals a striking truth, they that know their God shall be strong and do mighty exploits. Yes, knowing God is very important.

Richard L. Strauss wrote - “Scripture declares that ‘the people who know their God will display strength and take action.’ That is a great promise. But in order to understand it we need to know a little Jewish history. The Jewish people have experienced some fierce persecutions through the centuries, but none worse than under Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king who reigned from 175 to 164 B.C. He assumed the name **Theos Epiphanes** which means “**the manifest God,**” but the Jews changed one letter in his name (in their language) and called him **Epimanes**, which means “**mad man.**” And mad he was! His hatred for the Jews was literally insane. Daniel anticipated his reign prophetically in this eleventh chapter of the book. And he did exactly what Daniel predicted. He ordered the Jewish sacrifices to cease and polluted the temple of God by offering swine’s flesh on the altar. In addition to that, he prohibited the observance of the

Sabbath and the circumcision of children, ordered all copies of Scripture destroyed, set up idolatrous altars, commanded the Jews to offer unclean sacrifices, and insisted that they eat swine's flesh. Anyone who disobeyed his edicts was sentenced to death. It was an ancient holocaust. As Daniel anticipated this atrocity he asked himself how these people would ever be able to survive. The answer was not long in coming: "the people who know their God will display strength and take action" (11:32). And that is exactly what they did.

A group of courageous men called the Maccabees led a heroic revolt against Antiochus. Their exploits, against insuperable odds, were nothing short of phenomenal. They knew their God, laid hold of His sovereign power and might, took action, and broke the grip of Antiochus on Israel. Their story is a saga of strength, the mighty power of people who know God. People today who truly know God have the same degree of courage and strength. They stand for righteousness, oppose wickedness, endure persecution when necessary, triumph through suffering, and accomplish great things for God's glory. There is no other way to have spiritual power except through the knowledge of God. Daniel himself was a man who knew God. When the presidents and princes of the Medo Persian Empire prevailed upon King Darius to issue a decree prohibiting anybody from making petitions to any god or man except the king, or be cast into the lion's den, Daniel went right on praying to the God of Heaven (Daniel 6:4-15). Not even the threat of death could keep him from it. He knew his God, and people who know God have the courage and strength to do His will even though the whole world be against them and everybody around them be giving in to sin. We too can have the spiritual power to do God's will and to make a significant impact on the godless world in which we live. As our knowledge of Him increases and our friendship with Him grows more intimate, He makes His power more readily available to us. (Richard L. Strauss, in *Theology Proper*).

We cannot know God simply just like that. Unless He reveals Himself to us we can never know Him but He did reveal Himself in His Son and in His Scriptures. Knowing God is an effort and it is a constant

spiritual exercise. Many in the church are ignorant about God. They may know about God but don't really know Him! There is an insightful story about 6 blind men who came to know about an elephant in the palace. The first blind man put out his hand and touched the side of the elephant. "How smooth! An elephant is like a wall." The second blind man put out his hand and touched the trunk of the elephant. "How round! An elephant is like a snake." The third blind man put out his hand and touched the tusk of the elephant. "How sharp! An elephant is like a spear." The fourth blind man put out his hand and touched the leg of the elephant. "How tall! An elephant is like a tree." The fifth blind man reached out his hand and touched the ear of the elephant. "How wide! An elephant is like a fan." The sixth blind man put out his hand and touched the tail of the elephant. "How thin! An elephant is like a rope." An argument ensued, each blind man thinking his own perception of the elephant was the correct one. The Rajah, awakened by the commotion, called out from the balcony. "The elephant is a big animal," he said. "Each man touched only one part. You must put all the parts together to find out what an elephant is like." Only a handful have full revelation of God and multitudes are like the blind men.

In Ps 46:10 God said, "be still and know that I AM God." We are no more "**still**" people in this generation. We are "**swift runners**" always. We don't know how to be in the presence of God, how to wait upon Him, how to pause from all our endeavors and concentrate upon Him, how to cease from selfish pursuits and be with Him. Only when we learn we can know God personally. We may know about God but we will not know God. To hear His "**small and still**" voice we must practice stillness. If you read 1 Kin 19 you will notice that God was not in the fire, not in the earthquake, not in the wind but after all of this He whispered in the stillness or silence! As a church we will make every effort to know God intimately. Worship service, Sunday school, Bible study, Retreats, and Seminars etc are meant for that.

You cannot know God if you don't seek to, if you don't hunger for it, and if you don't long for it. Jer 29:13-14 God said, "if you seek ME with all of your heart you will "**find**" ME, and I will "**show**"

Myself. Instead of growing their brain with the knowledge of God's word, many are growing their belly with the porridge of the world. They do not desire the meat of the word but long for the meat of the world. A man complained to the doctor about his body aching everywhere which is unusual. Doctor asked him to touch his forehead, his elbow, his knee and his toe every time he touched them he cried out in pain. Then the doctor said, "you idiot, your finger is dislocated and that's causing you the pain!" It felt like everything was wrong, when in fact only one thing was wrong! If he ever got this one thing right, then everything else would be alright.

*** Loving Him with all of our being**

It is God's desire and command that we love Him with all of our being. In Mk 12:30-31 Jesus said, "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." God longs for a pure and perfect relationship with us and He is right in doing so. He wants us to be totally for Him. Love is a great quality with a great scope. We must be His in season out of season, we must be living for Him 2 Cor 5:15. We must love Him with **"all"** of our heart, mind, soul and strength. We must not be convenient Christians but committed Christians. The problem is we try to love Him with **"some"** of our heart, **"some"** of our mind, **"some"** of our soul and **"some"** of our strength! How can we love God fully? Keep God as your number one priority, let your heart long with passion for God, God should be your ultimate pursuit. Giving undivided devotion and total submission is a part of loving God. Loving God is the **"most important"** or **"chiefest"** of all commandments.

Some time ago I was reading about the 18th century German sculptor Johann Heinrich von Dannecker. His skills were impressive. He could bring stone to life with his tools. At the height of his powers, he wanted to do something special with his gifts — he wanted to shape

a statue of Christ that would stand out as a witness to his world. For two years he chiseled and scraped and polished the marble, till he was certain that it carried the likeness of his Lord. But he wanted to test his work on eyes that wouldn't lie. So he went out to the street, and brought in a young girl. He took her into his studio, and he set her down in front of the shrouded stone. Uncovering it, he asked her, "do you know who this is?" "No, sir!" she replied. But he must be a very great man. And Dannecker knew that he'd failed. The statue was good enough for kings and nobles, but it wasn't good enough to speak the word about Christ. He was discouraged. He was disheartened. He was depressed. But he knew that he had to try again. So he set his hand to the task. Six years it took him this time. Every day, painstakingly, shaping and carving. Finally, it was done. And again, he brought in a child as his first critic. He took off the shroud, and asked her gently, "who is that?" Legend has it that tears came to her eyes as she recognized Jesus. It was enough.

Dannecker had finished his task. He had created his masterpiece. He had given visible shape to his faith. And later, to a friend, he told the secret of those last six years. It was as if, he said, Christ had joined him daily in his little room. He felt the nearness of his Lord. He sensed the glory of His presence. All Dannecker had to do, really, was to transfer the vision of Christ that he received to the block of marble. It's a powerful story, isn't it? (Biblically speaking the above story lacks Scriptural support, it is used here just to make one point – Dannecker's adoration for the Lord alone!) But there's more to it. There's another chapter that comes later, one so striking that it actually makes John's vision come alive. Some years later, the French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte saw Dannecker's work. He was very impressed. He sent for the sculptor, and he had a commission for him – "Make me a statue of the goddess Venus for the Louvre," he said. Quite an honor! To be chosen as the creator of a work of art like that. Who could refuse? But you know what? Dannecker did! He refused the commission. He gave up that honor. And you know why? This is what he told Napoleon: "A man who has seen Christ can never employ his gifts in carving out a pagan goddess!"

In Jh 14:15 Jesus said, “if you love ME obey MY commandments.

One of the commandments is to be passionate about Him and His church, having a **“kingdom mind-set”** is very important in these times. There was a farmer who had three sons: Ron, Don and Little John. All had their names on the church roll but none ever attended church or had time for God. Then one-day Don was bitten by a rattlesnake. The doctor was called and he did all he could to help Don, but the outlook for his recovery was very dim indeed. So the pastor was called and appraised of the situation. The pastor arrived, and began to pray as follows: “O wise and righteous Father, we thank Thee that in Thine wisdom thou didst send this rattlesnake to bite Don. He hasn’t been inside the church in years and has shown little interest in You. We trust that this experience will be a valuable lesson to him and will lead to his genuine repentance. And now, O Father, wilt thou send another rattlesnake to bite Ron, and another to bite Little John, and another really big one to bite the old man. For years we have done everything we know to get them to get serious with Thee. Thank you God for rattlesnakes.” Just as in the story of the rattlesnakes, James recognizes that there is often a break down for many between what they profess to have and the fruit they bear. Jam 2:14-17. Do you have **“visiting experience”** with God (on Sundays) or **“living experience”** always? If you think more about **your gold** (treasure) than about **your God** Mat 6:21 then you are in a real hot soup. God must be first or else you will not last long. Some treat God as their treasure but many others treat treasure as their god!

*** Sharing the Gospel**

The Lord Jesus commanded His disciples with the task of preaching the gospel Mk 16:15. As someone said, **“His last command has become our last concern!”** Our job is to be on His mission. We are called as witnesses in the world. We must witness through our life, work and lips. We are the torch bearers to those that live in the darkness. What are you doing to share the gospel? Years ago R.A. Torrey wrote these words: “I would like to ask what right any man

has to call himself a follower of Jesus Christ if he is not a soul winner? There is absolutely no such thing as following Christ unless you can make the purpose of Christ's life the purpose of your life."

Do you want to know what is in the heart of GOD? Read 2 Pet 3:9 He doesn't want any to perish and He desires that all should repent and be saved. Do you not desire the same? If you are a follower of Christ, then you would want to do what the heart of God desires. That's why it is VWC's priority. While Romania has seen some dramatic changes in recent years, at that time the Communist regime was firmly in control and the church was enduring persecution. A young university student shared her testimony. She was very bright, and had a promising future before her as an engineer. Six months before she was to graduate, all students at her university were ordered to sign a statement affirming their commitment to atheism and pledging their support to the Communist party. One of this young lady's professors knew she was a Christian. He went to her and admonished her, "Simply sign the form. You don't have to change your beliefs. After you graduate and get your job, you can do what you want. But if you don't sign the form, you won't graduate and you'll probably end up sweeping floors for a living." The girl responded, "If I deny my Savior for 6 months, what is to keep me from denying Him the rest of my life? I don't have to be an engineer. I do have to be a witness." Hats off to that true daughter of the Lord.

In Rom 1:14-16 we see the heart of the Apostle Paul. He says, "I am a debtor, I am eager to preach the gospel and I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation to them that believe." Not knowing this we come up with many excuses for not sharing the gospel. Someone said, **"Don't rationalize, evangelize!"** Jesus didn't say, "Go into all the world, all you extroverts." If something good happens to you like you passed your exam with a gold medal, got a high promotion, or got selected for IAS, or posted to a foreign country etc you share it with all the people you know with great excitement and eagerness. God asks us, "what about My good news? Why don't you share it with others the same way?" What are you doing about the good news of God's goodness? Paul said he

was ready to preach the gospel. The word **“ready”** in Greek is **prothumos** - It is a compound word, made up of the two words *pro* and *thumos*. **“Pro”** means **“before”** it can refer to rank, place and time. Here it refers to time. **“Thumos”** means **“an intense passion of the mind”** or **“on fire”** or **“bursting forth of the flame”** so Paul was **“on fire to preach the gospel.”** What about you? Are you on fire for God? Are you on fire for God’s work? Are you on fire for the kingdom of God and for the lost? If not what are you living for?

Remember Jesus’ words in Rev 3:16 you should be either cold or hot and should not be lukewarm. Go and make disciples is His command Mat 28:19. **“Go”** means that we must take the initiative. Evangelism is required to accomplish the task of disciple-making. **“Make disciples”** means **“make followers, or learners.”** This seems to include the entire process of helping a person understand the gospel of salvation through Christ and then to help them grow as a Christian. The church (every person in it) is responsible for carrying out this command. Every ministry in a church must be part of the process of disciple-making. Evangelize the sinners and edify the saints. Exhort your family members, neighbors, relatives, classmates, colleagues, acquaintances and others to be a part of the kingdom of God. Specially turn those who have gone astray and have strayed into false churches.

C. K. Lee, a native Christian leader of China, was in this country a number of years ago, and he spoke one Sunday morning in a liberal church in the state of California. At the conclusion of the message, a young college student asked him a question, which many Bible teachers have been asked, “Why should we export Christianity to China when China already has Confucianism?” And Mr. Lee replied, “Well there are three reasons why we should export Christianity to China. In the first place, Confucius was a teacher and Christ is a Savior, and China needs a Savior more than a teacher. In the second place, Confucius is dead and Christ is alive, and China needs a living Savior. And in the third place, one day Confucius is going to stand before Jesus Christ and be judged by Him, and China needs to know Jesus Christ as a living Savior before she has to meet Him as a judge.”

Our willingness can be used by God to beat all our weaknesses! He will make us capable of doing His job. Hudson Taylor shared in his testimony saying, “God said to me, “I am going to evangelize China, and if you will walk with me, I will do it through you.” He did walk and we know the rest of the story.

*** Growing into Christ likeness**

God’s ultimate goal for us is to transform us like His Son Gal 4:19. Our aim and desire should be to be like Jesus. He is our example, He is our exhorter, and He is our empowerer. Look at the grand plan of God, He is turning a sinner into the image of His Savior. Only He can do that miracle. There is an old legend about a king who longed for a son. Finally, to the joy of the king and the celebration of the palace a baby boy was born. But the infant to the Doctors dismay was born partially paralyzed. Years went by but the young boy remained in a wheel chair. The disappointed king ordered his sculptor to make a statue of a strong, virile man and to place that statue in the middle of the courtyard. When it was finished the boy was wheeled out to the statue and he was told that the statue was the image of the man that his father hoped he would become one day. The little prince straightened himself a little in the chair. Every day he was wheeled by that statue and every day he would try to straighten himself a little more. Until the legend says, one day, he pushed himself up from the wheel chair and on wobbly legs stood looking at that statue determined to be the man his father wanted him to be. Finally, in his early 20’s that prince walked on strong legs, confidently across that palace courtyard, stood beneath the statue, looked up and saw a perfect likeness of himself. Now, God has set the image of Jesus Christ in front of us as a model of what He wants us to become one day. And even though we have been partially paralyzed by sin, if we look to Him daily and straighten ourselves a little. Day by day we’ll grow and one day we may reflect His image to others 2 Cor 3:18.

Heb 12:2 tells us to keep **“looking”** at the author and finisher of our faith Jesus. We must learn to constantly gaze upon our Savior with our mind’s eye. If you love someone you **“think”** about them

continuously. Keep reading about Jesus in the Scriptures, keep meditating upon Jesus at regular intervals, keep desiring Jesus always. Its only JESUS, always JESUS, heart full of JESUS. Jesus commanded the disciples saying, teaching them all that I have commanded you. How can this be possible without the regular gathering of the church for worship, bible study, sunday school and other meetings where these truths can be taught? Without learning personally from Christ Mat 11:29, and corporately in the church Eph 4:20-24 you cannot be transformed into His likeness. The problem is in the **perception** of many Christians, instead of looking at Christ and learning they keep on looking at others and their faults and as a result they falter and fail. What happens when we pattern our Son ship on those around us? We end up imitating each other instead of imitating Christ the Lord. In the British Museum a Greek writing tablet, earlier than the Christian era, is shown. It is the classical equivalent of a child's copybook. The headline has been written by the master. The scholar has traced the second with his eye upon the first; but afterwards each line is a reproduction, not of the first writing, but of the last. Consequently, each line shows a wider divergence from the pattern than the one before. Is not this one cause of the broken character of our holiness—that we imitate one another, or reproduce our familiar imperfections, instead of portraying the fair likeness of Jesus Christ? Truth helps us to be transformed in to His image. Truth not only liberates us but also changes us into Christ likeness.

*** Caring with the heart**

The Bible commands believers to use their grace gifts for the benefit of others 1 Pet 4:10. Caring for others and serving to meet their need is divine ministry. Christians are known to be compassionate people, loving people, understanding people, caring people and a sacrificial people. They are supposed to be the **“soft hearted people”** and the **“tender conscience”** people in the world. We must not only represent Christ but also reflect Him through our lives. Many try to show that they care through their lips but that's not enough. We can care for somebody without any love for them. We can do it out of duty, out of

hobby, out of guilt, out of religious activity, or out of reputation 1 Cor 13:3. It should be done with a heart full of love. We must show through our life. We learn to care because God cares. We believe VWC is a family of God, so we must be like a family. Phil 2:4 says **“everyone”** among you must care for others, not just the Pastor, elders, deacons or some members but everyone in the church of God is responsible. See verse 5 for the example of Jesus and His great care for us. Learn to show real interest, genuine love and perfect care for others. Look at the kind of compassion and care showed by a company to a single boy in the USA!

In 1975 a child named Raymond Dunn, Jr., was born in New York State. The Associated Press reports that at his birth, a skull fracture and oxygen deprivation caused severe retardation. As Raymond grew, the family discovered further impairments. His twisted body suffered up to twenty seizures per day. He was blind, mute, and immobile. He had severe allergies that limited him to only one food: A meat-based formula made by Gerber Foods. In 1985, Gerber stopped making the formula that Raymond lived on. Carol Dunn scoured the country to buy what stores had in stock, accumulating cases and cases, but in 1990 her supply ran out. In desperation, she appealed to Gerber for help. Without this particular food, Raymond would starve to death. The employees of the company listened. In an unprecedented action, volunteers donated hundreds of hours to bring out old equipment, set up production lines, obtain special approval from the USDA, and produce the formula all for one special boy. In January 1995, Raymond Dunn, Jr, known as the Gerber boy, died from his physical problems. But during his brief lifetime he called forth a wonderful thing called compassion.

How much more we Christians need to care and show compassion on those who need our help? As you devote yourself to such noble work, you will develop many ways to care for others. Dr. Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist, once gave a lecture on mental health & was answering questions from audience. One man: “What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?” All thought he would say, “Consult a

psychiatrist.” To their astonishment he replied: “Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone who is in need, and do something to help that person.” We don’t use God for our purposes but let God use us for His purposes. That’s a big difference. That’s why we were created.

* **Serving with commitment**

The Apostle Paul testified about the commitment of a wonderful godly couple. Aquila and Priscilla were ready to die for the work of God Rom 16:3-4. They showed great Christian commitment. It is our mark from the beginning to the end. We prove our mettle only through our commitment not otherwise. There are many **“fair weather”** Christians in the church but few **“foul weather”** Christians. If you don’t do a thing for God then your life is wasted, you have not served the purpose instead you have wasted the space in this world. We are not here to serve our **personal purpose** or other **people’s purpose** but to serve **God’s purpose**. Service is accepted by God only when it is done in pure dedication. Theodore Roosevelt said, “No man is worth his salt who is not ready at all times to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life, in a great cause.” Roosevelt spoke of a **great cause**, here it is for our **great Christ!**

Many so called Christians take God for granted. For every simple or silly reason, they throw their God given responsibilities to the wind. I don’t get it how in the world some people can do that to a loving and life giving God and dare not do the same to their boss? Weird behavior! If you have a certain responsibility in the church or ministry fulfilling God’s work you **must be available**, you **must be accountable** and you **must be adjustable**. Reasons given for not attending the work is sickness, pain, rain, office work, travel, distance, burden, and guests etc. Many are out rightly in disciplined and lazy. Living for God is a serious business and have grave repercussions. Brenda Goodine shares a story about her friend who decided to talk to her bright four-year-old son, Benji, about receiving Christ. “Benji,” she asked quietly, “would you like to have Jesus in your heart?” Benji thought for a few minutes and then rolling his blue eyes answered,

“No. I don’t think I want the responsibility.” Benji realized what many Christians still have not figured out: salvation is a free gift but it comes with some strings attached. Service is not an option for a follower of Jesus – it is a natural outgrowth of our relationship with Christ. Are you serving the Lord? Discipline is an essential ingredient in spiritual fruitfulness.

There is a true story that teaches a very powerful lesson. Brenda was a young woman who was invited to go rock climbing. Although she was scared to death, she went with her group to a tremendous granite cliff. In spite of her fear, she put on the gear, took a hold on the rope, and started up the face of that rock. Well, she got to a ledge where she could take a breather. As she was hanging on there, the safety rope snapped against Brenda’s eye and knocked out her contact lens. Well, here she is on a rock ledge, with hundreds of feet below her and hundreds of feet above her. Of course, she looked and looked and looked, hoping it had landed on the ledge, but it just wasn’t there. Here she was, far from home, her sight now blurry. She was desperate and began to get upset, so she prayed to the Lord to help her to find it. When she got to the top, a friend examined her eye and her clothing for the lens, but there was no contact lens to be found. She sat down, despondent, with the rest of the party, waiting for the rest of them to make it up the face of the cliff.

She looked out across range after range of mountains, thinking of that Bible verse that says, “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” She thought, “Lord, You can see all these mountains. You know every stone and leaf, and You know exactly where my contact lens is. Please help me.” Finally, they walked down the trail to the bottom. At the bottom there was a new party of climbers just starting up the face of the cliff. One of them shouted out, “Hey, you guys! Anybody lose a contact lens?” Well, that would be startling enough, but you know why the climber saw it? An ant was moving slowly across the face of the rock, carrying it! Brenda’s father is a cartoonist. When she told him the incredible story of the ant, the prayer, and the contact lens, he drew a picture of

an ant lugging that contact lens with the words, “Lord, I don’t know why You want me to carry this thing. I can’t eat it, and it’s awfully heavy. But if this is what You want me to do, I’ll carry it for You.” We need to remember these words when we are asked to do something that we feel is too heavy for us to do and or carry. “God, I don’t know why you want me to carry this load. I can see no good in it and it’s awfully heavy. But, if you want me to carry it, I will.”

It is very well stated in this cartoon by the artist. I like the attitude which reflects biblical truth. Are you committed to your church? It is not **“what can the church do for me”** but rather **“what can I do for my church?”** Good question to ask. Don’t be lazy, lukewarm or laid back in your commitment but as 1 Cor 9:24 says run to **“win”** the prize.

*** Transforming through fellowship**

Fellowship is one of the 4 main pillars of the NT church Acts 2:42. We are social creatures. God has a purpose for our lives and He joined us all together into a fellowship called **“church.”** We cannot live aloof and avoid our co-saints in the church. Remember we are addressed as **“sheep”** in the Bible that live in flocks and not as **“bears”** that live alone. Someone said, “Let the one who would worship God - open his mouth in praise, his heart in receptivity, his mind in contemplation, his purse in dedication, and his hand in fellowship.” Slowly but gradually you must meet with believers, mix with them and move along to accomplish God’s will through the church. Leave your inhibitions, fears, doubts, weird ideas and get together. Church is not a club where we get together to **“socialize”** but it’s a mission station where we get together to receive mutual encouragement, support, comfort, co-operation and fellowship to grow in grace. Everybody thinks that the other person must look at me, smile at me, wish me, talk to me, come to me, and welcome me without taking any initiative to do the same to others! Remember the golden rule in Mat 7:12 and follow it for great blessing.

This is an eye opener for all those who have no understanding of the fellowship. “Church is not an audience - A sharp distinction ought to be made between a church and an audience.

An audience is a group of unrelated people drawn together by a short-lived attraction.

A church is a group of born again believers drawn together by a Savior.

An audience is a crowd.

A church is a family.

An audience is a gathering.

A church is a fellowship.

An audience is a heap of stones.

A church is a temple.

Preachers are ordained, not to attract an audience, but to build a church. Coarse and worldly men, if richly gifted, can draw audiences, but only a man who is given to the Lord Jesus Christ can build a church.” (Charles E. Jefferson. Leadership, Vol. 11, no. 4.) Jesus sent 2 by 2 to ministry Lk 10:1. There are many “**one another’s**” in the Bible. Through our living together we may have some problems, troubles but that helps us to be transformed. Remember, “love your neighbor as yourself” is the same as the first commandment. We are to maintain a horizontal as well as a vertical relationship.

Our relationship with our brother shows the kind of relationship we have with our Father in heaven! Pro 27:17 iron sharpens iron likewise one saint strengthens another saint. Bob Gilliam said, “Today, churches have fellowship halls, fellowship dinners, and fellowship retreats, but very few have real fellowship. Yet for a church that seeks to be guided in principle and practice by the New Testament, fellowship is very important.” Learn a good lesson from the old St. Augustine. Augustine wrote, “A whole Christ for my salvation, a whole Bible for my staff, a whole church for my fellowship, and a whole world for my parish.” Beautifully stated and lived. Be a part of the fellowship, join in all the gatherings of the church, accept this as your spiritual family, and make VWC as your church-home! Let’s **belong** to Christ’s church and **build** the kingdom of Christ! Amen.