

Spiritual Overflow

Knowing and Using Your Gifts

by William Gibbs

Spiritual Overflow: Knowing and Using Your Gifts

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Dedicated to all who serve
by God's strength,
in love, joy,
and peace

Spiritual Overflow: Knowing and Using Your Gifts

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Stand still— keep the posture of an upright man, ready for action, expecting further orders, cheerfully and patiently awaiting the directing voice; and it will not be long ere God shall say to you, as distinctly as Moses said it to the people of Israel, “Go forward.”

Charles Spurgeon

In this book...

Introduction and Review

**Part 1 Parameters and Purpose for Gifts
 and Services**

Part 2 Initiation into Service, and Following

Part 3 Growth for Gifted Service

Part 4 Spirit-led Service

Part 5 Opposition to Service

Part 6 Love and Joy in Service

Part 7 Organization of Service

Conclusion

Appendices

Introduction and Review

Introduction. Read carefully. The purpose for this book is to build on the concepts we have studied previously; namely, using God's grace techniques to grow, build our faith, and reach super-maturity, whereby we can do the following: receive the fullness of God, surrender to His will, attain victory over sin, and access God's full contentment and joy. Through these, we can enjoy a steady connection with the power of the Holy Spirit and thus be equipped to serve God and man through the strength which God gives. This is where the greatest fruit and service occur, and where we will earn the greatest rewards in heaven. This is also the posture and place of honoring God...as God. These truths are hard to grasp, but they are seminal to all further understanding.

We saw in previous studies the means for achieving maximum maturity, and now we will see how to use this advanced maturity to enable us to provide meaningful service and know the full joy of seeing God work through us. When we reach the highest level of maturity, God will be doing through us the things that we have admired in principle, but have been incapable of performing on our own. At that time, even though the "service" will be considered ours, the work will be His. Maturity reveals that we can do nothing apart from Him.

When God has finished "perfecting" us and bringing us "into conformity with His Son" through the long and arduous growth process, we will then do God's will, fulfill His plan, portray the character of Christ, and depend on our heavenly Father for everything. At that level, there will be no idle time, no wasted motion, and no meaningless activity. And the joys and blessings of God's compassion will be unleashed and flow incessantly into our thoughts and experience, as God's promises are being fulfilled and manifested.

In this study, we will see how we can mature and build on the fullness of God and the contentment He offers. We will see how we can actively serve Him, through the gifts and opportunities He gives to each of us. We will review the main points of previous studies, revisiting the process for achieving super-maturity. And we will see how our new stature translates into *maximum* service. Maturity is not an end in itself; rather, it is the means to an end, which is this: HONORING AND SERVING our Maker, the Almighty God. This is our charge; this is our commission; this is our privilege.

Our General Objective. Our objective in this writing is for us to 1) *understand how* we reach maximum maturity, and to 2) *see ways* for utilizing that maturity, so that we can 3) *reach* the highest level of joy-filled service. We must take what we learn about the procedures for concentrated growth, and use them willfully, consciously, and deliberately to walk through the steps that lead us

closer to God. Everything worthwhile that will ever happen in our lives, every good purpose we will ever serve, will be born out of our mature reliance on the Father. Through Him and His methods, we will build our faith, depend on His Spirit, receive contentment, and serve Him purposefully.

Quite honestly, it is likely that none of us has reached the level of mature faith required for living lives of unrestrained commitment and unlimited blessing. But we can VIEW THE PRIZE that we are working toward. This, at least, will let us know what can be gained, and what we might miss.

The dilemma we face as believers is whether we will choose to grow...or just live lives of spiritual mediocrity. This is what we discussed in our last book, *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. Here is a snippet from page 48 of that book, with slight changes:

We start at scratch when we are born again, and we can sit on that spot, or we can begin the race. We are offered the choice of going our journey alone, or we can hitch a ride; this means that we can attempt to live the Christian life in our own strength and by our own ingenuity, or we can learn how to live in God's strength and by the directions given in His Word. The choice sounds intuitively simple, but the percentage of believers choosing to live life God's way, and by His power, is minuscule. Believing is hard, whereas self-effort is comparatively easy. But this is the lesson of maturity: Faith is the key to doing worthwhile work, and work without faith is meaningless (We are also reminded that faith without works is a dead faith, as per James 2). Our object is to grow by building our faith.

By building our faith, we will mature. By maturing, we will reach the fullness of God and surrender to Him. But here's the rub: Along the way, the intermediate stage of "growing" is hard and trying; God's training is rigorous. How many times do we at this stage look at the tests and trials that God brings and wonder if somehow God is not really taking care of us, or if we are not capable of receiving God's provision, or yet again if maybe we should just rely on ourselves and the world to fulfill our needs, desires, and goals?

This is a crucial time for us. Will we endure? Or will we cave in to the pressures? Will we persevere in our pursuit of the real and abundant life that God wants to bring to us? Or will we divert our attention to other resources for relief...and walk away from God? If we are truly willing, we will stick with God, and eventually achieve the following: adopt a divine perspective of life, acquire righteous behavior and thoughts, and attain a walk in the power of the Spirit that will lead to the fulfillment of our purpose...which is to serve.

When we commit to growth, we will build faith in our hearts, so that we can serve God "in our bodies". The result will be *service*, whereby we glorify God. This will translate into service to God's people, which we will perform in the strength which He gives. When we mature, our drive to serve will be unstoppable. It is then that we will know what Paul meant when he said, "For me to live is Christ..."

Service is through our gifts. "Spiritual Overflow" is GIFTED SERVICE. Each believer will be given gifts by which he will have the potential for great service. Love is expressed through our gifts; and

through gifted service, we will contribute to the growth of fellow believers. The unity and effectiveness of the “church” depends on the widespread maturity of its constituents. When a group of believers is characterized by growth and wisdom and fellowship, service will have the effect of bringing them to an elevated level of spiritual function. By each of us growing into maturity and each using his or her particular gifts, all believers served through these gifts will grow. This is how the “body of Christ”, as seen in the collective church, is built up.

We must understand how to get and use our gifts. That is our true objective in this study. We must know how to operate the gifts provided by the Holy Spirit, meaning that we must learn how to be available to Him, so He can operate His gifts through us.

The question remains: Do we want it? Do we want God? Do we want fellowship and closeness with Him? Do we want to be equipped for the full life of service? If so, we will sign up for training to prepare us to become what He plans, so that we can accomplish what He intends. Do we want the lives He imagines, or had we rather pursue our own illusory dreams? If we want Him, we will commit to growth, and yield to His plan, as laid out in the mechanics for our advancement into maturity. As we shall see, purity, holiness, confidence, and meaningful service can be ours, if we *want* them and *choose to do what it takes* to get them.

Review of Previous Studies. As a background for this study on gifts and service, we will look at the conditions which come into existence prior to, and then in connection with, super-maturity. Remember, super-maturity is the key to outstanding service. We will “serve” intermittently prior to ultimate maturity, but the greatest service requires the greatest maturity. The events or qualifications that come as we grow make us ready to serve increasingly-well as we are maturing. Without these, any “service” will represent only “human good”, which is not service at all, since no worthy outcomes will be derived from flesh-driven efforts.

Here are the main facilitators for meaningful service, which have been covered in our previous studies:

1. **Spirituality and Maturity.** To serve in “spirit and in truth”, we must address two status-related conditions: spirituality and maturity. *Spirituality* is a matter of our being in fellowship through the ongoing confession of our sins, whereby the Holy Spirit is given unobstructed access to our hearts. *Maturity* is the measure of faith that we have accumulated, based on our going through God’s training program, which includes intensive study of the Word and endurance of the events God brings or allows as part of our training. For any believer not familiar with the techniques and assets which God offers to equip us for service, please see Appendix A, “How the Christian Life Works”, repeated from a previous book. This short article summarizes the provisions God makes for our growth and our walk in Him.
2. **Growth.** The maturity aspect of our lives—our growth—is based on sustained spirituality, which forms the basis for our being able to benefit from both aspects of God’s training, including the “theoretical” (study aspect), as well as the “practical” (experiential aspect). One part of our training takes place in the classroom, and the other part takes place through the events and experiences God brings to us. As we go through training, prayerfully growing in

grace and wisdom, applying the assets and techniques God avails, we will acquire the quality of stronger faith, which will enable us to walk in the Spirit. Our maturity level will determine how much of the time we will operate in the sphere of God's power, meaning *in fellowship with*—and continually being *filled by*—the Holy Spirit. For more on the growth process, see Appendix B, “Growth of Believers”, also repeated from a previous book.

3. **Surrender.** The highest level of maturity and the highest form of all gifted service will take place *after* we surrender, i.e., after we get the “fullness of God” and move into super-maturity, where we will find victory over sin and contentment (God's “rest”). Here is a quote from the book, *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, which encapsulates the essence of the process of surrendering to God:

This is the giving of our all. This is our intended destination, the Shangri-la of our Christian faith, our highest service, and our finest hour. It may seem a little artificial or contrived to call this highest point of maturity “surrender”; it might be called “rest”, or the “fullness of God”, or “ultimate-maturity”. Whatever label we give to it, this maximum point of spiritual growth is the moment when God becomes the center of everything, not a peripheral interest. This is a time when a mature believer realizes that anything “God-like” must come from “God”. We will call it “surrender”, because that term fits, and because it is used in Scripture. Reaching this point means the development of “full faith” leading to “complete release”. It is a time when we see God fully, trust Him unreservedly, and discontinue self-effort completely. It is a time when we relinquish all of God's work to God, and lay ourselves...all we are and all we have...before Him, submitting our bodies to be the gloves He will wear to accomplish His divine purposes.

4. **Victory over Sin.** When we surrender to God, we will experience victory over sin, because we will have strong and mature faith, and will thus be able to walk in the Spirit. This walk empowers us to resist sin...consistently. In addition, when we reach this point, Satan will fade into the shadows, or flee, in the face of God's divine presence emanating from us. Our experience as surrendered believers will be characterized by a reduction in sin's influence on us, and an increased, God-directed capacity to resist it. We see in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*, a summary of the choices we face concerning sin, which will determine whether sin is wrestled down in our lives, or not. If sin is not defeated, it will dominate us all of our lives. Here is what we see on page 162 of the book, *Killing Sin*.

We would surely love to find some magical step we can take, or thought we can think...some formula... for defeating sin. I will be honest that I was hoping to find some hidden secret for beating sin, but I have come to a simple conclusion: THE ONLY WAY TO DEFEAT SIN IS TO OUTGROW IT...and this cannot and will not be easy. I wanted it to be easy and painless, but finally surrendered to the truth that growth requires suffering. The final defeat of sin is the outcome of extended and dedicated growth. Without maturity, there will be no victory. But even this

oversimplifies. Maturity is not a single decision, but a protracted commitment to growth, leading finally to a place of super-maturity.

5. **Contentment Leading to Service.** We will have much to say about contentment. We will discuss its role in complementing and supporting our service, but we can say conclusively at the outset that contentment is, apart from love, the most important foundational *condition* for all service. We will see how pivotal it is in providing the impetus for gifted service. Contentment is the outcropping of the fullness of God, surrender, and victory over sin. This concept was treated thoroughly in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. Contentment is the presence of peace and joy in the heart of a surrendered believer, a time of fulfillment for God's promises, and the occasion for full empowerment leading to consequential service. We will see how contentment impacts the function of our gifts in loving service toward fellow believers (and others). Contentment is the immediate precursor for service, as we shall demonstrate.
6. **Equality among Believers.** In the concept of equality, we find the true expression of unity, love, cooperation, and mutual support. Equality is the outcome of the interchange of all gifts, the external evidence for widespread spirituality. Like "perfection" (full spiritual maturity, this condition is rare, but it is still possible. This is the amalgamation of gifts and the Spirit-led weaving of services into a beautiful spiritual tapestry, woven by the Master's hand. Here are some of the essential conclusions concerning equality, as derived from our last book, *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. A full discussion of this topic can be seen on pages 138 through 142 of that book, from which we glean the following:
 - ☐ The Bible supports equality among believers, but there is no equality between believers and unbelievers.
 - ☐ The concept of "From each according to his ability to each according to his need", which is part of the Communist Manifesto and has had many evil applications in the world, actually works in the church...for believers ONLY!
 - ☐ Our primary job and the reason for gifts is to ensure that *all* needs of *all* believers are met.
 - ☐ The purpose of gifts is to advance truth, wisdom, and maturity among believers.
 - ☐ Paul called for equality among believers. (See 2 Cor. 8:10-15.)
 - ☐ Here is an example of an "equalizing" gift: The gift of "giving" means that no believer should go hungry (unless they are lazy). 1 Tim. 6:17-19 describes this gift and how it is to be used.
 - ☐ Gifted operations are conducted primarily by one individual expressing love through the services of his or her gifts, toward another specific individual (or more than one individual) who need it. The exception is the use of *instructional* (and perhaps other) gifts, which are targeted toward "groups".
 - ☐ Each believer should look for channels and opportunities for filling the needs of

other believers, in order to bring each one up to the level of all others. Believers with “more” (e.g., *spiritual* assets, and others) should serve to bring believers with less up to a higher level.

- The central purpose and outcome of meaningful service will be the edification, or “building up”, of the church and of all members within it. The goal is maximum maturity and the ultimate surrender of all believers, who will be unified by their common faith. Anything that stands in the way of this goal must be removed.

These are the topics of previous studies, and the essence of our thrust as believers. Now we want to turn our attention toward the topics to be examined in this book, as we explore our service obligations in light of the gifts that enable us to meet them.

Preview. In this study, we will look at all aspects of gift enhancement and the kinds of services our gifts entail. Here are the basic points of the seven parts of this book:

1. **Parameters and Purpose of Gifts and Services.** First of all, we will describe our gifts and the kinds of service that are open to us.
2. **Initiation into Gifted Service.** We will show how we receive our gifts, and see how we are inducted into service.
3. **Growth for Gifted Service.** We will visit once again the growth requirements that will enable us to fulfill our service requirements.
4. **Spirit-led Service.** Growth of our faith will lead us to maturity, which qualifies us for constant leadership from the Holy Spirit. This is the most crucial aspect of our service, because without the active engagement and empowerment of the Spirit, we will not be able to serve...in God’s way.
5. **Opposition to Service.** Because godly service brings honor to God, Satan and all his pals will rise up against it, launching opposition at all stages of our movement toward serviceability. We will look at these, so that we will not be surprised when they appear in our pathway.
6. **Love and Joy in Service.** Love, joy, and peace are keys to the development and use of our gifts, and we will look at each of these, especially love and joy. We have seen these from the time of our earliest books, and we will learn more about them in this study. The new extension of these previous studies is the way “contentment” applies to *service*. Contentment is the final step prior to superior service.
7. **Organization of Service.** Finally, we will look at the way service is *organized* into a cooperative, through which all gifts are expressed and all needs are met.

We are now ready for Part One, which gives a general description of gifted services, and provides a statement of their purpose.

Part One

Parameters and Purpose for Gifts and Services

In This Part...

Chapter 1-1. First Look at Gifted Service

Chapter 1-2. God Assigns Gifts

Chapter 1-3. Service is Not Just Activity

Chapter 1-4. Gifted Service vs General Responsibility

Chapter 1-5. Talents vs. Gifts

Chapter 1-6. We are All Ministers

Chapter 1-7. Priesthood of Believers

Chapter 1-8. The Purpose of Service

Chapter 1-9. Edification of Believers

Chapter 1-10. Lists of Gifts

Chapter 1-11. Overview of Romans 12

Chapter 1-12. False Teachings

Chapter 1-13. Verses on Gifts

Chapter 1-1

First Look at Gifted Service

First Look at Gifted Service. The primary service that we do will be done through our gifts. We will see where our gifts come from, and how they are used, but first we must take a look at the Bible's description of *gifted service*. For the scriptural basis for our discussion, we turn to Paul's discussion of gifted services, as found in Eph. 4:11-16, which says the following:

It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

This passage contains most of the concepts we will be discussing in this book, and is an apt introduction to the concept of gifted service. Christ (as His Spirit) gives gifts to equip "each part" to serve. Service includes two basic categories. One consists of equippers: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. These are the purveyors of information needed to cause everyone to learn God's truths, which show us how to grow and develop. Some interpret this passage to say that these equippers are themselves gifts to the body of Christ. To me these equipping gifts can be viewed as *abilities for service*, as well as they can be the *men who perform the service*. Either way works.

The other category of gifts includes everyone else. Many sub-categories, seen as individual gifts, occupy this category, and these, like the "equipper" gifts, are designed to "build up" the body by strengthening each of its parts. Each part strengthens others...and each part is strengthened.

Every believer has a specific role, pre-designed by God to be his or her means of contribution to the construction of the entire church. When the roles of all are fulfilled, then all believers can leave "infancy" and move toward the "fullness of Christ", or super-maturity. When each believer is moving toward God's fullness, this will ensure that each component that goes into the building is strong and steady. When the "equippers" do their job and impart correct information, everyone else can grow by increasing their knowledge of the assets made possible through the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Through these assets and the methods they encompass, we will be able to "mature" and thus become useful to fellow believers.

Unity through Service. Notice in the passage quoted above that the building up of each part becomes the sturdy structure of the Body of Christ, which will operate in complete cooperation of

its parts through love. We will say much more about love in this study, because it is linked to other essentials, such as the size of our faith and the filling of the Spirit, and because it underpins all service. Unity, bonded by divine love, leads to unified strength. The collective power of a cadre of mature and spiritual believers is a force that cannot be measured. The potential for good from a group (or “local assembly”) bonded in love and joined in purpose is unimaginable. But this will require that EACH PART grows and matures to become a contributing member of the group, so that the chain will be unbroken and the spirit of oneness will be strong.

Unfortunately, what exists currently (and, of course, historically) is the absence of such growth and such a spirit. Oh, yes, there are groups that put on a happy face and “share the glad hand” and “show a mouth full of teeth”, as R. B. Thieme used to say, but the behaviors which are exhibited may be nothing more than man-made facsimiles of spiritual unity, from which little fruit will be borne. EACH believer must mature in the Word and humbly embrace God’s purpose, and EACH must contribute from his or her gifts, as he or she enjoys the contributions of others. That way, ALL can grow. Then the interactive system of gifted interchange can operate under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and the spirit of oneness that evolves will form a solid front for meaningful service.

Chapter 1-2

God Assigns Gifts

Christ Provides the Gifts. Jesus Christ, in the person of the Holy Spirit, determines the gifts we are to have. This is one place (and there are others, of course) that the absolute sovereignty of God is in play. We are at choice on most aspects of our lives, from the time we choose to inquire about God, to the time that God brings the gospel to us so we can choose to accept it, to the occasion when we, as believers, can choose to grow and move closer to God. But the “gift” we receive for service is determined by God. It is possible that this selection of gifts is based on God’s foreknowledge of the strength of our faith, just as our “election” for salvation is based on His foreknowledge of our choice to believe in His Son. One thing is certain: from our perspective, God decides what gifts we get.

Ephesians 4:7-8 is one passage (and we will see others later) that shows where our gifts come from. Here is what this passage says: “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it [or God] says: ‘When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men’.” The term “grace” enfolds the nature and scope of our gifts, which are activated into service by faith.

God Gives the Gifts to be Used. God does not give these gifts so they can be stored in the closet and never used. These gifts are given to serve specific purposes, and they must be nurtured and developed. Our main role as believers is to cultivate our gifts through growth and spiritual cleanliness. This means, of course, that we must regularly confess our sins, in order to stay clean and be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. And then we must study and pray and endure God’s training so that we can build our personal faith in God, His Word, and His will. With growth, we will be able to *use* the gifts we have *received*. Without growth, our gifts are useless. We will review growth requirements and examine these at length later in this study. For now, we must establish that gifts without growth will produce nothing, no matter how active we are in attempting to serve. Growth precedes service.

God Directs the Use of our Gifts. Once we have identified our gifts (we will see how soon), we must operate them under the leadership of the Holy Spirit (this, too, will be embellished later). God has a specific will for the operation of our gifts. He does not want us to independently determine how our gifts will be used. This is a hard lesson: We must grow, and then we must wait on the Lord to direct us into specific opportunities for service. So how can we know the specific place and time of our service? By waiting and GROWING ENOUGH TO SEE IT. When maturity is complete, the gift we are given will operate with meaning and purpose; we will serve God’s people and accommodate His will.

What He gives, He intends for us to use. Our role is to be His instrument as He uses our gifts to do His service for His people for His own glory. Our privilege is to embrace and cultivate the ability

that *He gives* that *He will use* to perform His work.

An example of God's directing the operation of our gifts is found in Acts 16:6-8, which says this:

Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

One thing a mature believer learns is when NOT to serve. If you eye an opportunity to exercise your gift, and something is blocking it, proceed with respect to the conditions God brings. The mature believer will know when to resist the opposition, and when circumstantial hindrances are God's way of steering one away from pointless activity. God not only GIVES the gifts; He can also DIRECT the gifts, as we shall see.

Chapter 1-3

Service is Not Just Activity

Drawn to Activity. We tend to get it backwards. We want to be spiritual by serving, rather than serving by becoming spiritual. This is a major theme of this book. We must keep the horse in front of the cart...first things first. We are made spiritual first, and then we will be qualified to serve. Maturity also plays a role. Rom. 10:2 says, “For I testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.” Paul is talking about the Jews here, and wishing they would all be saved, but there is also an application for *believers* relative to *knowledge that leads to spirituality*. Believers learn how to access grace assets through “knowledge”, and become mature and faithful by using what they learn.

Activity is not service. Service toward man and for God is not merely an “action”. The *conditions* for service must be met for the “activity” to be service at all. Motion is not the same as production. Just being an enthusiastic believer will not be enough to equip one for service; rather, we must advance in “knowledge and grace” to develop the spiritual resources necessary for service.

The first thing we need is to be in fellowship, so that we will be led by the Spirit. We cannot serve without the sustaining energy of the Spirit, which comes through cleanliness and growth. Rom. 12:11 says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.” The fervor we keep is “spiritual”, which shows that the fire which builds our spiritual steam comes through the Spirit, without whom there is NO spirituality. Keeping our spiritual fervor is keeping the fire of the Spirit burning through fellowship, and never “quenching” this fire, as per 1 Thess. 5:19, which says, “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire.”

Imitation Service. Many shallow and self-deceptive believers think they are okay in their spiritual lives, when—in reality—they are merely acting a part, appearing circumspect and holy, fooling themselves that they are good. The more their facade persuades others, the more they believe their own lies. In other words, if others approve, I must be good...I am good because they say so. This represents a large percentage of what passes as “holy behavior” and “religious comportment” around our churches today.

There is a tendency for a “club” mentality to develop in most churches, whereby all members of the club attempt to follow the group norm that the club establishes. This brings a pattern to the local assembly, whereby all members adopt standard procedures for “spiritual” activities, such as service. Little attention is given to maturity or specific giftedness, as conformity to club rules is paramount. The result is perfunctory compliance and robotic imitation of behaviors required or exhibited by established leaders. There is neither knowledge nor spiritual fire (even though there may be emotional intensity) behind visible behavior. When we see certain kinds of service that are “supposed” to be done, even if others are doing it scripturally and correctly, and we set out to *duplicate* what we understand is required, the “activity” we exhibit will not have good spiritual

results. Imitation is no substitute for spirituality. For service to count, it must be led and directed by the Holy Spirit.

It is good to know what the “goodness of service” looks like: loving, caring for others, and sharing. But we don’t satisfy commands to do these things by just staging them and performing them. We complete these only by growing and allowing the Spirit to direct us into them. Gifted service cannot be done without the direct impulse and guidance of the Spirit. Without Him, what we will be doing will exhibit only mindless, lock-step, legalistic acts of conformity....activity, but not service...simulation without reality.

Real Service is “Spiritual Overflow”. When we are growing and filled with the Spirit, meaningful service is inevitable. It naturally “overflows” from the well-spring of our spiritual standing. Psalms 23:5b provides a concise statement of the process for real service: “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Being anointed with oil is a symbol for being filled with joy, signifying the filling of the Spirit, through whom our “cup overflows”. We often think of this as joy “bubbling over”, and this is not a bad application, one which we will see as having direct connection with service, but the immediate application is that the filling of the Spirit will flow out from us to others to bless them, enrich them, instruct them, strengthen them, and rescue them. While we are maturing, the effects of our gifts will increase, as God causes His Word and His righteousness to overflow in greater measure from us toward those who need what our gifts offer. We will be serving, not just acting.

Chapter 1-4

Gifted Service vs. General Responsibility

Gifts are Specific. When gifts operate, they are specifically targeted toward particular needs of designated believers. Both the target and the gift are narrow and specific, and the Holy Spirit provides a clearinghouse for the interflow of gifts and needs. If a particular believer needs prayer for illness or some shortfall or a difficult task, or whatever, a believer with the gift of prayer (and probably faith, as well) will be dispatched to provide special prayers, either in the presence of the person with the need, or somewhere behind the scenes. Gifts are specifically aimed at given needs, and when a need exists, if all spiritual conditions have been met by both the believer with the gift and the one with the need, the gift will be suited for—and effective in—addressing the need in question.

The needs that are met by gifts are largely *spiritual*, and are related to *growth*, but the principle of gifted service spreads out to encompass *any* need that might distract from or prevent spiritual progress. For example, when a person is sick or hungry or exhausted, study and prayer are more difficult for them, and these conditions will be served well by those with relevant gifts: the prayer of faith for the ill, or the gift of giving for the hungry, or the gift of helping to relieve someone who needs rest. This will have the effect of enabling believing subjects who are affected by adverse conditions to be freed from their adversity, so they can give full attention to their walk in the Spirit, and their advancement toward maturity. Gifted functioning is pin-pointed to particular needs.

We see the principle of the specificity of gifts in Rom. 12:4-6a, which says the following:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Each of us has a different “function”, which will be directed toward meeting the needs of given believers. We have “different gifts”, given to us for various purposes. But there is a general form of service that also needs to be considered, so that we do not think that gifted service alone completely fulfills our Christian obligations.

Service can be “General”. Not all service is from gifts. All of us are to give, share, pray, have faith, encourage, show mercy, instruct, help, and so on. Rom. 12:13 says, “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Even if we do not have gifts specific to the needs that we see, we should be ready to address the needs and provide the services needed. Gifts are more concentrated and specific, but these should be complemented by all the rest of us “pitching in” to fill the cracks and stop the leaks to strengthen and round out gifted services. We should not take the attitude, “That’s not my job, man.” We should not shy away from service, even outside our gifted areas, as long as we are not usurping the services of others’ gifts.

Gifts are focused, whereby the love and spiritual energy of a mature (or maturing) believer will be

funneled into assigned acts of service. The center of attention for gifted service is on opportunities for particular gifts to operate. But service can also be done by those not specifically gifted for it. Whether we serve “specifically” or “generally”, we must acknowledge what Rom. 14:7-8a says: “For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord.” Our purpose is to serve specifically or generally, as led by the Spirit. Our eyes will be on Him, which means that we will perform all service in His strength and by His direction.

One caution briefly cited earlier needs more emphasis, and that is this: We must not try to exercise gifts that we do not have, as if they were our own; we should not commandeer the gifts of others. We must make the function of our gifts in service to others the most important pursuit of our lives, concentrating on activities within the limits of the gifts God has given us.

The balance: Reaching out to meet the needs of others is always good, unless we are trying to be an “eye” when we are a “foot”, and unless we are stepping across boundaries into the legitimate function of other believers’ gifts. The distinction must be made by the Holy Spirit. Just as gifted service must be directed by God to be effective, general service must occur only when God directs it. This, of course, assumes maturity and spirituality on the part of the one serving. The first order of business is to establish and use our gifts, and then we can branch into general areas as God leads.

Chapter 1-5

Talents vs. Gifts

Talents. When we are born, we have certain natural abilities that will enable us to do *some* things better than other things. Natural abilities are called “talents”, and apparently all people have areas of performance which are stronger, relative to their other abilities. These are inherent and inborn, and are part of our make-up as unique human beings. Most physical, and many mental, characteristics are received from our parents. This is also true for our abilities. Whenever we do something particularly well (or even somewhat well), we can assume that the ability to do it came through our ancestors.

Abilities can be developed or refined through practice and repetition, but the existence of pre-existing talents will either promote or delimit capabilities for performance. Talents are a human condition, existing in the world as a part of the birth-life-death cycle of all humans, and include any abilities we are born with. They are part of being alive and functioning from day to day, and are particularly useful for success and recognition in the world. They also provide ways to enhance the quality of human life. So talents have a viable place in society and in all lives, making life better for those who possess them and those who benefit from their use.

But talents are not the same as gifts.

Gifts. Some conflate gifts with talents. But they are different. Talents are possessed at birth, and gifts are received well after birth, and then only by believers. Talents are useful in the world, while gifts are given by God to accomplish His purposes for the world, for the church, and for individual believers. They have a spiritual component not seen in the function of talents.

The question arises: Can talents and gifts be the same thing? The answer is, perhaps, to some degree. God can *overlay a talent with a gift*, so that the talent would be transformed from a natural ability to one that is supernaturally transmitted and manifested. But just because one is born with a talent does not mean the talent is a “gift”, at least not one rendered by God for spiritual purposes. The gift a believer receives may be completely distinct from his or her talents; the talents may be useful in other ways, but not as a gift designed by God to fulfill the growth-related needs of others.

So the effects of talents and gifts are different. Talents have “natural” or worldly effects, whereas gifts have spiritual or “super-natural” results. Talents are used to improve conditions in the lives of those possessing the talents, and in the lives of others in the world; gifts are useful to build the spiritual lives of believers in the kingdom of God. Talents have *temporal* implications, whereas gifts have *eternal* ramifications (even when their application is immediate, practical, and/or mundane).

As we get into the operation of gifts, we must distinguish between talents and gifts. It is possible to be awed by this talent or that, and to assume that its existence and usage must be “of the Lord”. It may be, but we must not confuse natural abilities with special gifts. As we said, they may be the same, but the purpose of each is completely different. Recognize talents, but do not seek spiritual

sustenance from them. Those will come from spiritual gifts, which God apportions and—in the spiritual believer—operates.

So how do we know whether we are observing a talent or a gift? We must test them. If a function draws attention to the person performing or acting, then we can assume that what we see is a talent. If it draws attention to God and provides a condition or value that contributes to the growth of other believers, it is probably a gift. Is it self-serving or a service to others? Does it aggrandize the one acting or build up those it is meant for?

If someone is adept at counseling and comforting in the “world”, they may provide some relief, even to believers, but afterwards there is nothing on which greater faith can be built. A “gifted” comforter will not offer solace alone, but will render spiritual undergirding which will *strengthen* the one needing comfort. Results...or fruits...will show whether what is at play is a talent, or a gift. Believers can use the talents of others to their advantage, as appropriate, but what all believers NEED is GIFTED service for *spiritual growth*. Talents alone do not provide this.

Chapter 1-6

We are All Ministers

Two Categories of Gifts. There are two groups of gifted believers: one consists of the “equippers” and the other consists of the “servers”. Those who “equip” have instructional roles that involve speaking to groups, while those who “serve” are involved in all the other roles. 1 Pet. 4:11 defines these categories, as follows:

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

The category of “equippers” or “speakers” consists of those providing small or large *group* instruction, such as pastor-teachers, evangelists, and “prophets”. A fourth “equipper” is the apostle, who occupied a role that may no longer exist, since it was involved in receiving and recording truth. This role is now non-essential, because Scripture is now complete. The role of “prophet”, may still exist, but has surely changed to one of insightful instruction from the completed Word. (We will see more on these “instructional” gifts later in a chapter called, “The Equippers of Ephesians 4”.)

The other category of “servers” consists of everyone else...those who are *being equipped* to “serve”. Service is done by believers who are collectively equipped with a myriad of gifts designed to build each other up for, you guessed it, further service. The service that most of us do will take place among the “rank and file”, where service is offered to individuals, and benefits are bestowed personally and in close proximity.

Obligation of All. All believers, whether they are equippers or servers, are “ministers”. The distinction between “clergy” and “laity” is overplayed. Those who serve as pastor/teachers, for example, follow the same track for growth as do all other believers. And their service depends on the same Spirit as everyone else. There is a tendency for the “congregation” to think that pastors are “on the hook” and everyone else is free to go, virtually six (or more) days a week. But ALL believers have gifts, and every believer has the same obligation to make his or her gifted services available as any other believer. Service for God is an operation that is “open for business” twenty-four hours a day, every day.

The tendency of “non-pastors”, as we stated above, is to sit back and receive, with not much inclination to give or serve. The thing we must establish in this book is that NO ONE who is qualified (sufficiently mature) is exempt from service, and that the most important thing we will ever do...the ultimate purpose for all growth and increased faith...is to be able to serve others in the power and by the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is not alright to be “hearers” of the Word only, except for new believers; the objective for maturing believers is to become “doers” of the Word (James 1:22). It is important to know that maturity does not collect in some reservoir of the heart

to just sit there idly; it must be mobilized to serve a purpose, which is—above all—to help other believers mature.

If you are not paying attention to the identification, development, and application of your gift in service to others, you are not fulfilling the command to serve. Everything else, such as love, gentleness, compassion, and even fellowship, is related to our meeting of this requirement. Love is a condition of the heart...a base motivator for service...but the outcropping or manifestation of love is *service*, without which the love we have, like the maturity we acquire, or the knowledge we gain, is virtually useless. Service is the ultimate product of training and the greatest evidence for our closeness to, and love for, God.

We remind you that it is NOT okay to get the cart before the horse, or to charge out to serve prior to adequate preparation. Focus must first be on training: confession of sins, study, prayer, endurance of tests and trials, and exposure to gifted services of maturing believers. As we grow, awareness of our gifts, and opportunities to exercise them, will evolve. Once we mature, we will not only serve appropriately, we CAN'T STOP SERVING! If we are paying attention to our growth, and actually getting closer to God, service will come. If we will grow, God will do the rest. The purpose for this writing is to clarify where all this leads, so we will not miss our main purpose in the church and in life, which is to serve others, particularly within the scope of our gifts.

Eph. 4:12b-13b adds scriptural underpinning to these points by telling us that gifted service is done so that others can be “built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature”. This passage is aimed primarily at “equippers”, but is tied into all other gifts implied in verse 16, which says, “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” “Each part” here means “each and every part”, so that no one is excluded from the obligation to mature and serve. We are all to serve. In that sense, we are all ministers. We are all participants, not just spectators.

Timothy's Gift. A good set of instructions on the operation of gifts is seen in Paul's exhortation to Timothy. Paul mentored Timothy, nursing him from the stage of infancy to super-maturity. Along the way, he gave Timothy specific guidelines for the exercise of his gifts, the essence of which can be found in 2 Tim 4:2 and 5b, as follows:

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction...do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

Here is what we see regarding Timothy's gifts, which can generally be applied to each of us as we begin to use our gifts to edify fellow believers:

1. **Preach the Word.** “Preach” means “teach”. Timothy's primary gift was to instruct those he was commissioned to lead, to move them toward greater maturity.
2. **Be prepared.** Timothy was instructed to continue in the refinement of his spiritual life and to hone his gift through spiritual exercises. In reality, Timothy could not—and now WE

cannot—stop growing, if we expect to be of service.

3. **Correct, rebuke, encourage.** Timothy was a “pastor/teacher”, so—in addition to teaching—he also *led* his students.
4. **Operate in patience and with great care.** Timothy was to operate in love, the condition that forms the basis for patient and caring service.
5. **Do the work of an evangelist; discharge all the duties of your ministry.** Timothy was instructed to devote his time to non-stop service to *all* believers in his care. “Discharge all the duties” is a phrase indicating that gifted service is not a time of leisure. Take note that Timothy had the gift of evangelism, one of his numerous areas of gifted service.

This is a perfect set of guidelines for our own service. We are to “do the work”, but we must also “prepare” to do it; and then we must make sure our spiritual status remains strong, so that we will have the motivation and resources to keep on doing it.

Chapter 1-7

Priesthood of Believers

The Priesthood of Every Believer. In the old system of priests, selected believing Jews served as intermediaries between man and God, and many “spiritual” exercises were conducted through them. Some priestly functions were so special that only the High Priests could perform them, which required their going past a curtain separating the “Shekinah glory” in the Most Holy Place (the actual point of contact with God), from the Holy Place. The High Priests went “behind the veil” into the very presence of God. When Jesus Christ died, the veil was torn apart (Matt. 27:51), symbolizing the removal of any barrier between God and believers, and giving them direct and personal access to God Himself. Each believer is his own “priest”.

Heb. 10:19-22a describes our access this way:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God...

Rev. 1:5b-6 says, “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.” We are now priests and can enter the Most Holy Place. In 1 Pet. 2:4-5, we see our priesthood described, as follows:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Verse 7 tells us which of us are making (or using) acceptable sacrifices: “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious...” Those of us who believe embrace the “living Stone” and thus become a part of the “holy priesthood”, because we come to the Father through the son...i.e., through our faith in the work of Jesus Christ. Because of the work that Jesus Christ did on our behalf, and because we have believed in Him, we now have direct access to God the Father.

Why is it important for us to know that each of us has become his or her own priest? Because we must know that we are directly and individually responsible to God for the conduct of our lives and all related spiritual matters. We cannot rely on a church leader (or anyone else) to “know” for us, or “pray” in our stead, or “trust” in our behalf...we must do these ourselves. We will receive knowledge, and accept prayers, and draw on the faith of stronger believers, but the RESPONSIBILITY for knowing and growing, drawing near through prayer, and building godly confidence through trusting and relying on Him...is OURS! We have no priest other than our High Priest, who is Jesus Christ. But He has made us priests through our union with Him, and because we are priests, we have unobstructed access to the Father (as long as we have “washed our hands” before we “draw near”...see James 4:6-10...more on this later.)

Direct Access to God through Jesus Christ. As those who have direct access to God through Jesus Christ, we have many privileges. We have seen these in our last five books, and we will see even more of them as we go through this book. As confirmation for and clarification of our unfettered access through Him, we provide the following passages of Scripture:

Heb. 9:3-5—Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover.

Heb. 9:12—He [Jesus Christ] did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Heb. 10:19-22—Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Matt. 27:51—At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Mark 15:38—The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

Heb. 6:19-20—We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

James 4:8a—Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Rom. 5:1-2—Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Eph. 2:18—For through him we both have access to the Father by One Spirit.

Eph. 3:12—In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

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

Because of our identity with Christ...our oneness with Him...we can go to the Father. And we are the ones who must decide to do what God requires to draw close and live close to God. And we are the ones who must serve Him. Heb. 13:15-16 commands us, as follows:

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with

such sacrifices God is pleased.

The sacrifice God wants from us is our godly and sacrificial service to fellow believers, which is how we serve Him. We “do good” and “share” when we exercise our gifts on behalf of other believers.

Chapter 1-8

The Purpose of Service

Service is for God. The correct posture for those serving is one of fellowship and love. When we have been cleansed through the confession of our sins and are thereby filled with the Holy Spirit, we can operate in His power, which enables us to perform acts that are effective and productive. If that power is not present, we will be operating in the flesh, under the power of the sinful nature, and will be serving ourselves instead of God. Real service is connected with and directed by God Himself, and will be targeted toward specific needs that exist among individuals in the body of Christ.

1 Thess. 1:4-8a describes a case of Spirit-legitimized service, first with Paul, and then with those who carefully followed his leadership. Here is what this passage says:

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

This passage carries so many implications and truths that we will need to compress our discussion of it to fit it into this work, as follows:

1. First of all, these believers had been “chosen”, as evidenced by the fact that the gospel came to them. (v. 4) They welcomed this message, because they wanted a relationship with God. (v. 6) We have established in previous studies that God “chooses” or “elects” (selects) us on the basis of our wanting Him...or welcoming Him. He knows well in advance that we want Him, and plans the occasion of our receipt of the gospel, which provides us with the procedures for salvation.
2. Paul was being led by the Spirit when he preached the gospel to them, which links God's foreknowledge of their interest in Him with a plan to have Paul bring the saving message of faith to them. Notice the Spirit's power in the process. (v. 5)
3. Notice Paul's commitment to service, saying that his only reason for being with them was for “their sake”...to serve them according to the will and power of the Holy Spirit (v. 5).
4. He obviously not only provided the saving knowledge of the gospel, but doctrines for living, as indicated by the fact that these believers had endured “severe suffering” as part of God's training, through which they continued to “welcome the message”. (v. 6)
5. These believers had grown enough to become “imitators of us and of the Lord” (v. 6),

suggesting fellowship, which allowed them to experience the contentment of maturity as “joy given by the Holy Spirit” (v. 6).

6. Because Paul was led by the Spirit in the function of his gift, and because these believers wanted to get closer to God, these believers had reached a high level of maturity, even to the point of “surrender”, victory over sin, and contentment. (vv. 7-8)
7. In verse 7, Paul states that they “became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia”, and then shows in v. 8 that their own gifts were fully operational: “The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your [strong] faith in God has become known everywhere.”

Paul’s purpose with them was to serve them. The purpose of his service was to bring them to maturity. Once they matured, their purpose was to serve others, so their faith could yield its own fruit. Indeed, Paul reported that they had learned to “serve the living God” (v. 9). Our purpose is to serve God by serving others, and the purpose for serving others is to help others become servants themselves. In so doing, we not only serve God, we honor Him and glorify Him. That is the ultimate purpose for our gifts. It is not to be “seen” or honored ourselves. 1 Pet. 4:11, a verse we saw earlier, confirms our real purpose, saying the following:

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Gifts are ultimately to bring honor to God, not man. In fact, many gifts operate “below the radar” of human observation, and are performed by those whom Robert McLaughlin called “invisible heroes”. For more on invisible heroes, see Appendix C, which is taken from a larger discussion on the war that Satan is waging against God. Our place in that war is described in *God’s Training Program for Believers* (see pages 55-93 in that book). Our role in this conflict is being observed by all angels, who see credit-worthy service, even if no one else sees it; even by itself, this brings glory to God.

Self-Service Does not Count. Phil. 1:15-17 gives a self-evident statement about service being for God and not for ourselves, as follows:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry [from the flesh], but others out of goodwill [from fellowship, prompted by the Spirit]. The latter do so in love [fellowship], knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.

Selfish service is an oxymoron. It is not service at all, but a selfish act purported to aggrandize or enrich one’s self. 1 Tim. 6:3-6 describes another inappropriate use of service by saying this:

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife,

malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

When believers are “serving” to promote themselves or increase their own riches, they have no connection to the truth, and are operating as servants of Satan, the world, and self. All service must be couched in the power and leadership of the Holy Spirit, and rendered for the purpose of pointing to God; else it cannot be credited as service.

True Service. According to Eph. 4:12-13, which we saw earlier, the purpose of gifts is to “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...and become mature...” In other words, the purpose for service is to equip others to serve others, so that more and more are equipped to serve. Sounds recursive and redundant, doesn’t it? Why do I equip you? So that you can equip others, who will equip others, who will in turn equip others. But wait a minute. What’s the point? Equipping to equip to equip...where does something good come out of this? Remember that it is our FAITH that pleases God, and “equipping” is building that faith. Strong faith is the immediate objective, and service is the long-term goal, because it enables more faith...and more faith...with the result that God is pleased and glorified...**because we believe Him and trust Him!** Remember Heb. 11:6a, which says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God...”

The GOOD that comes from faith has eternal implications and can only be described as infinite and everlasting. Such grand considerations can hardly be compressed into language, but we can be sure that God wants to see our faith because He values it above all else; so our purpose to build faith that culminates in service—in order to *build yet more faith*—can only be seen as our greatest end and our highest calling. A primary medium for building this faith is interactive service among believers.

By “preparing others”, according to Eph. 4:12-13, we cause them to mature, as established in verse 14, which says, “Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.” Someone who is no longer an infant is someone who is maturing. The purpose of service is, conclusively, growth and spiritual development.

Chapter 1-9

Edification of Fellow Believers

Centrality of Service. We must acknowledge that service is the ultimate goal of all we will do. Without service, spirituality and growth stand as a hammer hanging on a wall in the garage. It is not useful until it is in the hands of the builder and being used to fashion something. As God's tools on earth, we will not fulfill our purpose until we are being used to build what God has designed. Service is this: being useful to God. Without true *service*, we may spin and gyrate and perform great and noble deeds, but we will not be building; service is the operation of our gifts in the energy of God's Spirit for the purpose of constructing an edifice, which is the maturity of all believers. Without service, no growth will occur, God will not be honored, and we will not be fulfilled.

For believers who feel that something is missing or that their lives are incomplete, they should look at their service pattern. Has their advancing maturity included increased service? If not, they are disregarding the most important outcome of their growth...service. Not enough notice is given to our obligation to build others up. It is likely that maturity will naturally lead to increased service, but surely our volition is involved in a deliberate recognition of our need to pay more attention to the products or fruits of our maturity. To fulfill our purpose we must tend to the development and use of our gifts.

The end point of maturity is service. From another standpoint, maturity is the outcome of service, meaning that maturity is increased among those receiving the service. Each believer must assist others toward maturity, so the church unit can be strengthened and mobilized for greater service and God's glory. The topic of service has not received the attention it deserves in Christendom. Everything we do shakes down to one purpose: SERVICE. If we grow enough as believers, we can expect to enter a level of "super-maturity" that will enable us to *experience* the fullness of God, *surrender* completely to Him, *enjoy* victory over sin, and *receive* full contentment as we *enter* His rest. But when these have been attained, our focus shifts completely from OUR growth and joy to the NEEDS OF OTHERS. And when we recognize their needs and have our gifts in hand, we will know that there is nothing left to do but serve to help meet those needs. That is our charge and our mission.

Eph. 4:15-16 gives our central purpose, saying this:

Instead, speaking [teaching] the truth [truths for living] in love [in fellowship and maturity], we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

As we serve, which we are able to do because we have matured and are walking in the power of the Spirit, we will build each other up in every way "into Him", which means into a stronger connection with and reliance on His Spirit, who indwells each of us. This, in turn, enables greater

service which brings greater ability to others to serve...and the beat goes on. This is the “doing” aspect of our Christian life, and this is our central goal.

When you listen to soldiers returning from battles that have taken place in one location or another, they can be seen as having served for patriotism and “keeping our country safe” and preserving our freedoms, and so on. But when they were in real danger in the heat of battle, and life and limb were threatened, what was the one thing that made them race out to certain harm? We hear it over and over, and this is it: “I will die for my buddies.” When the unit comes together with a common purpose, and each is looking out for others, self-interests disappear. This is the way we as a believing unit should be: We have a mission, and the enemy is bearing down on us, so we must stand together and bolster each other as we advance toward the enemy as one, with clear orders and a full supply from our Commander.

Scriptures on Edification. Edification is the main purpose of gifted operations. Put another way, building each other up is foundational as a goal for gifted service. To help establish a base for further discussion on gifts, and to see the importance placed on edification in Scripture, we offer the following passages, with comments:

Rom. 15:1-2—“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” Everything we do with and for each other is based on our command to build on the command to edify. This does not mean to strengthen egos, which focuses on “selves in the world”, but to build each other up spiritually, wherein focus is on “each other” in the kingdom of God. Edification may be done through socializing, but socializing is not the point. Much of social experience is centered on the world and all its activities and goods; whereas contact among believers has as its purpose the strengthening of each other spiritually. When we are part of an ongoing group, or when we get together, our first priority is to fulfill each others’ needs, either directly through personal contact and interaction, or indirectly...through intercession, for example. Everything we do is directed toward maximizing opportunities to increase the growth of all.

Rom. 14:19—“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” Peace is reconciliation between one believer and others. This is true fellowship, based on mutual fellowship with the Holy Spirit. The effectiveness of gifts depends on a large number of believers living in fellowship. No edification will take place apart from the power of the Spirit, which can operate only when fellowship exists. Verse 17 says, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” These stand for fellowship, and why is this important? Verse 18 answers this, saying, “...because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.” When we are in fellowship, we will not alienate, offend, or do damage to other believers (v. 16), but will provide consideration toward them, so we can serve them.

1 Cor. 14:3—“But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” The exercise of our gifts is to strengthen, encourage, and

comfort other believers.

1 Cor. 14:26—“What shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.” Interaction among believers is for the strengthening of the church. In modern-day America, the tendency is to believe that we get together to “have a good time”, and it is easy to allow “fun” to override the serious purpose of edifying each other.

1 Cor. 14:37—“If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.” We are not just *encouraged* to identify and develop our gifts, we are *commanded* to do so. To be in God’s will, we must pay attention to our gifts and to the way they are used in service. Our command is clear: To do “all of these” (gifted functions) for the strengthening of the church. The test of excellence for our service—indeed, for any act directed toward fellow believers—is this: Is it *strengthening* them?

1 Cor. 10:23-33 (quoted in part): V. 24—“Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.” V. 31—“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble...” V. 33—“...even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved.” We are seeking the good of others, whether it is the salvation of unbelievers, or—more in keeping with our mission in the church—the growth of believers. Everything we do is related either to *preparation* for concentrated service, or the *performance* of that service for others.

1 Thess. 5:11—“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” Once again, we are to comfort each other and edify each other.

Eph. 4:29—“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Are we starting to see the seriousness with which we must assume our responsibility to use our gifts with definite dedication and pointed purpose? Everything we talk about has value to the degree that it edifies. Idle chat does not edify, which is not to say that it can never be used, but the main goal at the heart of God’s design is always to HELP by edifying, whether it is by direct instruction or another means. The operation of ALL gifts that are directed toward believers leads to edification...even “giving”...as those who “give” remove impediments to learning that may hamper knowledge and growth. All gifts lead to edification.

It is clear, then, that edification is the end product of our quest. We have no higher purpose. Even love and joy have, as we shall see, their greatest expression in acts of accommodating the needs of other believers. What are love and joy without specific proofs through service? These do not exist in a vacuum, but as motivators for godly behavior and divine good, manifested as acts of service.

Chapter 1-10

Lists of Gifts

Lists from My Previous Writings. In one of my earliest books, *Bible Basics on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life*, I provided a chapter entitled “Gifts”. I am providing this chapter as Appendix D here, not only for the lists of gifts which it contains, but for other insights on “gifts” which the chapter offers.

Lists from Kenneth Boa and Others. Kenneth Boa is a scholar, author, speaker, teacher, organizer, and publisher. His article, “The Gifts of the Spirit” provides comprehensive lists of gifts, with descriptions for them. His discussion is complete and insightful, and I heartily recommend your taking the time to go to www.bible.org, where you can search for this title or other articles from Kenneth Boa. (Endnote 1)

Here is an unembellished list, as provided by Boa in his article, where he identifies gifts from Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4:

1. Prophecy (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29; 14:1-40; Eph. 4:11)
2. Service (Rom. 12:7)
3. Teaching (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; Eph. 4:11)
4. Exhortation (Rom. 12:8)
5. Giving (Rom. 12:8)
6. Leadership (Rom. 12:8)
7. Mercy (Rom. 12:8)
8. Wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8)
9. Knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8)
10. Faith (1 Cor. 12:9)
11. Healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30)
12. Miracles (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 29)
13. Distinguishing of spirits (1 Cor. 12:10)
14. Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 14:1-40)
15. Interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 30; 14:5, 13, 26-28)
16. Apostleship (1 Cor. 12:28,29; Eph. 4:11)
17. Helps (1 Cor. 12:28)
18. Administration (1 Cor. 12:28)
19. Evangelism (Eph. 4:11)
20. Shepherd or pastor (Eph. 4:11)

These encapsulate the most common gifts that we associate with service, and many of us probably fit into one of these areas of giftedness. Many scholars have combed through Scripture to glean other gifts. Here are a few that others have identified:

1. Discernment (1 John 4:1)
2. Exhortation (Heb. 3:13; 10:25)
3. Knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18)
4. Mercy (Eph. 4:32)

Another list was suggested by C. Peter Wagner in *Your Spiritual Gifts*, quoted by Kenneth Boa in his aforementioned article. Here are some additional gifts from Wagner:

1. Celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7-9)
2. Poverty (1 Cor. 13:3)
3. Martyrdom (1 Cor. 13:3)
4. Hospitality (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9)
5. Missionary
6. Intercession
7. Music
8. Craftsmanship

There are undoubtedly a myriad of other gifts and even gifts within the same genre which differ by degrees. God dispenses gifts to provide distinct services that are needed on particular occasions by specific believers over the span of the gifted believer's life. I doubt seriously that God is all that concerned with the lists and categories that we identify, except to teach us principles and guidelines concerning the operation of our gifts. The gift or gifts that each believer is given probably has a "label" of some sort, but our first priority is to make sure we achieve the spirituality and maturity needed to make our gifts plain to us, and to make them usable for God.

Some gifts are thought to be "temporary", and we will address these later in this study.

Chapter 1-11

Overview of Romans 12

Overview. Romans 12 is a study on gifted service. There are a number of passages in Scripture that deal with gifts and the services they entail. We have introduced 1 Cor. 12, and we will embellish it further soon, as we add chapters 13 and 14 to the discussion. We have visited Eph. 4 in part, and will derive more from that chapter as we proceed. Other parts of Scripture will be considered, as well, to see their contribution to our understanding of gifts and service.

Our present focus, however, will be placed on Romans 12, for which we will render an overview in two parts. The first part of Romans 12 has to do with the *operation* of our gifts, while the second part has to do with the *basis* for our gifts. We will look here primarily at the first aspect of service, which is the “work” of service; and will reserve the bulk of discussion on the second part, which deals with the “love” behind service, for later. Please read this chapter in your Bible before you begin this study. Here are the two parts of Romans 12:

A. Rom. 12:1-8—The first half of Romans 12 cites the conditions and components for gifted operations. The verses are broken down, as follows:

1. This verse admonishes us to do something within the scope of God’s mercy and forgiveness, which means to confess our sins for forgiveness and to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit controls, we will offer our bodies to Him in sacrificial service. It is fitting that Paul’s discussion of gifted service should begin with the real source for all quality acts: the Holy Spirit. When we are in fellowship, we will perform worthwhile acts. We are told that such acts are “holy and pleasing to God”, and they are our “reasonable service” (NET). Service performed by His Spirit is “sanctified”...and pleases Him.
2. Here we see another condition set up for “reasonable service”; namely, *maturity*. When we are first saved, our hearts are still attuned to the ways and wants of the world. But as we are “transformed by the renewing of our minds”, we will become aware of the spiritual principles by which God intends for us to operate. When we go through the processes of growth, which we will review later, we will advance in our ability to recognize when the things happening in our lives come to us as correction because we have not confessed, or as prompts for growth through trials and tests that strengthen our faith. When we reach maturity, we will be able to know, not only God’s *general* will for believers (and for mankind in general), we will know His *specific* will for each of us...His “good, pleasing, and perfect will”. We will know the exact moment and occasion for our gifts to kick into motion, and there will be no wasted words or energy.
3. Paul starts this verse off by saying, “For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you...”

He is letting them know that he is operating within the parameters of his own gifts, using words which are stamped with the seal and approval of God. From this vantage point of authority, he tells the Romans to think humbly and realistically about themselves, so that they are not exaggerating their position above that which God intended. He says, "...think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." He wants them to correctly visualize themselves within the role defined by their gifts, not by the gifts of others, or gifts they imagine themselves to have. God has given a certain "faith" to each one, which means the "knowledge to function within specific gifts". Faith here means "knowledge" or "ability", speaking of the gift God has provided for specialized service. "Concentrated" service should be done within the limits of our own gifted area and not beyond. God gives us what He wants us to have.

4. We all have one body, and each of our bodies is made up of different parts. Each of these parts has a distinct role to play, which cannot be efficiently occupied by other parts. Each part must respect the role of other parts, and not try to assume or take over tasks naturally assigned to others. Ridiculous images of all kinds come to mind that illustrate such futile attempts, and we will see some of these later.
5. As members of the body of Christ, each of us is different, and each of us occupies a specific part in the function of the whole body. The parts of the body all work together to form a unit, without which any efforts by the body will be uncoordinated and poorly directed. We "belong" to each other, which means we must work cooperatively so the entire body will be strengthened.
6. So what distinguishes us from all other parts of the body? It is our "gifts". This verse begins with this: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." And then the rest of the verse give us an example of this "grace that is given", by saying, "If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." We will say more about the gift of prophecy later, but for now, we want to understand that it is an example of the kinds of gifts that are provided to hold the whole body of Christ together and keep it working properly.
7. This verse gives other examples of gifts, including "service" (special abilities to facilitate the gifts of others), and "teaching". Once again, much more on these will be provided soon.
8. The list of other skills is expanded in this verse to include encouragement, giving, leadership, and mercy, and provides parameters for each. Encouragement is self-explanatory, as it is given to believers whose spirits are sagging under the load of their growth and service. The gift of giving is to be done generously, which means that selfish needs become secondary. Leadership is to be done with complete focus and devotion to excellence; no lazy person can lead effectively. Finally, the showing of mercy is to be done cheerfully, which means without hesitation. When the gift

of mercy is at work, it will not be shown as an afterthought, but will work quickly and effectively to show the flagging or failing believer that he or she is still cared for, and that there is hope for forgiveness and improvement. The term “with cheerfulness” also connotes a condition of not being pulled down by someone else’s discouragement, but holding steady in a perspective of faith that will both demonstrate and teach the correct attitude we are to have toward the circumstances of life.

- B. Rom. 12:9-21—The second half of this chapter brings into play the motivating force for service, which is love. Anytime we see a discussion of gifted service, we will see it associated with love. As we stated earlier, we will have much more to say about the role of love as it relates to service...a whole chapter, in fact...and will merely acknowledge at this point that love is the key to service. This means that the first order of business is not the development of “service skills”, but of “love”, because without love, service will be contrived and fleshly. In verses 9-21, Paul illustrates the place of love, and establishes how essential it is for meaningful service. This passage has to do with our relationship with *believers*, even though it is often incorrectly applied to those we relate to outside the church. The purpose of what we read here is to establish our correct attitude toward FELLOW CHRISTIANS, even those who might be “enemies”. Our service is to ALL believers, because of the love we have for them.

We will revisit parts of Romans 12, as needed, throughout the rest of this study.

Chapter 1-12

False Teachings

False Gifts. Any gift can be faked by Satan. He can duplicate and exhibit the behaviors of gifted believers, and use his substitutes to trick and deceive believers who are seeking assistance in their Christian walk. One of the most prominent false gifts used by Satan is that of false teaching, since that is the one that influences the largest number of believers. A false teacher can wreck an entire local assembly, a city, or even a country. As we look to develop our own gifts and grow into greater service, we must be sure that we are getting correct information and “true” teaching, as false teaching can derail our spiritual advancement and destroy the service that is potential for us.

False Teaching Comes from Satan. Satan’s activities are not always blatantly evil, such as the despicable behavior we see in certain parts of the world, where the masks commonly used to conceal hatred and destructiveness have been removed. Such transparent evil unveils glaring, murderous treachery for all to see. These areas and groups require little encouragement from Satan; their evil is self-motivated and self-sustaining. But where Christianity exists and believers abound, Satan is hard at work to duplicate the “goodness” of the church to establish his own *approximation* of godly practices. His object is to blur the lines between man’s activities and God’s work. If he can convince people that human good is the same as divine good, then he can have Christians and others chasing causes, issues, and purposes that seem right or good, but that lead away from God. This serves Satan’s goal, which is to pull our attention away from God and to have us confide in our own resources...even for good causes.

Satan is the great counterfeiter. In a society that is largely “Christian”, he goes after faith at many levels. He presents lies and cloaks them in truth to make them appear believable. He takes darkness and dresses it in light. He takes humanity and frames it with the appearance of divinity to make man look godlike. He takes human abilities and equips them with supernatural qualities to make them appear superior and potent. He attempts to deceive and mislead in every possible way, to cause believers and others to doubt God, to ignore confession, study, and prayer, and to reject God’s training. He even uses fake “gifts” to mislead.

2 Cor. 11:13-15 describes Satan’s efforts to misdirect our attentions, as follows:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

Satan sends out his messengers, not as shifty-eyed charlatans, but as successful businessmen, popular politicians, mesmerizing performing artists, captivating activists with honorable causes, brilliant professors, articulate news analysts, and preeminent experts in many fields to capture our

attention and implant reasonable and practicable ideas for good and worthwhile living. And—oh, yes—he places his ministers in places of “religious” influence to impress the Christian masses that they are hearing God’s message. Some of their messages so completely overlap God’s truth and righteousness that they are hardly distinguishable from the real thing.

An example of satanic deception might be seen in the feeding of the hungry, which can hardly be seen as a “bad” thing. But when Satan mobilizes people, including believers who are out of fellowship, to make this their cause, they can convince themselves that they are being magnanimous, deceived into believing that they can do good without God. But without God behind this altruism, the acts are not good at all. This is tricky. Serving even the most noble of causes can represent “ungodly” behavior. Why? Because it can be directed by Satan and not by God. It may be done in the energy of the flesh and not the energy of the Spirit. This would mean that it is not “of faith” and anything not of faith is “sin”. Satan’s deceit is cunning and hard to spot. But when God’s leadership is followed, real good will be forthcoming, even the appropriate feeding of hungry people. It will be good, because it will be done according to God’s truth, in His strength and for His purpose. That is the difference

It is easy to follow convincing arguments delivered by skilled deceivers...human messengers that Satan dispatches to pronounce his lies. 1 Tim. 4:1-2a tells us, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars...” False teaching comes from demons, but is usually spoken through captivating human teachers. This is what makes it so difficult to see. A person who is deceived DOES NOT KNOW he is deceived. He accepts a lie without awareness that it is wrong. “Deceiving spirits” are easy to follow, because their message rings true and their delivery seems sincere.

We see this again in 2 Pet. 2:1-3a, which says this:

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even [subtly] denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.

These teachers are false, exercising fake gifts and secretly plotting to draw attention away from God and His divine truths. They propagate mixed and diluted “half-truths” that are actually lies being uttered through calculated omissions or high-flown overtones. And once the sheep fix their eyes on a false shepherd, they will follow him into deep waters that will swirl above their heads and drown them in false beliefs and practices. This is not the operation of cults or obscure groups with bizarre practices; this is the pattern of many large churches and influential organizations that promote a form or facsimile of the truth, but lace it with lies that distort and undermine its meaning and application, and make it impotent and/or destructive.

Other Passages Warning against False Teachers. We must challenge and test every message we hear concerning God and the truth. We see exhortations to do this in a number of scriptures,

some of which we will present here, with comments, as follows:

Matt. 7:15-18—“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” What is the fruit of false prophets? As it is with any gift, “Fruit” is “that which is produced”. And what does a prophet produce? Messages. And what does a “false prophet” produce? False messages! But how can we evaluate the messages? The key determiner for the quality and veracity of a prophet’s message is found in a simple test: Does it line up with the Word? Acts 17:11 shows that conscientious believers were properly wary of messages, and even examined Paul’s teachings every day by combing through what he taught. Their concern for truth was described, as follows: “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” We must conduct “due diligence” in determining whether what we are taught is verified in Scripture. If it is not, then we should reject it and keep an eye on our “teacher” to see if he is a “false prophet”.

Rom. 16:17-18—“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.” The obstacles that the “dividers” throw down into the paths of growing believers consist of teachings that are “contrary” to the truth. They come from great and influential speakers, but silver-tongued oratory can be filled with incorrect information which will quickly mislead and deceive. The words of our “teachers” must not only be scrutinized, they must be investigated with a full search for errors, lies, and misinterpretations. That includes this present study. Test it. Sift it. Reject it, if it does not meet the smell test of proper interpretation.

2 John 1:10-11—“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching [of Christ], do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.” We may not be able to judge the conduct of our teachers, but we can—and should—judge their words. And as we evaluate their doctrines, we should pray for wisdom...that God will lead us to the truth.

Col. 2:8—“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” When someone comes to us fresh from the idea gardens of the world, with erudite but false messages interwoven with real truth, and we buy it, we will be surrendering to a master who will ensnare and enslave us in a prison of ignorance and powerlessness. We will become slaves to a system of lies.

1 Tim. 1:3-7—“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote

themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work—which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.” Teachers who are speaking just to hear what they enjoy most—viz., hearing themselves talk—may impress others with their language and their oratory prowess, but they lack the fire of fellowship, meaning the filling and energizing of the Holy Spirit. Those who are teaching out of self-love will promote confusion and controversy, rather than “God’s work”; namely, service completed by maturing believers in the power of the Spirit. Regardless of how inspiring, stirring, and convincing their messages, the communications of false teachers amount to meaningless babble.

1 John 4:1—“Dear friends, 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 must comb through each statement, and see its correlation with Scripture. If it cannot be ascertained as true, then it should be either shelved or discarded. It is not ready to become operational. John wrote 1 John to warn against unbelieving false teachers, comparing them to their opposites: believers in fellowship. In 1 John 2:26 he stated his purpose: “I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.” And then he proceeds to tell his readers what to watch for and guard against in the messages they were tending to accept as “truth”.

When we embark on a quest for truth, we can be sure of one thing: Satan’s opposition will come against us with every false notion imaginable. He will dress in his finest suit, flash his whitest smile, and charm us with his most brilliant words. This makes our task of discerning the truth especially difficult. Without a true desire for God and His truth, we will be easy prey for false teachers, and will join the throng of those who have already succumbed to the lure of Satan and his ambassadors.

Chapter 1-13

Verses on Gifts

Why should we Read These Verses? As we are writing, sometimes we editorialize and express opinions, and either don't want to over-repeat the scriptural underpinning of what we say, or we simply "intuit" and present certain principles out of a general awareness of truth. In other words, sometimes we (I) "generalize". It is good, though, when we can slow down and review pertinent passages to add weight to our arguments. The following verses provide a strong basis for much that we have introduced already and/or will be exploring further in the remainder of this book. These passages will help us further frame our discussion, and provide additional depth regarding gifts:

Acts 2:1-4—When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Rom. 12:6-8—We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to [in agreement with] his faith [*the* faith, meaning "the Word"]. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

1 Cor. 12:4-11—There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each, just as he determines.

1 Cor. 14:26—What shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

Eph. 4:11-13—It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Heb. 2:4—God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Heb. 13:20-21—May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Tim. 1:6—For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

There are other passages describing the universality and usefulness of gifts. We have much to do in our lives, which are being shaped by the Holy Spirit to reflect Christ, mostly through our gifts. Almost all creditable “doing” will take place within the utilitarian area of gifted service. This is why we must learn all we can about these gifts and their operation.

Part Two

Initiation into Service, and Following

In This Part...

Chapter 2-1. Finding your Gift(s)

Chapter 2-2. Following Christ's Example

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Chapter 2-1

Finding your Gift(s)

Preliminary Reading Assignment. If you have not already read the chapter on gifts in the book titled, *Bible Basics on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life*, please read Appendix D, “Gifts”, which is a complete presentation of that chapter. It is an excellent complement to our current study and helps set up this chapter on “finding your gifts”.

Establishing our Gifts. The first thing we must do is establish the fact that it is crucial for us to identify our gifts. Most believers, and I mean an overwhelming majority, are just floating through their lives with little concern for their specific gifts and the types of service which their gifts imply. In 2 Tim. 1:6, Paul told Timothy to pay attention to his gifts, saying, “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” When we add wind to a fire, what happens? It gets bigger and hotter, because it gets more oxygen. Paul is telling Timothy to do what it takes to increase the intensity and effects of his gifts.

In terms of what we have studied historically, what would it mean for us to “fan the flame” of our gifts? It would mean we must add a quality to our gifts which would make them more effective. And what is that? It is the operating power of the Holy Spirit! And how do we acquire this? Stated as succinctly as possible, here is the answer: We get His power by staying in fellowship with Him through the constant confession of our sins, and by going through God’s growth program of study and endurance (endurance implies the presence of some form of tests or trials)...to strengthen our faith. By GROWING (i.e., building our faith), we will increasingly walk in the Spirit, whereby our gifts will be activated, thus yielding fruit. To serve, we must first *prepare* to serve.

Paul was telling Timothy to *pay attention* to his spiritual life so that his gift would become more useful and beneficial to those it served. Then notice what Paul reminded Timothy of in verse 7 (still 2 Tim.): “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” He is telling Timothy that the operation of our gifts *in the power and love of the Holy Spirit* will automatically overpower any reluctance or reticence we might have to start moving and begin service. The key is “power and love”. The “self-discipline” shown here is simply the response of “self” to the empowerment of the Spirit, which conveys the idea of “godly direction”. The influence of the Spirit is much more effective for producing anything good than self-motivation or personal determination.

When we are walking in the Spirit, the hue of “self” changes from one of darkness to one of light...i.e., from “self-service” to “godly service”. Eph. 5:8b-9 tells us, “Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)...” When we live in the light, we will qualify to illuminate others through gifted service. 1 Cor. 3:6-7 frames our place in the operation of gifts, as follows: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything but only God, who makes things grow.” Real

productivity comes from God, through us, toward those who need the service. When we rely on His Spirit, His work gets done.

Don't Neglect your Gifts. Paul told Timothy he must continue to exercise his gift, once he has established it. In 1 Tim. 4:13-16, Paul told him the following:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save [deliver] both yourself and your hearers.

Don't neglect your gift! Pay attention to it! Be "diligent" in cultivating it and putting it to use. This implies a proper spiritual condition, which is influenced by what we value and what we want. Do we want God more than anything? Do we want to walk with Him? Do we want to grow in Him and serve Him? Do we value God's will? If so, we will obey His commands to confess, study, pray, and endure, so that we can trust Him more and more, which will allow Him to do more.

"Give yourself wholly to them." This applies to each of us, just as much as it did to Timothy, because each of us is a priest and minister. The hardest condition for any believer to achieve, and the ultimate test of maturity, is the condition of being focused completely on God, the relentless demands of our busy world notwithstanding. God will be everything to us...or He will be as nothing. When we know this and choose Him, along with the difficult path this entails, we will be deciding to persevere in all spiritual matters. This will enable us to grow and to establish the gifts that will provide service within our personal ministry.

The sooner we pay attention to our gifts, the sooner we will learn what they are, and how to use them, thus avoiding patterns that waste time and energy...and engender the performance of low-production activities.

Being Eager for the Greater Gifts. It is possible to recognize the value of some act or thing without coveting it or envying those who have (or do) it. And it is always appropriate to give thanks for what God brings, and know that what He brings to us, He intends for our good and growth and usefulness. This applies to gifts, as well as to living conditions.

It is possible for us to recognize the effectiveness of the "greater gifts" without being disappointed that none of these gifts are ours. We can be "eager" to appreciate these gifts and benefit from them, without being flooded with a "need" to possess or emulate them. Still, there is a tendency to want what others have, if it looks better to us than what we have.

1 Cor. 12:27-31 (NIV) frames the idea of "wanting" certain gifts by saying this:

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in

tongues? Do all interpret? But [you] eagerly desire the greater gifts.

The standard NIV translation for verse 31 sounds like a command: “eagerly desire the greatest gifts”, but the NIV offers an alternative in the footnotes, which I like better: “But you eagerly desire the greater gifts.” Paul is announcing that the Corinthians *are* desiring the greater gifts, not that they *should* want them. He names the “greater gifts” in verses 27-30, citing those which are more visibly-impactful than others. These are the gifts that the Corinthians want; they want gifts that are considered extraordinary...those that will draw public acclaim...and this is the condition Paul is trying to correct.

Transitioning from 1 Cor. 12 to 1 Cor. 13, Paul turns the discussion on its head by saying, “And now I will show you the most excellent way” (13:1). In other words, there is a better way to view and approach giftedness. He was informing the Corinthians in chapter 12 that they have *wanted* the “best” gifts, and then explains to them in chapter 13 that superior gifted operations will be done more from the right *spiritual condition*, than from this particular gift or that. He is saying to them that their longing for and adoration of specific gifts is actually a waste of time. He then defines, as we will see shortly, the specific spiritual condition they should fulfill in order for them to serve with distinction; he shows them “the most excellent way” to work their gifts.

What IS the most excellent way to exercise our gifts? He spends an entire chapter answering this question (1 Cor. 13), saying that it is through LOVE that we must exercise our gifts. (We will discuss love more thoroughly at a later time, and will at that time elucidate the whole concept of love as it relates to gifts.) Love, he says, is the arena within which gifts can function effectively. Love, remember, signifies fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit provides the power for gifted service. When we function in the Spirit, we operate in love.

The theme of “serving in love” continues in the next chapter—chapter 14—where Paul restates the call to exercise our gifts *in love*, saying, “Follow the way of love and seek eagerly the spiritual things, rather, that you may prophesy” (1 Cor. 14:1). (Endnote 2, *Literal Translation of the Bible*) The meaning of “follow the way of love” is clear, but the rest of this verse is controversial and complex, so we will divert our attention briefly to extricate the lesson that it holds.

The NIV translates the second part of the verse, “eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” This sounds like a command to go after certain gifts (similar to 12:31 above), especially the gift of prophecy. Let’s dig further. The *Literal Translation* renders the same part of the verse, as follows: “pursue love, and seek eagerly the spiritual things, but rather that you may prophesy.” This is getting closer, in my view, to the true translation of this passage, but it still needs further probing. I examined the Greek wording in verse 1, and offer what I see as a better translation, which goes like this: “Follow the way of love and eagerly seek the spiritual to a greater degree, so that you may prophesy.” This changes the meaning altogether from the translation of the NIV, and clarifies the *Literal Translation* version.

The improved translation instructs us to seek the “spiritual”...or “spirituality”...so that we may (for example) “prophesy”. When we achieve maturity and spirituality, we can “prophesy”, or EXERCISE WHATEVER GIFT WE HAVE, within the field of love. When we seek spirituality “to a greater

degree”, we will be claiming God’s assets for doing His work, His way, in His power.

We have confidence that the NIV translation is wrong, because we don’t choose our gifts, or go after certain gifts; we accept the gifts God chooses for us, and then we use them in ways and at times that He directs. The word “gifts” is not even in the original Greek wording for verse 1. Neither is the word, “things”, as seen in the *Literal Translation*. We are to desire the SPIRITUAL...that is all it says...and that is where gifted service, the general theme of 1 Cor. 12, 13, and 14, actually originates...from *spirituality*.

The gift of “prophecy” was used as a *specific* example of *various* gifts. The question is this: Why did Paul use prophecy as the example? Answer: because it is an observable and serviceable gift, a “run-of-the-mill” *greater* gift. But what did the Corinthians want? *Exciting* gifts. Gifts that left people breathless, and staring in admiration of those with the gifts. Prophecy and ordinary gifts were spurned by the Corinthians, in favor of “spectacular” gifts, like “works of power” or “healing” or...the one Paul used as an example...“speaking in a foreign language”. Why did they want the grander gifts? Attention and approbation.

Prophecy is named as a *valuable* gift in chapter 14, but it is not as *sensational* as tongues. This is what the Corinthians wanted...sensationalism. They had plenty of gifts, but they were going after the *wrong* gifts, not to mention that none of their gifts were operating properly. Why? Because they were immature (1 Cor. 3:1-3). *Immature impulses* prompted them to go after the gift of tongues...whether God was assigning that gift to them or not. Paul showed them the fallacy in this approach to finding and using their gifts.

Verse 4 says, “The one speaking in tongues builds himself up; but the one prophesying builds up a church.” (Endnote 3) If we take the view that the term “builds himself up” means “edification”, our actions would seem to be pointless, because we would be our own “edifier”, or teacher. It is hard to see how we would learn much, when the pool of knowledge we are drawing from to teach ourselves is that which we already know. So “builds himself up” probably means in this case to “magnify oneself”, not “edify oneself”. One speaking in tongues may well be doing so to draw attention to himself; whereas the one prophesying can build others up.

What was even worse with the Corinthians was this: they didn’t even know what they were saying when they spoke in tongues, because there was no interpreter...talk about an exercise in futility. Our objective is to build up the church, not advance ourselves. Those who use an assumed gift to call attention to themselves are not doing God’s work, and their “activity”, which they possibly view as somehow “spiritual”, amounts to *nothing*. ANY gift that is operating without the energy of the Spirit will be one-hundred percent non-productive. (See 1 Cor. 12:1-11. “Spirit of God” or “Spirit” is used ten times in these eleven verses on gifts.)

Paul is saying that we should SEEK SPIRITUALITY IN ORDER TO EXERCISE OUR GIFTS! When we are “spiritual”, we will be following the way of love. And when love is at work due to spirituality, we will serve contentedly within the limits of the gifts we have been given. The gifts we use will be our own, and THEY WILL BE OPERATING IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT.

We are now at the core of Paul's objective in writing to the Corinthians. His message has two parts, as follows: 1) We must perform our gifts only in fellowship...in the power of the Spirit..., and 2) the bulk of our service must occur within the gifts we are given. It is important to serve by using the gifts that God gives us, rather than the gifts we think are "cool". And instead of wanting the most spectacular gifts, we must operate within the sphere of *our own gifts* by operating in love. "Operating in love", once again, means "walking in the Spirit".

We must BEGIN WITH FELLOWSHIP, desiring a closer relationship with God *more than* any specific gift; and then we must operate within the EXACT GIFT GOD WANTS US TO HAVE...THE GIFT THAT FITS US BEST. Only then can we be assured that WE WILL BE EFFECTIVE IN OUR SERVICE. It is likely that the believer walking in the Spirit will operate in his own gift BY DEFAULT. The truly "spiritual" believer...i.e., the one in fellowship...can only do "right". (For more on fellowship, see Appendix E, "Restoring and Maintaining Fellowship".)

So, what are we to do? We are to want God first, meaning that our first priority should be to attend to the spiritual life we can have with Him. This should take priority over our attempting to become noticed and praised through our gifted service. When we are close to God, we will accept the gifts he gives, confident that our specific gift(s) will be the ones he will use through us for greatest effect. Remember that it is only what God does with and through our gifts that will count. What we do independently, or apart from God, will have little or no value. What works is what we do within the scope of a complete reliance on Him. God does not need us; we need Him. What should we want? God. It is in Him that we will discover our proper place and service. In a close walk with Him we will find the right gifts, and then we will be relying on Him to "work" our gifts to bear His fruit.

Finding your Gift. Finding our gifts begins with growth. As we begin our search, we must focus on God's truth; He will speak to us through His Word, if we are seeking to get closer to Him. Soon enough, we will begin to see ourselves within the framework of the life God is bringing to us. An extension of this is that—as we begin to mature—insight into our gifts will sharpen, so that we can determine where our abilities lie and where our service should be concentrated. This requires perseverance and patience, which are touchstones of a growing faith. The point is this: Item one for an immature Christian is to BEGIN GROWTH. Only then can he conduct a meaningful search for his area of giftedness.

Growth is central to Christian living; but then we can add some things to growth that will help us recognize our gifts as we move ahead. Here are some screening questions that can help you know what to watch for as you are discovering your gift or gifts:

1. What do I do well? (May or may not be indicative of a gift.) What is it clear that I *cannot* do?
2. What draws my compassion? What do I care about? What do I "love"?
3. How do I react to specific situations? (For example, am I frustrated by disorganization? If so, I may have the gift of "administration".)
4. What have I done in different kinds of "service" that satisfy me most? (It is likely that there

will be some kind of confirmation of my gifts within my Christian experience.)

5. What do I *want* to do? (This will, of course, be trumped by what God wants me to do, but these may correspond.)
6. Have I grown through study, prayer, and God's training? (This is the most important step in recognizing and applying your gift. Without growth, "service" will never be "gifted".)

Except for point 6, these are not taken from Scripture, and are offered as food for thought. The most direct route to distinguishing our gifts is through growth. I am convinced that if we do nothing more or less than continuing to grow, we will eventually find our gifts and use them meaningfully. I do not, on the other hand, recommend any unnecessary delay in the implementation of our gifts. We should learn and grow AS we watch closely for any sign of giftedness. As we do all the things needed for growth, we will come across opportunities for service that will illuminate any gifts we have.

During and after the discovery of our gifts, they will become the daily focus of all our Christian practices, including the center of our prayers. I mention prayer in particular, because I see it as crucial in the process of discovering and using our gifts. We can pray for wisdom, clarity, feedback, and fruit as we begin to identify and use our gifts.

Other things will contribute to growth and gift development, and we will cover them all. Most importantly, remember this: The one thing we must NOT do as we are growing is to ignore the cultivation of our gifts. This process gets too little attention from most pastors, and because of this, believers under their care will not grow, they will not discover their gifts, and they will not serve. And the church will sleep.

God Gives the Gifts. God is the one who selects our gifts. Through His infinite and perfect wisdom, foreknowledge, and planning, God has made decisions about the gifts that fit each of us and that will serve His purposes. As those who trust Him, we accept the gifts He gives, and know that no gift is either "inferior" or "superior" to all others. Ours is but to grow and believe that He is making the best choice regarding His gifts to us. If we reject His choice and decide to clamor and claw our way up some spiritual ladder, we will fail to serve Him, and we will be operating in the flesh, which can never serve spiritual purposes. Gifts that are "popular" at a given time may be enticing and appealing, but if they are not the right ones for us, they will not contribute to the growth of others.

As we embark on a path toward growth and service, we must be sure that our objective is to identify and develop the gifts we are given. Here is what we said a few books back, in *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*:

It is also important to understand that our gifts should be ours, and the gifts of others should belong to them. They are not the same. It is a mistake to try to be the Christian *everyman*. Satan loves nothing better than to confound church machinery by having everyone trying to operate in the gifts of others, or for *everyone* to try to do *everything*. We may not know what our gift is for a long time, while we are leaving the spiritual crib and growing into spiritual

adulthood, but once we ascertain what our gift is, we should put our full energy into the refinement and operation of that gift. And never should we try to “imitate” other gifts, or try to be what we aren’t, as this will inevitably lead to disappointment and failure.

Authenticity will occur in the operation of our gifts, if we are sincere in our search for God...and for His will and plan. As we will see again and again, everything we DO arises from what we BECOME on the inside...in and through Him.

Chapter 2-2

Following Christ's Example

Jesus: Our Example. Many times the example of Jesus is seen in His loving demeanor and pure lifestyle. These and many other things about Him are certainly worth imitating, but we must establish at the outset that the only real “Christ-like life” we will show is the “life He lives”. In other words, to imitate Him, we must let Him become Himself IN US. As we begin to look at Jesus Christ as our example, we must establish right away that our following His example consists of our becoming like Him by releasing His life in us through the growth of our faith and the filling of His Spirit. We will say much more about these things as we proceed, but for now, we want to be clear that looking at His example is more about spirituality than conformity.

Jesus is our example for service. When He had washed His disciples' feet, He said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). There are other messages in this verse, but the one we want to see is that Jesus was a “servant”. He actually used this term in verse 16. Jesus was God, yet He considered Himself a servant. In Matt. 20:28, He said, “...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” We cannot give as He did, but we can serve, as we shall see. Phil. 2:5-8 adds this about Jesus' service:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

The nature of a servant is the attitude that realizes this: God is God and we are not. Trying to be more than we are is a universal impulse that we all experience. Even our great grandmother Eve thought maybe she could be like God through Her own efforts. It seems that none of us wants to be the tail; we want to be “somebody”. Taking on the role of a servant seems beneath us...demoralizing, demeaning. But that is the example that Jesus Christ set. He laid aside the fullness of what He was and acquiesced to the power and plan of His Father. He stripped Himself of divine privilege, which was the most extreme self-denial in all the universe. Going back to Phil. 2 and looking at verse 5, we see that Paul admonishes, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” How is that done? Verse 3 answers: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” Christ's example is found in His humility.

What enabled Jesus to take on the attitude of a servant? It was His full awareness of His role in relation to His Father's plan. As a man, He knew He could do nothing without the strength and life of the Father. His attitude was one of surrender to the Father's will and plan, and one of complete dependency on the Father's power. This is the position we must now assume in regard to God. We

must step down to the level of a servant to allow Him to make us kings with Him. In Luke 22:24-26 Jesus described this, saying the following:

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

Greatness is not found in authority or position; it is found in service. This is one of the hardest lessons we can learn in our Christian lives, and the part of Christ's example that is hardest to follow. Pride insists that we be recognized. If Christ had taken such a position, we would not have the place we have now, or the future we will have, because He would have said He did not care to bother sacrificing Himself as He did. But He did take on the role of a servant, and relied completely on His Father for everything. This is Christ's greatest example: In His humanity, He relied on God, and knew that His Father was the source of all goodness and life.

In John 5:19, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Jesus Christ saw His Father working, and He knew that—without His Father's initiative—He in His humanity could do absolutely nothing. And since He had placed His deity on the shelf, His only resource, and now ours, is the power of God the Father, without which—like Christ—we can do nothing.

Here are some other verses pointing up what Christ could not do without the Father, as we consider that we cannot do them either, and that we are dependent on the Father for everything:

John 5:30a—By myself I can do nothing...

John 5:41—I do not accept praise from men...

John 6:38a—For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me...

John 7:28a—Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true...

John 8:28b-29—...you will know that I am the one I claim to be, and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.

John 8:50—I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.

John 14:10—Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Jesus' example is that He gave up everything for His Father, because He counted on His Father to sustain Him...and notice that He lost nothing as a result of giving so much. In His humanity, He surrendered everything and gained a throne. We must look to His example of surrender to the

Father, and know that whatever we give in service will not be lost. God will be honored and we will be rewarded.

Following Christ's Example. In the last section we saw Phil. 2:5, which says, "Your attitude should be that of Christ Jesus." Jesus was humble, obedient, and completely dependent on the Father. He is our example, not just to marvel at, but to FOLLOW. John 15:18-20a says this about following Jesus:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

Following Him is what we did initially at salvation, when we believed in Him. After that we have the privilege of following Him as God's children. But following Christ is not a bus tour; it involves sacrifice and suffering, which are designed to help us build our faith, and by which we can produce more fruit. What Christ wants is for us to live as He lived by letting Him live through us, with the result that we will experience events similar to what He did. For example, He says in verse 19 that the world will hate us when we follow Him. (We might consider what it would mean if the world *loved* us, instead.) They will persecute us (v. 20), which sounds like something we should avoid, but He calls on us to embrace persecution as a means to advance within His kingdom.

What does it mean specifically, though, to follow Christ? This seems ethereal and unattainable. How is it measured, other than some kind of persecution in the world? Here is where we must come to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit in helping us to follow Christ. This is a study all its own, and we would wander too far from our main point if we provided too much detail here about the connection between Christ and His Spirit. In synopsis, Jesus Christ physically ascended into heaven, where He now sits at the right hand of the Father. In His place, He and His Father sent the Holy Spirit to become the active member of the Trinity in the lives of believers. For the most part, our relationship with Christ is now conducted through the Holy Spirit, who recreates the life of Christ in us when we are in fellowship with Him.

Christ introduced the riddle: How can I be saved? He then brought the solution: His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session. Did Christ declare the solution? Yes...when He called for us to "believe". And did He declare the standards for our lives? Yes...when He commanded us to love God and love man. But did He explain the details of how our interaction with God would be conducted? Yes...but only peripherally...in parables. The truths suggested in the parables that He taught created mystery, which would wait for their solution in the teachings of the apostles, who were gifted and inspired writers of truth; they would explain how we are to live as believers.

It is the Holy Spirit who now illuminates God's truths through the words of the apostles, words written under His inspiration and guidance. These truths have been codified and preserved by the Holy Spirit to be distributed throughout the world, 1) to promote salvation, and 2) to show believers how they are to live. Why is it important to understand the relation between the example that Christ offered and the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit? Because it is the Spirit who is

the Christ within us. It is through Him that the Savior is portrayed and glorified. And it is through our fellowship with Him that we become His vessels, instruments, and tools as He does His work.

In a book by J. Hampton Keathley, III, titled *Marks of Maturity: Biblical Characteristics of a Christian Leader*, he stated the following concerning our operating according to Christ's example of service:

No one in their own energy has the ability to give themselves sacrificially as a servant according to the example of the Savior. For this we need the transforming ministry and enablement of the Holy Spirit and the renewing direction, grace, and strength that comes from living and growing in the Word. Thus, a Word-filled (Col. 3:16), Spirit-filled life (Eph. 5:18) is an absolute essential to the ability to give ourselves as servants. (Endnote 4)

Christ grew, and so must we, if we are going to serve. This is exactly what we see in Rom. 12:1-2, as follows:

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

Through maturity and spirituality, we will find the pathway to service that will spring from the love generated through our communion with the Holy Spirit, who thereby enables us to follow Christ.

Chapter 2-3

Having Self-Confidence

Societal Positions Regarding Self-Confidence. A common theme, especially for the last thirty years, is that the greatest problem in society is the absence of self esteem. The reason people misbehave is that they lack a positive view of themselves, which causes them to act out to get the attention and validation they need. The claim is that we must each have more self-love, self-esteem, and self-worth to improve our attitudes and behavior. The case is made that our greatest *needs*, psychologically and sociologically, revolve around the absence of positive estimations of ourselves. We need more regard for our own value. If we can settle the issue of our personal worth in a positive way, then we can lose all anxiety about our own merits, and become secure enough that we can look to the needs of others. If we can implant *confidence* in ourselves, we can become better “selves”. But this is the world’s view.

According to the “love-yourself” view, the most important thing we can do is to take steps to correct any deficiencies we may have in our self-esteem. Both external and internal solutions are offered. *External* things that are suggested revolve around attending to our success and status through education and self-improvement. How can this be bad? If we are admired and recognized, surely this will go a long way toward correcting any negative views we have of ourselves, as the story goes. And then there are *internal* solutions that can help us feel better about ourselves, such as positive self-talk, whereby we feed our minds with positive messages aimed at boosting our flagging self-image. Look in the mirror each morning and say to yourself, “I am a good and worthwhile human being. I am capable and strong. And I can count on myself.” The intent is to say this to yourself enough times that you start to believe it, so that you can hopefully begin to live as a stable and confident person.

So goes the world view of self-confidence. What I need in order to function is to be competent and to believe in myself. There is a great deal that we could say that would refute this, but that would take more space than we have here, because discrediting it is not as easy as it might seem. Why? Because many of the solutions offered by the world actually work to some degree.

On the face of it, the value of self-improvement is provable and practicable...something that even believers can embrace and follow with some good effects. It is undeniably good to try to become better and more skilled in one’s job or role (worker, businessman, parent, friend, spouse, etc.), and confidence in one’s abilities can truly be enhanced through practice and skill-development. But get this: There is nothing we can do within the “world arena” that will be enough to ELIMINATE negative impressions which have been etched into our self-concepts. There will always be nagging voices within us, whispering arguments that we are INADEQUATE. Apart from God, this image will not be changed completely, because we got this sense of self from the world, and the world cannot remove it entirely...and it may even make things worse.

Our problem is that we have been trying to work from the outside to the inside to correct our self-confidence issues; i.e., we have assumed that, if we can change our performance, we can change our minds about ourselves. By doing well, we can alter any notions that we are not good. Once again, there is some truth in this, but it will never be *enough* to remove an abiding sense of deficiency. Even contrived self-messages of a positive sort come to us from the “outside”, and their effects will be limited.

We are convinced that the solution to a lack of self-confidence comes from the *inside*, but we mean DEEP on the inside...from the level of our inner being...not from superficial attempts at self-talk or self-hypnosis. (When positive self-talk is a lie, we will know at some root level that we are lying to ourselves, and we will reject it.) Until our HEARTS are changed, nothing else will really change in our thoughts or attitudes, even our view of ourselves. (For more on the “heart”, see the chapter, “The Internal Make-up of Man” and the chart which follows it, in *Bible Basics on Walking in the Spirit: Pathway to Production*, p. 3 and following.)

While our hearts remain as they are, there will be, at base, no change in behavior or attitude. But how does this work in our Christian lives? Surprisingly, nothing will measure the level of our spiritual strength like the presence of confidence. Huh? We will explain. For this, we must turn from the world’s view of “self-confidence” to God’s view.

Scriptural Positions on Self-Confidence. Faith in “self” is a sin, yet a correct spiritual position is to have *confidence*. The key is the SOURCE of our confidence. Confidence generally translates as “self” confidence, but our message is this: true confidence *comes from God*. The *effect* of confidence that comes from God is *confidence toward all of life’s circumstances*, which is experienced as a sense of security and sureness...or a specialized kind of self-confidence.

The flow must be established: Spiritual growth leads to stronger faith, which leads to confidence in life. But where does this confidence rest? It rests in God, and not in ourselves. The outcome is that, through *faith*, we live in *confidence*, but notice: all the rules have changed. No longer are we dependent on our own competence or lovability or beauty or the world’s view of us for our inner well-being. In fact, external input will likely become even more negative as we grow, because, as Jesus said, “the world will hate you”. But when we have faith in God, internal constancy will increasingly stabilize into confidence.

We will contrast this with the world’s methods for improving confidence and self-esteem. As believers attempt to operate in the world which they occupy, and follow a tendency to rely on the world for self-esteem, they become immersed in the issue of “self love”. Self-love leads to pride, which leads to lost faith, which finally leads to spiritual flatness. And, within the context of our purpose (and the larger topic of this book), when our spirits are deflated, there can be no joy or service. Service does not come through competence or worldly self-confidence; it comes through humility and faith and surrender...and God’s power. If you have a weak self-concept (and chances are, in all honesty, you probably do), then you need greater FAITH...much more than you need greater ABILITY. Self-development is fine, but only in a place where it comes second to spiritual growth. Grow spiritually FIRST, and then your confidence can be improved in ways that are

appropriate and helpful, leading to greater service.

Phil. 3:1-5a provides a good look at the place of self-love, as follows:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

This passage begins by citing the cause of “terrible times”, which is a condition of “people loving themselves”. And the passage ends with the worst possible outcome: “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”. Everything in between the “condition” (loving self) and the “outcome” (not loving God) is disclosed as the outcropping of self-service, reflecting the horrible results that arise from preoccupation with self. When we love ourselves, God takes a back seat. When we are *locked* into a pattern of loving ourselves, our love for God disappears, and all service is for self and not for Him, even if it takes on altruistic appearances.

When we love ourselves, money and pleasure displace compassion and service, and we count on the world to give us value and worth. Self-confidence will not come through self-love or faith in self. Solid self-confidence will only come through a mature faith in God. There is no greater source for a positive and confident sense of self than in our knowing that *our purpose is the highest in the universe*, which is to serve God by serving others.

Confidence in our Gifts. Then there is the notion of our gifts. When we know our gifts, even if we doubt our own abilities, we can know that God is the one who works our gifts, and we can have complete confidence that—if we have met the spiritual prerequisites—we will be “successful” and productive in our service.

“Self-esteem” should revolve around our gifts, because it is there that we can have full confidence and proceed with a degree of authority. The problem with most of us is that we want to be competent in ALL areas, and—if we are not—our self-evaluation returns to a reading of “inadequate”. This attitude spills over into our gifted areas, and prevents our having confidence in our gifts, the very place where we are to exhibit complete confidence. This confidence is based on maturity and faith in God’s ability, but it translates psychologically as *our* confidence...in the area of our gifted service. And the more time we spend functioning in the area of our gifts, the more time we will spend in calm and resolute confidence in the *efficacy* of our gift.

True self-confidence does not arise from an attitude of arrogance or a lack of humility, but from confidence in God’s ability to work within us. Based on this, while we are exercising our gifts, there is no cause for reticence or timidity. Paul told Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim. 1:6)...show a little fire when you are exercising your gift...“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Tim. 1:7). When we are growing and exercising our gifts, we will develop a bounce as we step out to serve, because there is power behind it. We will have confidence, because we have faith, and the Holy Spirit who lives within us

will be helping us each step of the way (see 2 Tim. 1:14).

Chapter 2-4

Selfishness Prevents Service

Self-Service. Building on our study in the last chapter, we look now at an extension of *proper* self-confidence, which is service. Or, conversely, at *improper* self-confidence, which comes from self-service. The biggest problem we have is that we are centered on ourselves, rather than God. It is NATURAL that we should consider ourselves above all else, since the human core of our function is our SINFUL NATURE. We are naturally prone to be selfish, self-serving, and self-pleasing.

The biggest trap we will encounter in service is falling into “self-service”, which is the wrong kind of service, and is actually not serving at all. If we serve to have our egos stroked, or to receive approbation from others, then we are serving ourselves, rather than others. On the other hand, if we become “mature” (as per Eph. 4:13), then we can serve others through our gifts. With stronger faith and the Spirit’s guidance, we can “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), meaning “teach the truth”, which means in turn to *exercise our gifts*. The result is that others will be “built up” (Eph. 4:12), as “each part does its work” (Eph. 4:16). The sequence is clear: 1) mature, and then, 2) help others mature. The production of *maturity* among all of us, more than relief or comfort, is the objective of service.

But we are attached to a ball and chain, the greatest impediment to our spiritual progress and creditable service, our *sinful nature*. It is our most fundamental drive to be self-preservative, and subsequently, self-absorbed. It is irresistible to seek self promotion as our most compelling pursuit. Even in “church”, we look for recognition. A risky part of noteworthy service is the danger that we will become “proud” of it. The “good feelings” of success can become a playground for Satan, where he can toy with our delusional self-imaginings, prompting us to envision ourselves as conquering heroes and leaders of men.

When self-attention becomes entangled with our service, it is easy for us to rationalize the tactics we engage to draw all eyes toward ourselves. How many successful and productive Christian leaders have fallen through trap doors opened by pride? And when they fall, sins of all kinds creep in so that service is disrupted and possibly even destroyed. This is the tragedy of service sullied by selfishness.

In *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, we cited the “law of sin”, which rises up and attacks when maturity is taking place. The more progress we are making spiritually, the greater will be the intensity of efforts by Satan and the world to lure us away from our growing faith. And they will attack our weakest spots, which are within ourselves. Self-pity, self-will, self-trust, self-improvement, self-justification, self-interest, self-enrichment, self-satisfaction, and on and on: these are the areas within which we begin to seek refuge, as we succumb to an ever-increasing barrage of demonic attacks.

An outcome of these attacks might be that we will become worn down. We want rest, but can’t

seem to find it, so we indulge ourselves with self-solace and a justification of growing refusals to study and pray. We seek distractions and pleasures, in lieu of continuing our growth. But NOTE: If we give in to fatigue and doubt, we will lose the ground we have already gained, and will be caught up in the strong current of reversionism. Growth will have stopped, and God's corrective agenda will be initiated soon enough.

Another effect of the increased attacks that come with growth is that we begin to see the tests and trials of training as cursed misfortunes, rather than growth opportunities. When the attacks come is when we must recall: THERE IS REST, if we know where to find it (more on this below). This rest will not be found in self-fulfillment, but will come when we reach the point in our maturity when victory over sin, along with true contentment, is attained. Reaching this point requires great endurance. We must be consistently trusting God throughout various forms of adversity and suffering, thanking Him for them, waiting on Him to bring relief from them at some point, and refusing to turn our eyes on ourselves as He is training us. These make up the components for building a super-structure of faith. Self-service does not contribute to this.

Concentrated self-service will actually prevent our growth, with the result that service for others will not be accomplished. We will be restless and dissatisfied, but there will be no escape from our frantic pursuit of self-elevation, because the demands from our needy selves cry out constantly for attention, and we respond to them. Conclusion: we cannot be enthralled with ourselves, and expect to serve in any meaningful way.

Rest from the Rigors of Growth and Service. The antidote for self-service is growth, but this is not—as we have stated before—an easy process. As we are being strengthened to overcome the monster that dwells within us (that proverbial “self”), we will be tried and tested. This will bring pressure, allowing the persistence of perseverance to bring substance to our faith. When faith is strong enough, we will find rest...God's rest. This is what we studied in *Surrender*, *Killing Sin*, and *Contentment*. The last book, *Contentment*, was entirely about God's rest, for which the classic illustration is the deliverance of the Jews from Egypt, their training in the desert, and their final victory through “surrender”...when they entered the Promised Land.

After I wrote *Contentment*, I discovered an identical presentation by Andrew Murray, in his book, *The Master's Indwelling*. (The only difference is that he says the same thing that I do, only with great eloquence and beauty.) The comments concerning rest that follow here draw from his remarks, even though a more broader discussion of God's “rest” is presented in the aforementioned book *Contentment*.

Rest comes through surrender and an act of mature faith. We have been saved, and are now in training for entry into the land of rest. As seen in Deuteronomy 5 and 6, God brought the Jews out of Egypt, (signifying salvation), and then trained them for forty years (reflecting growth), and allowed them to enter the Promised Land (symbolic of surrender, victory, and contentment). It is easy for us to apply their experience to ourselves. Once we have been saved, we will enter the desert of our training, and our commitment to this process will determine how long we stay there. While we are in the desert we will encounter temptation, want, and the absence of great victory.

But when we enter the Promised Land, we will have rest, overabundance, and victory after victory.

We must be honest with ourselves and with God. We have not left the desert yet, even though there are many around who would convince us that we enter the Promised Land at salvation. This is misleading. We CAN enter it at some point, but only after we negotiate the desert completely, which we all wish we could bypass. By realizing that we have not yet achieved super-maturity, we can confess our failures and begin the process of forgiveness and healing. The God who saved us can now give us a blessed life, when we finally cross the Jordan. Unworthy as I am, this life is available to *me*...even me.

We must pray so that we can understand our impotence and helplessness to add substance to our maturity through self-effort. And we must acknowledge that the *greatest impediment* to our believing that rest can be ours is our own preoccupation with SELF. We must come to the end of ourselves and say, "God, help me." We must stand with Jesus in the world's rejection and become as nothing. We must reject our own wisdom, and lay it at the feet of Jesus, as fools. We must replace our worldly wisdom with the wisdom of God. And we must admit, "Lord, I thought I was willing, but still much unwillingness exists." When we surrender at last, and trust God to make it real, it will happen. How shall not God then "give us all things"? (Endnote 5)

As Murray suggests, there is much offered, but much stands in the way of receiving it. It is only through persistent advancement toward maturity that we can begin to understand that what we are enduring will lead to the greatest unleashing of blessing and power known to man. This will not be achieved through efforts to bring it to ourselves. This will only come when self is no longer our highest priority, and God becomes the center of all we do or think. Until then, selfishness will stand as a barrier to godly service.

Chapter 2-5

Dying to Self

Andrew Murray on Dying to Self. We begin our discussion of dying to one's self by quoting Andrew Murray from his excellent book, *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness*. He said the following in a chapter dealing with "death to self":

And here it is that the teaching is needed: if you would enter into full fellowship with Christ in His death, and know the full deliverance from self, humble yourself. This is your one duty. Place yourself before God in your utter helplessness; consent heartily to the fact of your impotence to slay or make alive yourself; sink down into your nothingness, in the spirit of meek and patient and trustful surrender to God. Accept every humiliation, look upon every fellow-man who tries or vexes you, as a means of grace to humble you. Use every opportunity of humbling yourself before your fellow-men as a help to abide humble before God. God will accept such humbling of yourself as the proof that your whole heart desires it, as the very best prayer for it, as your preparation for His mighty work of grace, when, by the mighty strengthening of His Holy Spirit, He reveals Christ fully in you, so that He, in His form of a servant is truly formed in you, and dwells in your heart.

To die to self, to experience the death of Christ...so we can live in His resurrection...we must become humble. Such humility, and participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, will only come through maturity, leading to greater awareness of His greatness and our nothingness. When we mature, and God is increasingly the essence of our inner life, He brings humility to us, and concomitantly shares with us the death and resurrection of His Son. The object is NOT to die and stay dead, but to rise again in "newness of life", which is *His* life, lived out through us; we become nothing...or "dead"...so He can become everything. Ironically, this is how we truly "live".

What it Means to be "Dead to Self". Being alive to God means being alive to His righteousness. The opposite is being dead to God, but alive to sin. When we are alive to self, it is inevitable that we will be alive to sin. When we are dead to self, then we can be alive to God. How does this work? We will explain.

For clarity on this, we turn to Rom. 6:1-14, which we will quote intermittently to elucidate our point about dying to self. This passage talks about sinning, which is a practice to which we have *positionally* died forever through our union with Christ, and one to which we are *potentially* dead now through our fellowship with Him. Verse 2 says, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" By being baptized into His death, we have been saturated with His righteousness by being "baptized into his death" (v. 4), so that "we too may live a new life" (v. 4). We have been placed INTO HIS DEATH forever as our POSITION. Now, we can live a "new" life CONDITIONALLY, IF we LIVE THE LIFE OF HIS DEATH. We are in His DEATH *eternally*; but we are in His LIFE

temporally only when we are LIVING IN HIS DEATH. And what is His death where we are concerned? It is death to sin (v. 2). We need to say more.

We are “united with him” in his death (v. 5), so it is certain that we will “also be united with him in his resurrection”. It is in His resurrection that our identity with Him carries us beyond death and burial into the new life (v. 4 again). We must be *linked to Him in His death*, which means that some part of us dies. This is what verse 6 discloses: “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—” Notice the point of “knowing” something: namely, that we have died. This message is given to us so that we will understand that our *old self* has been “crucified”...it is dead...so that sin can be conquered and we will no longer be its slave.

Once again, we must distinguish reality and potentiality. We have eternal and complete victory over the *penalty* of sin through our permanent relationship with Christ. But we experience temporal victory over the *power* of sin (in life) only sporadically and conditionally. If we have confessed our sins, are walking in the Spirit, and are growing, the potential for strength against sin and Satan becomes greater, because of our increased spiritual empowerment against them. This is what *can* occur *in time* (once again, in *life*). This is the “new life”. It is the life of Christ enabling the diminution of the “body of sin”. We are “freed from sin” due to our position (v. 7), and we CAN BE “freed” in practice if we bring death to sin within us by maintaining conditions that allow His “life” to be sustained.

Still in Rom. 6, we see that verses 8-10 describe the death of Christ as the means for halting sin. By our being identified with His death, we are dead to sin, because no dead person can sin. And with sin removed, life with God becomes possible for us. “The life he [Jesus Christ] lives, he lives to God” (v. 10). And this *can* be true of us in the “lives we [now] live”. The unfortunate reality is that our “actual lives” probably look *conditionally* nothing like the unchangeable “lives we have” *positionally*. The object is to make the “lives we live” resemble the “lives we have”.

Verse 11 commands, “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We can assume with full confidence that our lives are “now hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3), because we “[our very own sinful selves] died” (same verse). This reflects our position. Now we are called upon to link our eternal state with our temporal condition: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature”, including “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

We want our condition to match our position. Verse 12 in Rom. 6 says, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” When our condition is “right”, it is because sin is not “reigning”. The indicator for purity and holiness is the absence of sin, which is a product of maturity and spirituality. When we become mature enough, we will surrender. Until then, one of the preliminary forms of surrender is to “offer ourselves to God” (v. 13). This is the alternative to offering ourselves “to sin, as instruments of wickedness” (also v. 13). We can offer ourselves to God, instead of sin, because we are among “those who have been brought from death to life” (still v. 13).

Verse 14 gives the backdrop for victory, which is GRACE. “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Because of grace, we have the opportunity to overcome sin. But this does not come through our own power or determination, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, who is there to convert our identity with the “*death* of Christ” into the “*life* of Christ”, whereby we become like Him.

Death to self is death to sin. And death to sin is the product of “life *in* Him” (position), which can generate “life *through* Him” (condition), something we achieve by means of confession and growth.

Chapter 2-6

Providing Unselfish Service

Unselfish Service is Commanded. Unselfish service implies that we are giving, rather than getting. No such service can take place without self-sacrifice, which is not a natural inclination for human beings. In service, we will give up time, money, resources, and energy to help others. It is more in keeping with our “survival” instincts to acquire and/or preserve these for ourselves, rather than to expend them for the benefit of others. There are, of course, “altruistic” people, who share these things “in the world”, but the fleshly nature of such “unselfishness” removes it from any qualification as “gifted spiritual service”. (“Worldly service” as a topic for discussion will be reserved for a later time.)

Our interest at this point lies within the arena of sacrificial Christian service. We will look at several passages of Scripture which provide prompts and parameters for this concept.

We begin with Rom. 12:1, which says, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. By offering our bodies as committed organisms, fully cleansed (holy) and in fellowship (pleasing to God), we conduct “spiritual worship”, which is “Spirit-driven service”. The word “worship” is used in the NIV as the translation of the Greek word *patreia*, because it has a connection with the “service” done by Levitical priests under the law. Their work was part of the “worship service” conducted in the temple. Applied to us, this word implies “active service” for the Lord. The idea of Rom. 12:1 is this: “Living sacrifices” done through gifted operations represent our spiritual *service*; in other words, when we serve through our gifts, we are sacrificing.

One of the results of service is that we will lighten each other’s load. When we serve cooperatively, we lift each other’s adversity. This is true, whether it is a time of “tests and trials” for training, or an occasion for corrective discipline (imposed to get us to return to fellowship through confession). Whether it is helping each other “endure” training, or guiding each other back toward spirituality and growth, we can—through our gifts—provide support for each other. This is what is called for in Gal. 6:1-2, which says this:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each others’ burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

We are to carry each other’s burdens. Applied to a “carnal state” in others, which is the example given in verse 1, we can help them by gently leading them back to fellowship through their own personal, private confession of sins. But we can also help “spiritual believers” by supporting them as they go through strenuous training exercises. A side-point noted in this passage is that we should “watch ourselves” to avoid temptation while we are helping others. The oft-repeated command not to judge others applies here. When we “help” others in dealing with the number one problem in

Christianity...SIN...we must take care not to judge, because if we are focused on someone else's sins, it is easy to *forget our own*, with the result that we will not *confess our own sins*. What will happen then? We will join the carnality of the ones we are helping. It should also be mentioned that gifted service increases satanic activity in opposition to it, increasing temptation. The main point of this passage, however, is that we are *gifted* to help sustain each other, each of us in his or her own unique way.

As we are working toward sustaining each other, and moving each other forward, our focus will be on the needs and interests of others. What we are doing *with* them must be beneficial *to* them. Phil. 2:4 lays this out for us, saying, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also the interests of others." We will pay attention, assuredly, to the things that directly involve or concern us, but we must also look to the needs of others. Knowing when it is time to address one's own interests...and when it is time to serve...is a matter of maturity, which enables us to balance self-care with service. With greater maturity, self-care will undoubtedly subside, as our actions become increasingly encased in humility...and based on faith. Care for others will expand and override inappropriate self-interests.

Service is the opposite of selfishness. When we serve, we do not view daily opportunities in the light of what we are gaining or taking away, but rather what we are contributing. When we serve, we give without re-inventorying to see what we have lost; on the contrary, we look to see how we have upgraded those we are serving. For the mature believer, there is no joy like serving. But joy is not what we are looking for when we serve; it is fulfillment of our highest purpose: to love, honor, and obey God. Luke 17:7-10 describes this condition of service as a presumed requirement, saying the following:

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

To truly serve is to perform endless, thankless service, simply because that is the crux of the Christian life. We serve without expectations of payback or recognition. We serve because it is our duty, even though—as we stated before—if we are maturing and walking in the Spirit, we can do virtually *none other*. We will serve, because that is the inevitable outcome of our growth, the natural fruit of spiritual adulthood. Unselfishness invoked by God Himself will burst through the shroud of self-centeredness that covers us, and true service will then flourish.

Sharing: A Mark of Unselfish Service. One of the best harbingers for unselfishness is sharing. There is, among all believers, a kind of brotherhood or fellowship, which can be properly described as a "sharing relationship". We are all members of the same family, and we will give to each other and help each other as an expected outcome of this connection. This is especially true within the

area of our gifted service. Within gifted service, we see a concentration of sharing and support. We share because we care, and we care because of increasing faith and greater awareness of Spiritual urgings from the Holy Spirit.

James was strong on the concept of equality and sharing, not as part of some government (that's a separate discussion), but as the obligation of the church. Care for each other, especially the "less-fortunate", was a major concern of James. He said, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress..." (James 1:27a). Giving and sharing, as indications of gifted service, should be common occurrences in the church.

James confirms his stance on unselfish service in James 2:14-17, which says this:

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

We have stated many times before that the way to true Spirit-based morality and service will come through the growth of faith, and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. James is stating that weak faith will not yield noteworthy service. He also says that any claims to superior spiritual stature will be empty...if there is no evidence to confirm them. The meaning of the word "save" in verse 14 can fall into two categories: 1) one which pertains to eternal salvation, and 2) another that pertains to specific temporal conditions, such as physical death, danger, or poor health.

Here we believe James is definitely NOT making reference to eternal salvation, since—if that were true—he would be implying that saving faith is only valid if it is accompanied by specific acts of good works. That would contradict the message of Paul, Peter, John and Jesus directly, which calls for faith alone in Christ alone for salvation. James would not do this! As the Holy Spirit inspired James' writing, the thought he was having was that *faith without deeds* will not "rescue" a "doubting believer"...but rescue from what?. What is there that would require the "deliverance" of someone who is already saved?

We believe James frames the answer for this in verses 15-26 of James 2, where he shows that only "active faith", or *faith for living*, will generate good deeds during the Christian life. This tracks perfectly with what we have taught previously concerning fellowship and the filling of the Spirit, whereby divine good is produced by God through a believer in fellowship...who is thus operating in faith. James is saying that the presence of active faith will be made evident by the production of "works" generated through fellowship. So where is the *danger*? It is that we will display "inactive" faith, and thus not produce. It is that we will not grow, not operate in faith, not walk in the Spirit, and not bear fruit. It is, in short, that we will not fulfill our purpose as believers.

Wandering from God is a SERIOUS matter, and the truncated faith of a wanderer will be inadequate to deliver him from carnality and sin. To "walk by the flesh" is more dangerous than it seems on the surface, and only the restoration of living faith through the confession of sins will

enable a believer to get back on the trail of growth and spirituality. This is “rescue” or “deliverance” from carnality through restoration to fellowship.

There is also a second layer of danger, which is that a carnal believer will fail to “justify” or uphold the value and efficacy of his faith, so that his “testimony” will be *discredited*, or even *killed*. Who will kill the message of faith? It is anyone who claims to be operating by faith, when he or she is actually functioning in the flesh. Great harm is done to the Christian faith by those who feign faith, while there is only flesh behind their actions. Verses 15-26 show that the only faith that can be “justified” in the eyes of onlookers is *real faith* that produces *real good*. James says in verse 26 that faith which produces no divine good is *dead*. But where divine good is being generated, faith for living assuredly exists.

The conclusion to James’ discussion in 2:14 is that mature faith and spiritual cleanliness (see also James 4:7-10) will bring about a condition wherein meaningful action, especially gifted service, can operate freely. Always behind the scenes in James’ writing is the presence of unselfish, gifted service. He cries out against selfishness and greediness in chapter 5, and calls for equality and compassion in the last part of chapter 1 and the first half of chapter 2. In his view of unselfish sharing, he admonishes any believer who sees another believer in need to “do something to accommodate his physical needs” (see 2:16). In this, James joins Paul in espousing the “active” use of gifts to accommodate the various needs of fellow believers.

A good example of unselfishness in service is seen in the operation of the gift of “giving”. Paul presents the guideline for such service in Rom. 12:7, where he describes the proper attitude for giving in the following: “...if it [the gift] is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously...” Giving is a gift that clearly requires unselfishness; but we can readily extrapolate that gifted service of all kinds will require the same spirit of generosity. We understand clearly that this means we must be “spiritual”, so that our “giving” will come from the deep well of the Spirit, rather from the paltry resources of our shallow selves.

I must repeat this point: Serving unselfishly, like all other functions prescribed for believers, depends on spirituality. It is only “in the Spirit” that we can achieve unselfishness; otherwise, our only resource is our sinful nature itself...the very seat of selfishness.

Part Three

Growth for Gifted Service

In This Part...

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Chapter 3-1

We Know More than the Apostles

Precept upon Precept; Line upon Line. The progressive nature of truth can be seen in a number of ways. One way is seen in Is. 28:9-10, quoted here, which suggests the progressive nature of revelation, and describes the advancement of understanding in INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS as they acquire knowledge:

Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are [just] weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts? [No.] For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line: here a little, and there a little. (Endnote 6, KJV)

Notice the progression: Those who are taught substantial knowledge are not the new or immature; advanced knowledge is for *mature* believers. New Christians can begin their growth by spending time on the “milk”, after which they can be “weaned”, so they can move on to meatier topics. Continual feeding on the Word will enable partakers to increasingly “understand doctrine”; and as understanding accumulates, maturation will take place. The advancement from level to level is based on a steady intake of teachings from the Bible. This is the most important component in growth: when a believer acquires “precept upon precept” and “line upon line”. Acquisition of wisdom is not instantaneous; rather, continuous interest in, attention to, and examination of, truth—*over time*—is essential for assimilation of the principles, promises, and precepts of the Word. Through study and growth, *individual believers* can “progress” upward.

There are other ways in which understanding is “progressive”. One way is seen in the DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIBLE itself. God’s truth is always the same, but historically it has been presented in different ways during different times, or “ages”. This went on from the time of man’s creation until the written Word was completed. For example, many rites and rituals during the Age of Law taught “truth” by offering object lessons that illustrated God’s grace, mercy, forgiveness, love, and provision, as well as His ways for dealing with sin. Other ages had other means for teaching these truths, with each new age adding to what was taught in the previous one. From the first “age” until the last, the story of God’s redemptive plan has been completed incrementally. As time progressed, the gradual release of new revelations brought increased definition, clarity, and meaning to the body of spiritual knowledge, until all the writings in the Bible were completed. (We are not trying to be thorough in our presentation of the differences in style and levels of knowledge from one age to the next, as that is too much for this study; we just want to establish that *revelation* is “progressive”.)

As the periods of history advanced, new disclosures brought greater understanding. What was illustrated in the Old Testament became reality and clear declaration in the New Testament, first with Jesus, who put a face with the Name and fulfilled the events of the prophecies; and then with

the apostles, who filled in the blanks that Jesus said He was leaving. The apostles stood firm on what had been revealed before their time, and added new information and greater truths as each contributed to the new “testament”.

Even THE WRITINGS FROM ONE APOSTLE TO THE NEXT showed progress, as concepts were being crystallized and codified. For example, Peter, Paul, James, and the writer of Hebrews left some of the details in their “truths for living” for John to complete at a later time. This is seen in particular with the doctrine of “confession of sins”, which the aforementioned apostles cited, but which they saved for John to bring to a fine point (see 1 John 1).

There is also progression in the *CONNECTION OF TRUTHS*. Not only were new truths being revealed; they were bonding to other truths to form monolithic doctrines. As each writer of Scripture wrote the inspired words of the Holy Spirit, he did not always know or fully grasp the significance of his words. As each author contributed, a larger “whole” evolved which included all the pieces of the puzzle, so that these could be linked and the whole truth understood. This is why it is important to compare scripture with scripture to see what the *entire* Bible is saying on a given topic, in order to ascertain and explain content and meaning. This is something the writers could not do fully, as we can, since we have the *completed* Word.

Progression can also be seen *WITHIN THE WRITINGS OF THE GREAT APOSTLE PAUL*. The writings of Paul in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians seem to get much deeper into the *HOW* of Christian living than do his earlier epistles. By examining Paul’s writings, the case can be made that his understanding was coming into greater focus as he matured and as his spiritual insight was becoming more vivid. Even at his peak, though, Paul did not have what we have...the finished Word of God. We have a real privilege and advantage with the completed Word!

Another way that understanding has progressed is through the *EXPANSION, CLARIFICATION, AND REFINEMENT OF THE BIBLE* since the time of its completion. In modern times, the advent of printing and numerous linguistic developments have enabled a better analysis of the contents of Scripture, resulting in improved understanding of its doctrines. We have more tools now to ascertain nuances in meaning than did the scholars of earlier times. More truths can be disclosed now, given the expansion of scholastic assets for drawing them out (led by the Spirit, of course).

We Have the Whole Truth. The “progressive” nature of revelation and understanding has been clearly demonstrated. As stated, each writer of the truths that now comprise the Bible could only present a piece of the puzzle. None of them had the completed story that we have. In a sense, we have more information than they did.

I believe there is a reason that we in this age are the first to have the “whole truth”. It is because the Church Age represents the “last days”, by some measures, for which the trials and pressures are greater than ever before. This is happening because Satan knows his time is running out. As truth progresses, attacks increase. Looking at the chaos in the world, and the growing opposition to God and Christianity, it is easy to see that Satan has intensified his efforts and mobilized his armies to move against us.

The reality of more truth bringing more pressure, however, is not a case for less study and more cooperation with Satan in an effort to take ourselves out of his line of fire. It is actually a case for study that is more concentrated than ever, and devotion to God that is unprecedented. We must stay ahead of this devil that is chasing us, by staying strong in our faith through the building of our understanding and wisdom. All of our spirituality and maturity hinges on our understanding. We must decide to take advantage of the great benefits we have with the completed Word, and commit to mastering all the ways in which we are to apply its techniques. This may invite more Satanic incursion, but it also enables protection that is greater than all of Satan's wiles.

Conclusion: We have unparalleled opportunity for understanding God in this age. How can we not avail this great privilege by throwing ourselves into His truth? How can we ignore the call of Scripture, which commands, "Earnestly study to show yourself approved to God, a workman [student] unashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"? (2 Tim. 2:16) (Endnote 7, *Literal Translation*) We must believe what God has said, and practice what He commands, daily increasing our understanding of what He intends. We must get close to Him, for that is the only place where Satan cannot touch us. We must hide in the truths we have been given, immersing ourselves into revelations that even Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah did not have. We have a treasure chest of knowledge at our disposal. We must not discount its value or ignore its offerings. Reach, grasp, take-hold, while you can. The quality of your service and life depends on your devotion to God's revealed truths.

Chapter 3-2

Ways to Study

What it Means to Study. The word “study” conjures up the image of sitting at a desk, or in an arm chair, with various devices around you to assist you in learning. You may be using books, pens, paper, a computer, television, CD player, and so on. But study can also be sitting in a classroom or church, listening to lectures in various forms and presentation styles, absorbing information “mastered” by instructors who know the content and have the ability to deliver it. Such teachers will offer facts, concepts, and other essential increments of knowledge to those who need them. Study can also take place while you are driving or working, as you listen to messages over the radio or CD player. Some even “study” by conversing with a Christian mentor or peer, where truth is presented in an interactive setting.

There are many ways to study, and various learning styles require different instructional methods. Pick the one that fits your style and schedule. But PICK ONE...or more. We must study daily in some form. This growth medium must not be neglected. After all, knowledge of truths for living is the basis for growth. This is what we see in 2 Tim. 3:16, which says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped [matured] for every good work.”

Referral to Previous Studies. Rather than re-work what we have said before concerning “ways to study”, we will refer you to Appendix F, “Ways to Study”, which pulls from an earlier work, *Living in the Power of God’s Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*, Volume 2.

Chapter 3-3

Preparation for Service

The Need to Grow. When we are brought into the world physically, a growth process begins that will almost always follow a natural and largely inevitable path that progresses through stages, beginning with total helplessness and ending at some graduated level of independence and self-sufficiency. As long as we are alive, maturation will occur to some degree for all human beings, without any program for growth or any deliberate commitment to becoming physically mature. We *need* to grow, and guess what...we just grow.

This automatic, natural process of human growth does not work for *spiritual* growth, however, because the growth of faith will not occur without specific steps being *chosen* and *followed*. We are capable of growth...it is open to us...but it will not happen without accessing the techniques of grace, the main tenets of which include confession, prayer, study, and endurance.

When we are born again, we must begin at the beginning. Our first item of priority is to start moving, but we must be sure we are moving in the right direction...i.e., toward maturity. Many times the first thing that is done with new believers is to get them to make improvements in their *behavior*. If we can get them to *act better*, then we can expect them to *become better*, which will help them somehow *get stronger*. But improved behavior does not come by working from the outside toward the inside. It must begin on the inside, which will change the outside. Good behavior will come as a consequence of growth, not as a means to it. In fact, as our faith is strengthened through growth, we will eventually correct all areas of deficiency through the increased influence of the Holy Spirit.

The first step for a new believer is to be *taught*. But we must be reminded: It is ridiculous to put a new, baby believer into “main stream” instruction. They must first go through a “basics” course, so they can build a framework for the accommodation of more advanced studies. Without a solid base, and a firm understanding of fundamental principles for Christian living, advanced concepts will only confuse new believers...they are not ready for them. Growth is gradual and progressive, beginning—as all ventures must—at “Start”.

As we Grow. When we grow, we increasingly see God in a clear light, and the world seems darker and more fruitless. To the maturing believer, the world becomes more of nothing, as we progress in our understanding that God is everything. With increased maturity, our awareness of God sharpens and a divine perspective evolves. This affects the way we look at everything, including sin, *for which* there is growing repulsion and *toward which* there is greater resistance.

As we grow, we become preoccupied with divine assets and operations, and our eyes become fixed on God. This complicates things for us *in the world*, but through maturity, we see that even the storms of the world can be overcome through spiritual management processes (viz., through the filling and leading of the Holy Spirit). With burgeoning maturity, we will increasingly turn *from*

ourselves and our petty interests and desires, *toward* a focus on God. We will *think* about God, and *pray* to God, and *seek out those* who want to *talk* about God. God will be our passion, our hope, our provider, and our refuge. This is evidence of real growth: when God is becoming everything and everything else is diminishing.

At some point in the progression of mushrooming wisdom and faith, we will graduate into higher levels of maturity, with the potential for reaching the final and ultimate stages of growth, namely these: the fullness of God, surrender, victory over sin, contentment/rest, and—as we are now exploring—God-driven service through God-given gifts. When we enter the Promised Land of God’s rest through advanced maturity, we will enjoy a warm and pleasant fellowship with the Father. We will not seek maturity for the sole purpose of attaining this special time of accommodation, but we cannot say that such a special time with God does not provide powerful incentive for our attention to growth.

When we mature, we realize that the supportive fellowship we have known *while we were growing* is but a placeholder for the phenomenal closeness and presence we experience with Him *after we have grown*. This closeness is the seat of joy and contentment, the ultimate condition of finally and truly “walking with Him”...not just for a day, but every day, all the time.

After we Have Grown. Growth is pertinent to our current topic of gifted service, because it unlocks all the spiritual resources at our disposal. We will have a great deal to say about all of them before we are through, but one item of immediate interest is the fulfillment of all promises. While we are growing, the promises that God has made in His Word are satisfied intermittently, but when we reach maximum maturity, they are fulfilled without reservation. That is why they are there...because they guarantee the *benefits* of ultimate growth.

Some scholars have discounted the promises as being localized to the audience addressed at the time they were given. They reasonably claim that context determines the target of the promises, but I go beyond the immediate application of proclaimed promises (as we do with almost all of the principles in the Word) to a generalized reflection of *the way God operates*...and *what He wants to do for us*! The *spirit* of the promises, and the *conditions* for their fulfillment, are proclaimed over the top of the original audiences, so that they reach me personally. If it fits, it can be worn, and I see endless promises made under specialized conditions that APPLY TO ME NOW.

Don’t tell me that “the battle is the Lord’s” applies only to the battle facing David as he ran toward Goliath. Or that Isaiah’s message to Israel cannot apply to me: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” And don’t try to convince me that “delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” does not work for me. There are conditions, of course, for the fulfillment of these promises, such as *reaching a required level of maturity*...and the *presence of spirituality*. But when I have met the spiritual prerequisites, these promises most certainly belong to me!

For your convenience, we are including in this volume a complete set of promises, separated by categories of application. These are guarantees for what we will receive through maturity. They all

deal with God's provision, empowerment, and blessing, and all of them are connected with what we need in order to perform our services as mature believers. The lists of promises that we are posting are taken from *Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word: Pathway to Truth and Wisdom*, Vol. 2. These can be seen in Appendix G, "The Promises", at the back of this book. A caveat concerning this appendix: We did not know at the time *Bible Basics on the Power of God's Word* was written that promises are *completely* fulfilled when we reach super-maturity, and *intermittently* fulfilled before that time. When you read Appendix G, fill in the blanks with this assurance: The time of "surrender" is the time when virtually all the promises regarding Christians will be fulfilled.

Provisions While we are Growing. While we are growing, God will patiently provide for us. He will correct us with discipline, which can sometimes be intense and harsh, but He will always deal with us in love, as we are going through the desert of our training. This is what we see in Psalm 78, the heart of which is the passage that shows the fickleness of the Jews in the desert, alongside God's persistent patience with them while He conducts their training. Verses 35-39 give us this:

They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer. But then they would flatter him with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return.

One of the most telling phrases in this powerful passage is the descriptor, "time after time". God is endlessly patient with us, because He knows us. He will correct us, but He will never stop loving us. This is an important lesson to know while we are growing, one that we will cover in more detail later on. We will fail, but we must let God build on those failures, rather than allowing them to overwhelm us and cause us to be discouraged. God can turn our weaknesses into strengths and our failures into triumphs, if we simply bring them to Him in confession. He will forgive us and enable us to become ever stronger so that our daily path will not be littered with endless failure.

Notice what God provided for the Jews in the desert, even though they failed continually (still in Psalm 78):

- He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night. (v. 14)
- He split the rocks in the desert and gave them water as abundant as the seas. (v. 15)
- He brought streams out of a rocky crag and made the water flow down like rivers. (v. 16)
- He rained down manna for the people to eat; he gave them the grain of heaven. (v. 24)
- He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. (v. 27)

He provided for them through all their faithless wanderings, and He will provide for us the same way. We will grow as we endure the desert of our training, and eventually we will be prepared to

enter the Promised Land, the “land of milk and honey”. In the meantime, we will be cared for. We just have to keep moving upward and forward.

Two Stages of Growth. As we grow, we will go through stages. In his book, *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness*, Andrew Murray sees growth as dividing into two stages, as follows:

All God’s dealings with man are characterized by two stages. There is the time of preparation, with the mingled experience of effort and impotence, of failure and partial success, with the holy expectancy of something better which these waken, train and discipline men for a higher stage. Then comes the time of fulfillment, when faith inherits the promise, and enjoys what it had so often struggled for in vain. (Endnote 8)

This short quote beautifully captures what I have so desperately tried to describe over my last four or five books. The whole point has been that we must GROW first, after which we can reach maturity, experience the “fullness of God”, surrender, achieve victory over sin, and enter God’s rest. But all of the “big” things that we can attain do not come until the end of a long and arduous journey through which we have endured rigorous training and preparation. When we reach the pinnacle of super-maturity, service can begin in earnest. Until then, service will be intermittent and uneven.

I estimate that the proper Christian life consists of a larger percentage learning to serve and a smaller percentage serving. Luke 10:38-41 illustrates this principle well, saying this:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

I used the alternate NIV translation, instead of the main one the NIV offers, for verse 42. The standard one says, “but only one thing is needed.” The alternate says, “but few things are needed—or only one.” If we accept the first translation, we can assume that all we are ever supposed to do is sit and listen and learn. But the second one is more favorable, because it allows for *doing* beyond *learning*. Mary was learning, while Martha—though she had probably entered intermediate maturity and was serving to some degree—had more to learn. The most important step for service cannot be left out, which is *learning*. Mary did not need to “serve”; she needed to “learn”.

Martha was providing a gifted service, such as her house...for meetings...to which she surely added all the accoutrements that are essential for comfort during the meetings. Martha’s contribution was important and necessary, but Jesus informed her that not everyone is ready to serve, and NO ONE SHOULD SERVE WHO IS NOT FIRST PREPARED! Mary was in preparation, and should not have been asked to serve.

Martha had learned some things already, but she needed more instruction, as evidenced by the fact

that she did not already know that Mary had to *train first*...before she could serve. And Martha needed to learn to trust...she was in a state of being “upset and worried”, which is not a mature attitude. Jesus took advantage of a “teachable moment” with Martha and added new knowledge to her understanding. But then he returned to the business at hand, which was to teach Mary. So what is the point Jesus is making? It is this: We must train completely before service can be fully effective. Until then, it will be spotty and of limited effect. DO NOT BYPASS TRAINING and try to short-cut to service prematurely.

To provide a handy reference to the broader concept of growth, we have included in the appendices an excerpt on growth from *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. If you have not studied this vital document on ultimate growth, please take time now to read Appendix B, “Growth of Believers”.

Being Worthy of our Calling. We are called upon in Scripture to develop strong faith and to walk in the Spirit. (To provide more on this, we are taking whatever space is needed in this book to add a fuller discussion on “faith”. This can be seen in Appendix H, “Faith and How it is Strengthened”.) To the degree that faith and its product, spirituality, are in evidence, we will become “worthy” of the gifts we have been given. If we do not give devoted attention to growth and spirituality, our gifts will be wasted and no good can be developed from them, no matter how hard we “try”.

To be worthy of our gifts, we must cultivate our faith, which will enable our reliance on the Holy Spirit. Paul told the Thessalonians, “With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith” (2 Thess. 1:11). Look closely at this verse. Paul is praying first of all that God would see in them (and us) a “worthiness” of the calling He has given us. The variable in the process is in us, not in God. God will always see us as “worthy” if we indeed *become* worthy through the grace processes for growth.

The second thing he prays for is that they (and we) will “fulfill every good purpose”; which is accomplished only through the power of the Spirit (This is why it says, “He may fulfill...”) Notice, though, what turns this power loose: “every act prompted by your faith”. Faith comes before empowerment, which in turn comes before fulfillment of our purposes, so that we may be counted worthy of God’s specific plan for us. The sequence is, as follows:

1. Develop faith through cleanliness, study, prayer, and training, i.e., by growing.
2. Receive the continual flow of spiritual power from the Holy Spirit, which is unleashed through faith.
3. Operate within the purview of God’s gifts to accomplish His purposes.
4. Satisfy God that we have honored the gifts we have been given.

Growth is at the center of spiritual operations, i.e., we must *learn* to allow the Spirit to function through us. We cannot omit the criterion cited above, namely, “his power”. This important phrase is often overlooked when we are reading or studying Scripture. The number of those who “practice a

form of godliness”, but “deny the power behind it” (2 Tim. 3:5) is staggering; precious few understand that the *presence of this power* is the difference between truly living the Christian life, and just living as a human who happens to be born again. Remember 1 Cor. 3:7, which says this: “So that neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” God is the One who GIVESTHE GROWTH, and it is His power that generates service.

Everything we need in order to fulfill our calling comes from God. In 1 Cor. 1:18 to 2:15 (please read), we see that the wisdom in which we operate our gifts comes from God. Paul did the “preaching” of “Christ crucified”, but what was behind his work? Paul himself said that the words which came through him did not originate from him. This is what he stated in verse 4, quoted here: “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.” And what was the effect of his message? It formed the basis for growth, which comes from God, as we see in 2:5, which says, “...so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.”

Paul also knew, as he was learning God’s truths, that they were from God. He describes the spiritual basis for learning and growth in 1 Cor. 2:10-14, where we see the teaching of the Holy Spirit being completed in believers who are in fellowship (who are “spiritual”), as follows:

But God revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of a man within him? So also no one has known the things of God except the Spirit of God. But we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God; which things we also speak, not in words taught in human wisdom, but in words taught of the Holy Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things. But a natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (Endnote 9)

So Paul not only received the *power* to perform his ministry, but the *content* of his ministry was also given to Him out of the vast knowledge and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Now, the same power and wisdom that was available to Paul is now offered to us. The point is that THESE THINGS COME FROM GOD. So where are you looking for power and truth? Within yourself? In the world? You will surely find answers there, but they will *not be correct*, convincing though they may be; and you will not be effective in your service...nor will you walk worthy of your calling.

In Eph. 4:1 Paul told the Ephesians, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” (Compare with 2 Thess. 1:11, quoted above.) Paul then goes on to describe what such a life looks like. Fulfilling our calling is equivalent to our following the diagram for spiritual growth. This is what we described in *Bible Basics on Maturity: Pathway to the Worthwhile Life*, on page 57, where we see this:

To walk worthy of our calling, we must be confessing our sins, studying Scripture, praying, giving thanks, acknowledging God, expressing fear (and faith) in the Lord, staying God-conscious, trusting God’s promises, surrendering to God’s will, submitting our bodies to God’s service, and learning God’s will for our individual lives.

In short, we must be advancing toward maturity. Only then can we begin to serve in ways that are “worthy”. Our focus *must be*, while we are foraging for our gifts and seeking to become what He intends, to put our hearts into seeking for GOD HIMSELF, looking always to draw closer to Him. Our singular goal must be to fully exploit all the ways we can live in His strength, so we can serve Him and fulfill His purpose...through His power and wisdom.

Chapter 3-4

Calvinism and Growth

Agreement with Calvinists Regarding Growth and Spirituality. I will not take up space here to discuss the five points of Calvinism, and how much I *agree* or *disagree* with them. I will only say that my primary sticking point with them, my major point of DIS-agreement, is that God chooses certain souls for salvation prior to birth, and all others have no shot at being relieved of eternal condemnation. But this difference with Calvinism is not the point of this chapter. In fact, what emerges from all the agreeing/disagreeing is how much I appreciate our common understanding of how the Christian life is to be lived.

One of the areas of GREAT agreement between Calvinists (in general) and me (in particular) is that the Holy Spirit is our primary source for holiness...inside and out. All good comes from God, and we are helpless and useless apart from His power and performance to produce it. This is of more-than-marginal importance to me; I see it as *totally central* to the success of our lives as Christians. Thus, I feel complicity and fellowship with Calvinists, because of our common view of how believers should LIVE. The disparity between our respective views of the *backdrop* for salvation (God choosing us vs. our choosing God) is not crucial, because they still believe, as I do, that salvation itself is by grace through faith. Whether God chooses us or we choose Him, we are saved when we believe the message of the gospel. For me, that is agreement enough on the method of salvation.

My greatest rub with Calvinists is not their view of “sovereign grace” as the primary foundation for salvation (meaning, once again, that an Almighty God chooses His subjects); it is their too-frequent OVER-EMPHASIS and ENDLESS DEFENSE of this view, which often overshadows and de-emphasizes more immediate concerns, like HOW TO LIVE. They believe in spirituality, but talk too much about soteriology (doctrine of salvation). When they talk about “choice” at salvation, I tune them out, but when they speak of Christian living, we have agreement. When their emphasis is about life *after salvation*, we have a wide area of commonality.

So why am I mentioning this? It is because there are too few groups “out there” who embrace the role of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling God’s purpose in our lives, so when I see one that does, I embrace them. There are precious few who are devoted to the principles of growth and spirituality, as most Calvinists are. The best example I have seen of a Calvinist who totally embraced growth and spirituality is Andrew Murray, from the 19th Century, whose profound description of God’s place...and ours...is almost breathtaking in its accuracy, its depth, and its beauty.

Andrew Murray, a Champion of Spirituality. Andrew Murray saw God as choosing us at salvation, yet when you read his books, especially his later ones, the “reformed” notions that he believed were buried beneath a landslide of treatises concerned with the need for the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout our daily lives. Murray actually showed how the CHOICES we make

affect our spiritual track. Though a fully-persuaded Calvinist, Murray talked very little about divine choice as the underlying basis for salvation. He emphasized HOW WE ARE TO LIVE AS SAVED PEOPLE, rather than the disputable plan behind it. He extolled confession of sins, fellowship, prayer, growth, training, the filling of the Spirit, commitment, surrender, and contentment...ALL OF THESE! He was less concerned with what transpired *before* we became born-again believers, than he was with *what we do afterwards*. He was adamant and indefatigable concerning our dependence on the Spirit in and for all things, as we live the Christian life.

One of the most compact and profound of all his statements dealing with the essentials of spiritual life can be found buried in an obscure book titled *The Deeper Christian Life*. Here is what he said:

There are some people who seem to think that God, by some unintelligible sovereignty [choice based on divine prerogatives], withdraws His face. But I know that God loves His people too much to withhold His fellowship from them for any such reason. The true reason for the absence of God from us [as believers] is rather to be found in our sin and unbelief, than in any supposed sovereignty of His. If the child of God is walking in faith and obedience, the Divine presence will be enjoyed in unbroken continuity. (Endnote 10)

The presence of sin makes us “carnal”, rather than spiritual. And the lack of faith shows that we have not grown. Here are the two pillars of the Christian life again: spirituality and maturity. Stay in fellowship and keep on growing: that was Murray’s message, the message of many Calvinists, and the message we have been trying, in these many books, to inscribe. We say, “Confess your sins. Keep growing. Good will come.” And the choice is always ours.

Chapter 3-5

The Immature May have Gifts

Believers can be Carnal and/or Immature. In 1 John 1:8 and 10 John is telling the believers to whom he is writing that BELIEVERS SIN! He told them, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.” There is no getting out of the fact that believers sin. As a result, believers spend a great deal of time being controlled by the sinful nature, rather than the Holy Spirit, and no growth will occur while they are in this state. In addition, no gifted service can go on while they continue in sin. (The solution, as we know, is *confession*, as seen in 1 John 1:9; and *growth*, our current topic.)

Paul sized the believers up in Corinth as “carnal”, or “fleshly”, sometimes translated “worldly”. They spent a great deal of time out of fellowship because they were immature. In 1 Cor. 3:1, Paul addressed them this way: “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly [fleshly]—mere infants in Christ.” We see two problems with these Corinthians: 1) they were carnal, and 2) they were immature. But are they unique? No. They have many brothers “in the flesh” (as it were), who share their carnality and immaturity in our “modern” times.

The believers in Corinth, and many of us, are carnal and immature. Look at verses 1 through 4 in 1 Cor. 1. As we comb through these verses, we see terms referring to carnality/immaturity over and over, as follows:

1. “worldly” and “infants”
2. “not yet ready” and “still not ready”
3. “still worldly”, “worldly”, and “mere men”
4. “mere men”

The fleshly and infantile condition of the Corinthians is made very clear. But did they have gifts? That is next.

The Corinthians had Gifts. 1 Cor. 1:7 describes the giftedness of these believers, saying, “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” They had the gifts, even though their gifts were not being developed, due to immaturity and sinful practices. They had the capacity, but not the maturity to use it, which made their gifts virtually useless, without a change in their condition. You can have a gift, but you cannot “force” its operation, or expect any good effects from it, until you have moved along the spirituality/maturity scale.

“Gifts” is a Basic Doctrine. In 1 Cor. 3:2, Paul told the Corinthians, “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.” The “milk” consists of basic teachings, which are essential before tackling the meatier doctrines of Scripture. 1st Corinthians is a very important study regarding “gifts”, but notice that it is being delivered to immature believers,

because it is a “beginning” doctrine. But even basic doctrines can span the entire expanse of divine instruction and be a part of advanced teachings. The dispensation of gifts is a basic notion, but their full and effective operation requires understanding of complex concepts, such as surrender, victory over sin, and contentment.

What the Corinthians (and We) Need to Know about Gifts. The reach of the doctrine of gifts is extensive, because it applies differently at each level. For the Corinthians, they needed to move from the realization that they had gifts, to an understanding of what is to be done with them. Between chapter 1, where Paul told them they had gifts, through chapter 11, Paul taught them many useful and fundamental doctrines to help them prepare to use their gifts. Then in 1 Cor. 12, Paul cracks the book on truths dealing directly with the operation of spiritual gifts. He told them in verse 1, “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” But they *were* ignorant!

Verse 2 talks about their being “influenced and led astray to mute idols.” This is the darkness in which they were operating, where gifted service was “activity” without “production”. Then Paul hits them with the punch line before he has even developed the story, by saying, “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

This is a crucial point, and one that has been distorted by numerous misinterpretations of this verse. What is Paul saying? When he says that no one who is “speaking by the Spirit of God” can defame God...and no one can truly praise or represent God “except by the Holy Spirit”...what is the underlying message? It is simply this: FOR ANY GIFTED OPERATION TO BE EFFECTIVE...FOR IT TO COUNT...IT MUST BE DONE BY A BELIEVER WHO IS OPERATING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT! If you are IN FELLOWSHIP and MATURING, you *cannot* say the wrong thing! And you *can* be effective and fruitful in the exercise of your gifts! The difference is the power and wisdom that comes through the Holy Spirit: the power of fellowship, and the wisdom of maturity. On the other hand, if you are immature and/or out of fellowship, saying the right thing will not be a common occurrence.

Once Paul establishes the key condition for gifted operations, which is operating “by the Spirit”, he launches a full discussion of the gifts that are provided and how they are to function. This goes on for the rest of chapter 12, and continues through chapter 14. We will be looking at all of these as we proceed through this study. For now, we have established that gifts are given to the immature, but that they will not operate effectively until maturity and spirituality have equipped us to exercise them through divine power.

Chapter 3-6

Becoming a Servant

The Odd Requirement of “Becoming a Servant”. Beginning in this chapter, and continuing through the next two, we will see a world that is flipped. We live in our own skin and feel our own pain...psychologically, physically, emotionally, and so on. We have a sense of what we want and what satisfies us, and we envision conditions that would please us, make us secure, give us significance, and bring peace to us. But chances are, we are wrong in most of our assumptions, because, you see, we are children of God, and many of the things that the world promises for our satisfaction *will not work for us*. This is because we live in a “kingdom” that is not of this world, and we cannot play by the rules of “the world”.

The ironies of Christian living are endless, and we will say more about them along the way, but for now we must understand that down is up, and right is left in the spiritual world. This is because the “unseen” is real, and the “seen” is an illusion. The world of faith is not the same as the world of tangible “reality”, so we say that what we have and hold onto in the world amounts to nothing, and the spiritual reality that is “behind the scenes” is everything.

As we unscramble and alter our view-point so that it is more like that of God (which is certainly different from that of the world), we will come to grips with the following: The illusions we have embraced must be discounted, and we must adopt new perceptions of what is real and valuable. We must begin our re-evaluation by seeing *who we are* and *where we are*. We are individual “selves” in a “world” that honors and extols human self-hood. The world supports and promotes “self-awareness”, which inevitably leads to “self-preservation”, along with all the other “self-things” that keep us centered on SELF. But living for self is not “kingdom living”.

A big part of operating in “God’s kingdom”, as opposed to the world, is walking away from self-interests and becoming willing to sacrifice “self” for “others”. To do this correctly is not easy, and will not happen on its own, even though a kind of “service” and “human good” can go on in Satan’s world as his substitute for “kingdom” service. “Real service” will come only from a heart filled with God’s goodness. When a believer is right with God and moving closer to Him, service will overflow as an inevitable consequence of spirituality. We are not “born to serve”, but we can “learn to serve”...REALLY SERVE...and we must.

We are Commanded to Become Servants. Mark 10:35-45 describes true service. We quote verses 42b-44 here:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

When we have authority, we believe our safety and security are enhanced, because greater jurisdiction gives us more ability to control what we see as crucial conditions in our environment.

Control contributes to a sense of power; and power makes us feel safe, perhaps invincible. So it is “natural” to want to be the one “in charge”, rather than the one who is “less powerful”. Those without power can be disregarded and discarded without a thought...they can become obscured, and are easily trampled under the feet of those with power.

But we are told that to “become great”, we must become “servants”. Here is our flipped world again. This seems backwards. And—in the world—it is. Even in churches, the need to be “higher up” is compelling. But Matt. 23:8-12 commands this:

But you are not to be called “Rabbi”, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth “father”, for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called “teacher”, for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Adopting this kind of life style will be like swimming upstream. We do not want to be the low man on the totem pole. This is why the attitude of a servant will come only through tremendous growth. We must pray for the wisdom and faith to become servants, so that we can become what we essentially have not been...deniers of self.

Becoming a Servant. J. Hampton Keathley, III, presented an important question concerning the command for us to become servants, saying, “Now, an important question to ponder: What is one of the surest signs of mature spirituality? It is possessing the heart and mind of a servant.” (Endnote 11) And what is the biggest test for determining our attitude to see if it is that of a servant? Keathley answers this, saying, “The real test of whether we are truly maturing and learning to become a Christ-like servant is how we act when people treat us like one.” (Endnote 12)

We discussed the example of Jesus as servant in an earlier chapter, and introduced at that time a passage in John depicting Jesus as servant. Here we will quote the entire passage to help us get Jesus’ message on service:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:12-17)

Jesus pointed out that He was teaching TRUTH, which was an alert signal indicating that the disciples should pay close attention to what He was saying. He wanted them to understand how important it is that we see ourselves as “servants” and not “masters”. So what is wrong with churches today as we look within them? There are too many who are practicing all the best Pharisaic moves in order to call attention to themselves...who want to elevate themselves and get approbation from onlookers. It should also be acknowledged that there are many who come into

church to be “ministered to”, and not to be “equipped to minister”. (Endnote 13) In either case, there is no real service...in the first instance because they are not following Jesus’ example, and in the second because they are absorbed in selfish laziness (too lazy to study, pray, and grow, let alone “serve”).

We must grow in order to serve. And then our attitude must become that of a servant. In fact, when our spirituality is fully developed, our attitude will be characterized by a *drive to serve*. With maturity, we will get the attitude we need. We will see this more clearly, as we get into issues of pride and humility, the topics for our next two chapters.

Chapter 3-7

Pride and Arrogance

The Enemy Within. We know very well that we have a sinful nature dwelling within us. It is not from the devil or the world that most evil comes, but from US. We have an evil bent, an insatiable drive to satisfy our lusts, and a powerful tendency to violate God's standards. Our "nature" is the root of all the "evil" we do, and this root has a deeply-buried tentacle...called PRIDE. Believing we are "more", and that we deserve "more", is the essential motivation for our deviation from God's principles, and the underlying cause of our tendency to avoid God. The basic source of energy for the evil that men do, even in the name of good, is most commonly pride.

Pride is ubiquitous...pervasive and universal. It is the hardest condition to correct, Satan's greatest point of leverage over us, and the world's greatest trap. When pride dominates our sinful nature, which is most of the time, spirituality and faith don't stand a chance! Pride is the "abiding sin", the one which is most difficult to overcome. This is the condition that we most want to correct, and the part of our inner being that God will work on the most. Record this: Almost all of our training will be about confronting and diminishing our pride.

Jesus described conditions underlying our inner propensity for sin, that part of our heart that drives all evil. Here is what he said about evil from the heart:

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean'. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'." (Mark 7:20-23)

The heart has a good side—where the Holy Spirit resides—and a bad side, where the sinful nature plots and conducts evil. We know that the influences of Satan and his world are powerful in prompting us to sin, but the real culprit in evil is our sinful nature, *dominated by pride*. And we are responsible for the devastation it does.

Pride will not be permitted to go on endlessly without being checked. A heart filled with pride will be challenged by God, as He did that of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel describes the outcome of the king's pride: "But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory." Pride will eventually destroy the life and work of a believer.

Look at Me, Look at Me, Look at Me. We want to be seen and praised. This is pride, and it is a big problem. In fact, it is the greatest single detriment to faith in God, because it is an expression of faith in "self". This is what we see in John 5:44, which asks this question: "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another [indication of living in pride], yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" Notice that the acceptance of "praise" from people, i.e., believing the lie that we are "good", causes us to focus on ourselves, and leads us to believe in our

own resources, rather than God. When this happens, we will not believe in or trust God...our faith will be nil. This is the effect of pride, which causes us to be more interested in the approbation of men than we are the approval of God.

We are suckers for applause and recognition; we can never seem to get enough. We recall the Pharisee that Jesus described in a parable, as follows:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” (Luke 18:11)

Self-righteousness is the hardest form of pride to overcome, because we are actually doing what we see as “right”. When we see ourselves as “good”, we will believe we are something, when we are actually nothing. We think, “My, how impressed God must be with me!” Unfortunately, seeing oneself as “worthy” is one of the most insidious and dangerous forms of pride, because we see no need to change.

In this same parable Jesus concluded (in verse 14), “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (We will provide a discussion of humility in the next section, but for now we are looking at the other side of the coin: *pride*.) The Pharisee was “exalting himself”, because of his pride. His view of himself was elevated, but his faith was flat, so he was scoring no points with God.

Pride of any sort undermines our spiritual walk. Experience, as a deceptive source of truth regarding pride, can lead us to think that it is good for us to receive the acclaim of the world. We can feel really good—exhilarated—when we receive recognition, but this will become empty before long, and we will be left with nothing but a shell. We will be taken down at some point, because we are looking toward the wrong source for significance and worth. “Peacocking” is one of the least attractive things we can do spiritually, and when we do it, we can expect to be dropped like a rock, followed by a rapid descent.

Remember Isaiah’s description of Satan’s fall: “All your pomp has been brought down to the grave...” (Is. 14:11a), to which he added, “How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth...” (Is. 14:12a). Pride cannot stand. As Solomon said, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18).

Spiritual Impact of Pride. Even in true “holiness”, pride can creep in and weaken our faith. When we get smug about our spiritual stature, and start comparing ourselves to others, we take the maturity we are building and trample it. We cannot sustain maturity and spirituality, whenever pride takes charge. And pride will overpower us if we are not on our toes constantly...confessing, studying, praying, reviewing the promises, trusting, and enduring God’s training. As it is with Satan and his allies (the world and the law of sin) we must *stay ahead of pride*, or it will overtake us and pin us down. And its effects are devastating. Pride will debilitate our spiritual value and progress, for as long as it persists.

In context with our larger topic, gifts and service, we must see pride as the greatest detriment to

our spiritual effectiveness. When we are focused on ourselves, and seeking to aggrandize ourselves, we will not be able to serve others. When we walk in pride, we will not be walking by the Spirit, and will have no consideration for the needs of others...needs that might be satisfied through our gifts. In Gal. 5:26 Paul admonished us, "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." Conceit, arrogance, pride: these are what we must avoid. But these are irresistible to us, and no amount of being convinced that pride is bad will be enough to make us STOP BEING PROUD. The only way for pride to be taken down is through the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. Pride is a "spiritual" problem, requiring a "spiritual" solution.

Notice verse 25 (still in Gal. 5), immediately preceding Paul's cry for us to avoid conceit. In this verse, he says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [walk by] the Spirit." Verse 25 represents the *right* way, while verse 26 represents the *wrong* way. We will walk by the Spirit, or we will walk by pride. If we are walking in the Spirit, we will be walking in His love, and our attention will be directed outward toward others. If we are walking in conceit, our attention will be drawn inward, where we will be nursing our ego, our self-image, and our pride.

God sees our pride, and knows when it is dominating our hearts. 1 Sam. 2:3 tells us, "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows [you], and by him deeds are weighed." If arrogance exists, God sees it...He knows us inside and out...and all we can do is confess it, so that God can forgive it. Only then will we be able to move on without the crushing weight of our own self-adulation.

When we are cleansed through confession, we will be filled with the Spirit, and He can perform His loving ministry through us. And as long as He controls us, we will operate in His power, rather than through the impetus of pride. The love we have *in the Spirit* will expel pride for as long as we *remain in Him*. In 1 Cor. 13:4, we see that "love does not boast". This means that there is no room for pride where love prevails (through fellowship). And when love is present, gifts can operate; what we do then from moment to moment will be Spirit-led, with the result that we will be serving others in His strength. Final footnote: We must not forget that *sustaining* the spiritual condition of fellowship will require rapid growth, so that faith will be bolstered and "backsliding" averted.

Chapter 3-8

Humility

The Perspective of Humility. We have written a great deal about humility in the past, but we always manage to see some new truths when we revisit this topic. Everything we do as believers begins with humility. We will not confess, pray, learn, or endure, without humility. But it is not our nature to be humble, as we saw in the last chapter; it is common for us to become proud. The pride we have is inherited from Adam, and is a permanent tendency within our make-up. It is only when we are in communion with the Holy Spirit through the cleansing effects of confession that the life of Christ within us becomes dominant. From Him we learn humility. It is not our natural viewpoint, but is a “supernatural” outlook that comes through growth and fellowship.

In this chapter, we will lean heavily on Andrew Murray for clear language to help us frame the concept of humility. *Humility: the Beauty of Holiness*, by Murray, contains a treasure trove of insight into this topic. Here is a statement from this book, which highlights the need for us to examine this doctrine: “How much there may be of earnest and active religion while humility is still sadly wanting.” (Endnote 14) We have plenty of “worship” and “speech” and “sincere countenances”, but too little humility. The practice of “religion”, often based on some form of self-induced legalism, is based on the belief that we are basically, intrinsically, and independently “good”.

After we are saved, there is a tendency for us to embrace religious conformity and compliance as the way to exhibit “Christianity”. We see our place among men, and forget our place before God. We too often gauge our value by how we compare with others, and assume that as long as we measure up to some minimum standard, we pass. The right “practice” is there, but not the right “attitude”.

Murray gives a perfect perspective of the right attitude of humility in the following statement:

Yes, let us ask whether we have learnt to regard a reproof, just or unjust, a reproach from friend or enemy, an injury, or trouble, or difficulty into which others bring us, as above all an opportunity of proving how Jesus is all to us, how our own pleasure or honour are nothing, and how humiliation is in very truth what we take pleasure in. It is indeed blessed, the deep happiness of heaven, to be so free from self that whatever is said of us or done to us is lost and swallowed up in the thought that Jesus is all. (Endnote 15)

How can it be any clearer how accepting we must be of God’s attempts to train us through humbling circumstances? This is the hardest condition for us to endure gracefully. Here is what we mean: When others behave wrongly, we can pretty much tolerate that, unless that “wrong behavior” is directed at us. If we are wrongly accused, or harshly put down, our self-defensive mechanisms kick in, making it impossible for us not to rise up in defense of the *truth* about us. If we are wrongly criticized, we are driven to correct any mistakes.

But that is not all: Even when we are rightly “judged”, we still feel a need to justify ourselves. This is

because we have screened out God's purpose in the training exercises that he brings to teach us humility, and we resort to our own resources to sustain and preserve our image. It is virtually impossible for us not to *protect our reputation*, when it is threatened, but the right response to being maligned is to trust God to sustain us through the attack. The kind of maturity required to exhibit such humility is rare, almost to the point of extinction. But it is, with God, *possible*. Let us pray that we can achieve such an extraordinary level of faith.

Speaking of faith, the attitude of humility is fundamental to the full operation of our faith. Or perhaps it is better seen as the greatest *evidence* of our faith. Humility and faith are almost identical, because the more we see God in His true reality, and the more humble we become, the more there will be a concomitant presence of faith. And the more we see pride and self-trust and self-absorption in ourselves, the more we will see our faith eroded. Humility is the kernel of all we will ever hope to understand, become, or achieve. Without humility, there will be no meaning...and no fulfillment of our purpose as believers.

Realizing that We can do Nothing. Once again, we look to Murray to help us shape our understanding of humility and its place. This is what he presented concerning the centrality of humility:

Humility is the only soil in which the graces root; the lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure. Humility is not so much a grace or virtue along with others; it is the root of all because it alone takes the right attitude before God, and allows Him as God to do all. (Endnote 16)

How can God operate through a heart that forms a road-block to Him? How can He bless us and empower us when we are relying on another (ourselves) to execute the Christian way of life. He can only work through a heart that is open to Him. Murray continues this vein of thought by saying, "...the first and chief mark of the relation of the creature, the secret of his blessedness, is the humility and nothingness which leaves God free to be all." (Endnote 16, repeated) This was true of the humanity of Christ, of His disciples, and now of us. Without God, we can do nothing; and we *are* nothing. Murray said, "It is only where we, like the Son, truly know and show that we can do nothing of ourselves, that God will do all." (Endnote 16, repeated)

Any goodness or righteousness or holiness does not come *from man* as the source, but *from God*. It is the quintessence of pride to believe that we are good, or that we produce goodness, regardless of how the world may view or assess what we do. To claim that we produce "good" is to ignore its only real origin, which is God Himself. Murray concluded this:

There is none holy but God: we have as much of holiness as we have of God. And according to what we have of God will be our real humility, because humility is nothing but the disappearance of self in the vision that God is all. (Endnote 17)

Learning what Humility Is. Does being humble mean that we should go around berating ourselves? No. Public self-effacement or open self-condemnation is not what humility calls for. Humility is on the inside, and does not need to be announced, although it will surely show if it is

present, without our saying a word. In that connection, public confession of sins is NOT required in Scripture. (FYI: James 5:16 refers to clearance of outstanding relational difficulties with fellow believers, not exchanging sin lists with each other. If you have wronged someone, clear that before you pray, since unresolved relationship issues affect prayers. See 1 Pet. 3:7.) The correct recipient for confession is God alone. Public confession can easily turn into a process by which one carnal believer can influence other believers to join him in his carnality. When a sin is described by a believer, it can easily appeal to the sinful natures of others, and—before you know it—carnality is spreading like a summer cold.

We would all like to be lifted up by God. We all want grace and God's favor. But these do not come through directly searching or vying for them; they come through humility. Grace is for the humble. If we want grace, we must learn humility. James 4:10 says, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." James 5:6b-7 confirms this, saying, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

An important point to note is that we don't "make" ourselves humble. We cannot BE humble; we must LEARN HUMILITY through God's Word and God's training. Through growth and training, we BECOME humble. We don't decide to "be humble"; we decide to grow and endure training, so humility will develop. It is then that God can lift us up. Once again, Murray has a better description:

He has not learnt to seek humility at any cost. He has accepted the command to be humble, and seeks to obey it, though only to find how utterly he fails. He prays for humility, at times very earnestly; but in his secret heart he prays more, if not in word, then in wish, to be kept from the very things that will make him humble. (Endnote 18)

Humility is learned through training, so when we pray to grow or be made humble, we must know what this means: that we will be shaped and refined through the hammering and grinding of God's training program.

Jesus said, "...learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (from Matt. 11:29). Rest comes through proper recognition of God *as God*, and the wisdom to see ourselves as the weak and lowly creatures we are. We are wholly dependent on the grace and mercy of our Creator and Savior. Jesus also said, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4). And He said, "For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest" (Luke 9:48b). We are starting to see what we have to learn: that we are most when we are least, that we are strongest when we know our weakness, that we are most successful when we acknowledge our failures, and that we are most righteous when we confess our sins.

The conditions under which we are learning humility are the most challenging we will face. The real test of humility takes place in the "heat of battle", in the rigors and difficulties of daily life. It is easier to think about God and maintain humility in the form of confession, prayer, Bible study, and so on...when we are comfortable and at ease. But when we are engaged in meeting the demands of our many responsibilities in the world, and facing a steady flow of events, often trying ones, it is

much harder. Being able to maintain humility when the storm is raging requires great advancement into maturity. Believers who are new or mid-level in their growth will be swamped by circumstances in the world, and have little hope of staying humble. Their thinking will tend to be carnal and/or worldly. So what is needed? Maximum attention to growth.

While learning about God as part of our growth process, we come to understand his LOVE, which is the most humbling awareness we can have. In Ephesians 3, we see the importance of God's love, and learn that our fully grasping this love is the basis for our receiving the fullness of God. This is what we see in Eph. 3:17b-19:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

We don't see "humility" mentioned specifically in this passage, but we see it before and after, in Ephesians 3:8 and 4:1-2. Paul says that he is "less than the least of all God's people" (3:8), so he received grace; and he calls for us to "be completely humble and gentle" (4:2), so that our lives will be "worthy of our calling" (4:1). When we receive the fullness of God, as Paul assuredly did, we will become "less", and when we are small enough, we can reflect some of the same qualities that Paul did. When we know how big God is, how great grace is, and how wonderful God's love is, we will be eligible for the humility that lets us share in all of these.

When we see God, we will not like the person we see in ourselves *apart from God*. In Job 42:5-6, Job finally realized that the problems he was having rested with HIM and not with God. In this passage, he said, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." What does God want most from us? Humility. What reflects humility and recognition of mercy and grace better than anything else? Confession...or "repentance". When Job looked at his own failings, and SAW with the eyes of his heart the greatness of God, he could only despise himself.

Isaiah felt the same way, as we see in Is. 6:5, where he said, "'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am a man of unclean lips...'" He followed this with, "...my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." This confession and awakening set Isaiah up to go to work, both within himself, and within God's plan. In verse 8 (still in Is. 6), he said, "Here am I. Send me." And God replied in verse 9, saying, "Go and tell this people...", followed by the message he was to deliver. The cleansing that came from confession (as per verse 7, which says, "...your guilt is taken away") equipped Isaiah for service. His humility qualified him to fulfill his mission. Applying this to ourselves, when we start "seeing" God through growth, we can know that we are moving toward humility.

Humility (along with the fullness of God, surrender, victory over sin, and full-on service) may be one of the last spiritual conditions we achieve. Seeing God, which goes along with grasping His love, leads to His fullness and our humility. It is then that we can be exalted and lifted up, becoming recipients of "more grace" (James 4:6). When this happens, we will know our true place in the divine hierarchy, and we will see at last, perhaps with a jolting shock, that God is everything!

Paul's Humility. We mentioned Paul's humility in the last section, but there is more to discover from his example, so we will extend earlier remarks to include further examination of his mature view of himself and God. 1 Cor. 15:9-10 is Paul's testimony:

For I am least of the apostles and do not deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

There are several items in this and related reports regarding Paul's humility that we want to examine, as follows:

1. When Paul became born again, he was as far from God as one can get. He was openly opposing the message of Christ, and those who espoused it.
2. After he was saved, did Paul achieve humility right away, or begin his ministry immediately? No. He was not ready. He started off as a helpless blind person, before being healed and then being sent to the desert for three years of intensive preparation.
3. When Paul started writing his epistles, over a decade had passed since he had been saved, and a lot of training had been completed in the meantime. He was learning *humility* to equip him for the operation of his gifts.
4. Before he began his first missionary journey...and before he wrote his first epistle...he had come to recognize that it was not he that was doing God's work...it was God. Specifically, it was God's "grace"—operating through Paul's gifts in the energy of the Spirit—that ended up doing the job.
5. So Paul could just sit back and watch God work, right? In a sense, yes...on the INSIDE. But results are manifested on the OUTSIDE? Paul "worked harder than them all", even though it was God's grace that was behind him. Paul knew he was a vessel, an instrument, the "least of all God's people", dependent on grace. (See Eph. 3:7-8.) And he was worked to the bone.
6. By recognizing his place in the kingdom, which was that of a "servant" of God (Eph. 3:7), Paul achieved humility, which opened wide avenues for service, resulting in the unfettered expression of grace through Him. God took this one, this "least" of all believers, and gave him the privilege of being the greatest single proponent of grace, and the best-known expositor of truths for living, in all of human history.

While Paul was doing all the phenomenal things that he accomplished, did he still have a sinful nature? Of course! That is why, in 1 Tim. 1:15, He said, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." Does he mean that he was the "worst" before he was saved, and that after salvation he was forever pure? No.

After Paul was saved, he recognized that there was much work to be done, before he would be

elevated above his position as the “worst”. Paul had been a distinguished scholar and public official in his society before he was saved, but salvation changed that altogether. No longer was he a powerful and influential man. He was ostracized and alone in a world quite foreign to the world he had known. The world had not changed, of course; Paul had changed.

As he grew, he learned that what he did, he did by grace, and not through existential superiority. In Paul’s recognition of being the worst, he was citing his past, even his growth history, during which time he spent a great deal of time living up to his label as the worst. Like all of us, he no doubt went through many failures before he learned how to operate in grace.

To succeed, Paul learned what we must all learn, as expressed by Andrew Murray:

He seeks to bring us low, until we so learn that His grace is all, as to take pleasure in the very thing that brings us and keeps us low. His strength made perfect in our weakness. His presence filling and satisfying our emptiness, becomes the secret of a humility that need never fail. (Endnote 19)

There is a wrinkle, though, that we need to see in Paul’s growth pattern, which is going to seem a little odd when we present it, yet it is perfectly in line with all the things we have said before in *God’s Training Program for Believers, Step by Step toward Surrender, Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*, and *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. Before we present the “surprise” about Paul, we want to take a look at his maturity. Paul was committed to God plan and will, and he progressed eventually to the level of super-maturity.

Few Christians achieve an extraordinary level of maturity that enables them to “surrender”, as Paul did. He experienced victory over the sin that had haunted him so doggedly during his growth phase. He received unprecedented blessings in the fruit he saw being borne. And he acquired spiritual strength that enabled him to serve without the weights and impediments of “pre-mature” living. Through super-maturity, Paul learned to walk entirely by the power of the Holy Spirit, and to live in yieldedness to God’s guidance.

Paul came from the “least” to a time of “holiness”. And here’s the wrinkle: If Paul was mature and “holy”...and *knew* it...how could he measure up to the requirement of humility? The answer will take some explanation. It begins with an acknowledgement that humility is ultimately a full recognition of GRACE. There is no question that Paul became a powerful, surrendered believer through grace, and this brought him to HUMILITY. His humble attitude was completely directed toward God, and became, as we shall see later, overlaid with FAITH. The blend of mature humility and faith erupted into FULL CONFIDENCE in God’s workings, with this outcome: Paul KNEW that he had arrived, at last, at his spiritual destination, where he trusted God completely, while God worked unreservedly. This is what we see in 2 Cor. 1:12, as follows:

Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted (behaved) ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God’s grace.

The resolution of the riddle about Paul is that he knew he was living in the power and wisdom of

grace (or “by the Spirit”), and he knew he had achieved “holiness”...but he also knew that WHAT WAS HIS DID NOT COME FROM HIM. What was being generated was not his own righteousness or perfection...but that which comes FROM GOD. On the surface, his confidence may have looked like pride, which would come as a shock from such a great believer. But Paul’s knowing that he was “holy” was actually an expression of humility, because he acknowledged the *source* of the good that was flowing through him. Paul was mature enough to be “holy”, to know it, and to remain humble.

Don’t try this at home, because you and I are not prepared for this. We have not reached super-maturity; we are just far enough along to *see* the concept, though we are not yet able to *live* it. We still live in a universe in which we are the center, and where we still tend to think that anything good must be generated by us. We still fail miserably. We may count on God now and then, but NOT FULLY, as Paul did! The door is open to us, though; we can grow into a closer walk with God, so that we will gradually gain understanding of the place of God in our lives and in all of creation, and this will eventually lead us to full maturity. Paul himself learned through a means which Murray described well, as follows:

It [humility] can, as [with] Paul, in full sight of what God works in us and through us, ever say, “In nothing was I behind the chiefest apostles [2 Cor. 11:5], *though I am nothing*” [Eph. 3:8a]. His humiliations had led him to true humility, with its wonderful gladness and glorying and pleasure in all that humbles. (Endnote 20)

Paul came from the “least” to the “chiefest”, but was still *nothing*, as grace was *everything*. And through such advanced awareness, Paul achieved “holiness”.

The big lesson for us is that God will *teach us* humility, and bring us to recognize, if we are willing, that only God can be God. While we are growing, as long as we are promoting ourselves instead of Him, we will be blocking His place in us. Humility *invites* Him; pride *slams the door* on Him. Conclusion: Humility opens the door to His life in us. When we master this, we will be able to say, with Paul, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). That is our objective.

Paul and Confession. Murray gives an eye-opening description of Paul’s humility, as seen in its most concrete form, which is the “confession of sins”. Forgive a lengthy quote from Murray’s *Humility*, none of which can be properly omitted for us to fully understand Paul’s confession of sins, as follows:

The true import of what these expressions of St. Paul teach us comes out all the more strongly when we notice the remarkable fact that, through his whole Christian course, we never find from his pen, even in those epistles in which we have the most intensely personal unbosoming, anything like confession of sin. Nowhere is there any mention of shortcoming or defect, nowhere any suggestion to his readers that he has failed in duty, or sinned against the law of perfect love. [that is...after he matured]. On the contrary, there are passages not a few in which he vindicates himself in language that means nothing if it does not appeal to a faultless life before God and men. ‘Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and righteously, and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you’ (1 Thess. 2:10). ‘Our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God we

behaved ourselves in the world, and more abundantly to you ward' (2 Cor. 1:12). This is not an ideal or an aspiration; it is an appeal to what his actual life had been [become]. However we may account for this absence of confession, all will admit that it must point to a life in the power of the Holy Ghost, such as is but seldom realized or expected in these our days. (Endnote 21)

Paul had surrendered to God, had achieved victory over sin, and had received God's rest (or "contentment"), *because he had reached super-maturity* and received the "fullness of God". He had learned concentrated humility, and knew that everything he did, every "service" he rendered, was an accomplishment of God's Spirit within him, and God's grace around him. Because he had developed such a complete faith in God's love and power, he was able to live virtually "sin-free". Hence the absence of confession.

This is possible for us, as it was for Paul. We can reach the level of faith and communion with God that we, too, can exhibit a level of cleanliness and devotion that will make confession a rare necessity. Not now, mind you, but this is potential within the future life of any true seeker of God, any believer dedicated to growth.

Paul on Humility before Men. We have largely been examining humility *before God*, and now want to see what Paul said about humility *before men*. To compact this discussion, which deserves more attention than we have space for here, we will cite several scriptures that establish the place of humility in the way believers treat, and respond to, each other.

Remember that the concentration of our love and service will lie in the area of our gifts. Outside our gifted areas, we are to have gentle compassion toward all believers, but the broader application of this requirement to "love" will represent a kind of "sweeping in the corners", which is the product of great maturity. We see in the following passages a call for us to allow the love of God to flow through us toward others:

- Eph. 5:21—"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." The source for love and regard for each other comes out of our relationship with and attitude toward Jesus Christ. When we are in fellowship and moving toward Him, we will be learning to "submit" to each other, rather than always trying to keep the "upper hand".
- Col. 3:12-14—"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." With humility arising out of maturity, we will be able to be filled and covered with godly love. This will include patience and gentleness toward those who are coming along behind us.
- Eph. 4:2—"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." Once again, as we mature, we will exhibit humility and patience toward fellow believers. Believers are more "trying", or harder to work with, because they have pressures from training, as well as increased Satanic attacks and temptations, which can

make them much more stubborn and irascible than unbelievers. Dealing with believers requires MATURITY!

- Matt. 23:11-12—"The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Self-promotion by believers is challenging to those around them, and is detrimental to personal fellowship with God, as well as peaceful relations with each other. Real service cannot mix with self-advancement. Service for praise is NOT service.
- Rom. 12:10—"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." When we see others as "above" us, we will take on the attitude of a servant. This is the standard; the means is maturity.
- 1 Cor. 13:4-6—"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." Love, the primary manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and the symbol of fellowship with Him, is expressed through our gifts. It is clear, then, that gifts will not operate if love is absent. If you want to determine whether you are operating in a correct way spiritually, look at the indicators for love just given. If they are not seen in your attitude and demeanor, you have some work to do. Come along; I will join you.
- Gal. 5:13—"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." The sinful nature drags us in a hundred different directions, all of them away from God. But when the Holy Spirit, rather than our nature, is in control, we can serve each other as a statement of our love and fellowship.
- Philippians 2:3—"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Once again, we see "SELF" rearing its ugly head, keeping us from humility and service.

How could Paul be more emphatic on our responsibility to stay in fellowship, grow, and reach a level of maturity that will enable us to be humble and to love and serve others? If we have any concrete seriousness about God in our lives, we must acknowledge our *need* to grow and to serve, followed by definite *steps* to make these happen. Growing IN grace, and BY grace, we will learn how to serve, which for us is to learn how to *really* live.

Faith and Humility. We cannot have faith if we do not have humility. Faith and humility travel together. As faith grows, humility grows; and as humility increases, faith thrives. Once again, we turn to Murray in the following for clarity and insight, to help us understand the relationship between humility and faith:

We need only think for a moment what faith is. Is it not the confession of nothingness and

helplessness, the surrender and the waiting to let God Work? Is it not in itself the most humbling thing there can be—the acceptance of our place as dependents, who can claim or get or do nothing but what grace bestows? Humility is simply the disposition which prepares the soul for living on trust. And every, even the most secret breathing of pride, in self-seeking, self-will, self-confidence, or self-exaltation, is just the strengthening of that self which cannot enter the kingdom, or possess the things of the kingdom, because it refuses to allow God to be what He is and must be there—the *All in All*. (Endnote 22)

Faith is the means to recognizing God; humility is the response to what we see. We see God because we trust Him and believe what we learn about Him. And we are humbled by what we come to understand. When we look at the world, our pride is fed, either with what we have, or with what we imagine that we might get. But when we look at God, humility increases, as faith is growing. Murray concludes this thought with these words:

Faith is the organ or sense for the perception and apprehension of the heavenly world and its blessings. Faith seeks the glory that comes from God, that only comes where God is All. As long as we take glory from one another, as long as ever we seek and love and jealously guard the glory of this life, the honor and reputation that comes from men, we do not seek, and cannot receive the glory that comes from God. Pride renders faith impossible. (Endnote 23)

Humility is attached to all spiritual engagements, including confession, prayer, study, trusting, and endurance. And it is the center-piece for all our relationships with fellow believers. There is no separating any part of the Christian life from humility. Murray said, “It is the humility that brings a soul to be nothing before God, that also removes every hindrance to faith, and makes it fear lest it should dishonor Him by not trusting Him wholly”. (Endnote 23, repeated) What does our life with God require, more than any other condition? Humility! Murray puts the cap on this by saying the following:

...absolute, unceasing, universal humility must be the root-disposition of every prayer and every approach to God as well as of every dealing with man; and that we might as well attempt to see without eyes or live without breath, as believe or draw nigh to God or dwell in His love, without an all-pervading humility and lowliness of heart. (Endnote 24)

We must not expect to ever reach super-maturity and surrender, if we leave humility behind at any point. If we expect to have great faith, we must first have great humility. Matt. 8:5-13, tells of a centurion, who—wanting Jesus to heal the servant he had left at home—reported the illness to Him. Jesus said, “I will go and heal him.” The centurion responded to the offer, saying, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.” Jesus was amazed at this, and said to the centurion, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” And, of course, the servant was healed. The lesson: faith reflects humility.

In Matt. 15:21-28, a Canaanite woman is reported to have come to Jesus, confronting Him with her daughter’s problem of demon possession. The disciples tried to get Jesus to send her away, but He replied to them: “I was sent only to lost sheep of Israel.” Implication: the “sheep” would not

include her, because she is not of Israel. The woman cried, “Lord, help me!” His reply to her was, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs,” referring again to her not being a Jew. She replied to Him, “Yes, Lord...but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” She was saying she would take the off-fall of His ministry, which was more than she had from Him at the time. Even a small piece of His healing would be an enormous blessing to her. Jesus answered, saying, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” The Canaanite woman had accepted the label of a “dog”, which showed her humility, and she accepted even the smallest favor from Jesus, knowing that it would be a big thing, since it came from Him.

We see, then, that faith and humility are symbiotic qualities, which support each other and mutually reinforce their respective purposes.

Part Four

Spirit-led Service

In This Part...

Chapter 4-1. Compelled to Serve

Chapter 4-2. Fellowship for Service

Chapter 4-3. Faith for Service

Chapter 4-4. Spirit-led Service

Chapter 4-1

Compelled to Serve

Paul was Compelled to Serve. Paul was compelled to serve by several powerful motivators. First of all, he was motivated by his *faith*, which caused him to *believe in specific directions* given by God. His understanding of God's divine instructions made it clear to Paul that he was to *SERVE*. He was also compelled by *fellowship* with God, which gave him a love for believers who were within the reach of his gift. This *moved* him to serve. And because of Paul's steady *communion* with the Holy Spirit, he was also *prompted directly* by the Holy Spirit to provide service.

When Paul looked out at the believers he was serving, he felt compassion and understanding, generated by the love of the Spirit within him. In 2 Cor. 5:14a, he said, "For Christ's love compels us..." He was moved by divine love, which burned within him. This created a desperate desire for him to fulfill his own service-mission, which was to enable other believers to join him in maturity. Paul knew what maturity was like, and knew where the believers within his purview belonged. We see this in Col. 1:28-29, which says this:

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Paul delighted in the maturation of those he was serving. He was a "servant of the gospel". He, along with all other gifted believers, was working to do the following:

...prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)

He wanted them, and us, ALL to reach a high level of faith and knowledge, and to become mature, even to the point where we receive the fullness of Christ. As we have seen in recent studies, this "fullness" is what we get at the pinnacle of spiritual growth. And, as we are discovering in this study, this is the place of greatest service.

We, as Well, are Compelled to Serve. Paul knew that we, like he, would be compelled to serve through the exercise of our gifts. This is because maturing believers no longer see fellow saints in the same light as they did before. We see them now as "prospects for maturity", and we see our gifts as a great catalyst within God's divine system to help them grow. With this view, it is hard to neglect our service, and it is unlikely that we will refuse the service of others. This is our main reason for living, and our lifeline, as well. And this is why contact among believers is so important, and why we should gather often for the exchanging of gifts.

Paul said this about our new view of fellow believers:

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly [fleshly] point of view. Though we once

regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:16-20a)

There are things buried in this passage that we have discussed before, such as what the "new creation" is. We showed in a previous study that this is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, which gives us a new view of others...and ourselves in relation to them. There are other precepts in these verses that we have dealt with before, or will in the future. For now, we want to see that the "ministry of reconciliation", as seen in this passage, is two-fold. One part has to do with dispensing the gospel to those in a lost and dying world, so they can choose to be "reconciled" to God. The other connects with our responsibility to see carnal believers restored to fellowship...or for them to be "reconciled" to the indwelling Holy Spirit. In either case, we are making an "appeal" to those who need God's word of reconciliation, which is broadcast through our gifts.

As it was with Paul, the love of Christ "compels" us. Even if we have other interests, and would rather be doing something else...IF we are growing and operating in fellowship, we will choose to exercise our gifts in service. So when *should* we serve? All the time!

John 5:16-17 shows us the parameters for our service, saying, "So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working'." God always works, Jesus always worked, and we must work...always. All this, of course, will come with growth and our walking faithfully by means of the Spirit. In fact, if we grow and walk in the Spirit, we WILL serve...as we are compelled to do...always.

Emotions and Spirituality are Not the Same. When we respond to the Spirit...we serve. 1 Tim. 4:5 tells us what this service looks like, saying, "But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." In this verse, Paul instructs Timothy to do the following, which we are to do also:

1. **Keep your head.** We are to maintain fellowship and faith while we grow, which shapes our attitude, but also preserves our sanity, which we need for effective service.
2. **Endure hardship.** This is perseverance through God's training, which equips us for fruitful service.
3. **Do the work and discharge all the duties of your ministry.** We are to exercise our gifts (one of Timothy's gifts was evangelism), and to discharge the duties associated with our gifts. And when should we do this? On an ongoing basis!

"Keeping our head" suggests that we are to be ruled by something other than our emotions. We are required to perform service at all times, discharging *all* our duties, even when we don't "feel" it...don't feel the "spirit moving". Service is based on *spirituality*, not on emotions. Unfortunately,

much of Christianity today relies on emotions to validate spirituality or to generate motivation for service. But this is not the correct method for determining or creating spiritual outcomes. What we can rely on is the following: God. He will forgive us when we confess, fill us when we have been cleansed (or “sanctified”), hear us when we pray, teach us when we examine His truths, cause us to grow when we are trained, and work through us when we are walking in His power. If we are doing these things, service will occur, regardless of whether we feel stirrings within ourselves or not. These happen because we BELIEVE they will happen, and because God GUARANTEES they will happen.

Spiritual “heart-engagement” is not the same as emotions. Emotions may accompany spirituality, and the older I get, the more this seems to happen, but the emotions that come are not essential to growth or fellowship. They are just enjoyable. When we are “compelled” by the Spirit, service can occur, even if we are flat emotionally. And this service can be just as powerful as it could ever be if we were “excited” about the things we were doing. To serve, we rely on the Holy Spirit, not on something that comes from us, such as our emotions.

Chapter 4-2

Fellowship for Service

Fellowship is the Key to Everything. We constantly pray that God will be with us, and comfort us...provide for us, bless us, draw near to us. But what must happen first? We must “draw near” to God! James 4:8 says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” This verse shows us HOW to come closer to God, which is through cleansing, or the confession of our sins. (For a recap and/or review of the doctrine of “confession”, read “The Solution for Sin”, pp. 41-56, in *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*.) We also want to be reminded of the *importance* of fellowship, and refresh our understanding of the need for cleanliness in order to draw near to God.

“The first and chief need of our Christian life is *fellowship with God*. The divine life within us comes from God, and is entirely dependent on Him.” This comes from Murray once again, in a study called, *The Deeper Christian Life*. (Endnote 25) The operation of the Holy Spirit within us will be “on” or “off”, based on our cleanliness. He will always be there, but He will not be the dominant force in our hearts if we are not clean, meaning *if we have not received forgiveness through confession, the influence of the Spirit within us will be dormant!*

After confession, the fellowship we enjoy through cleanliness will be *sustained* only for as long as we are “walking by faith”, a process which will last for a period of time governed by the *strength* of our faith. With strong faith, fellowship is sustained longer, because stronger faith produces greater resistance to sin.

To avoid too much repetition in the main body of this text, we are fleshing out this study by offering a discussion on fellowship from an earlier book, titled “*Bible Basics on Walking in the Spirit: Pathway to Production*”, adding it to the appendices here as Appendix E, “Restoring and Maintaining Fellowship” (referenced earlier).

Clarity on Fellowship. When I first learned the concept of fellowship through cleansing, I believed at that time, and even suggested in some of my earlier writings, that fellowship with God was the final end of our pursuit of holiness. In a sense, it is. But I now invoke this caveat: The Christian life does not “end” with fellowship; it “begins” with it. We need more than *fellowship*; we need *faith*. Faith is the core and crux of our Christian lives, so the object of fellowship is to give us the opportunity to EXERCISE AND GROW OUR FAITH.

We *get into fellowship* by being cleansed through confession, but we *stay in fellowship* by believing God and His Word. The *time* we spend in fellowship depends on the *size* of our faith, and for faith to get bigger, we must *grow while we are in fellowship*! This is why it is vital for us to confess BEFORE we study or pray, so that these can lead to growth. Without confession, these *will not work*! When we are in fellowship, prayer and study will lead to the enlargement of our faith.

Benefits of Fellowship. The greatest benefit of fellowship and growth is the continual energizing

and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, apart from which we *cannot serve God*! When we return to fellowship, our spiritual motors are started, but it is not until we begin to grow that we get our faith in gear and start moving. When we GROW, faith BUILDS, and fellowship will be sustained for longer and longer periods of time. When we follow this blueprint, service and production will be maximized.

Recap: Confession of sins reconnects our hearts to the Spirit within us. Faith then hangs on to that connection, for a length of time determined by the *strength* of our faith. When a believer matures, he or she will hang on to the Spirit's control, and will thus be "walking in the Spirit", which means "operating in His power".

Once again, we extend this study by including an appendix, this time dealing with the "filling of the Spirit", which is "fellowship perpetuated". Please see Appendix I, "The Filling of the Spirit".

We also draw from Murray's treasury of wisdom, which offers the following comment regarding the filling of the Spirit: "Oh, friends, do not be content with that half-Christian life that many of you are now living, but say, 'God wants it, God commands it; I must be filled with the Spirit'." (Endnote 26) In another place he adds, "I must be full of the Holy Spirit if I am to be a whole-hearted Christian." (Endnote 27) The greatest benefit of fellowship, the finest thing God offers to His children, is the control of His Spirit, which will enable truly good things to happen.

We will not be able to serve, if we are not filled with the Spirit. The example for this is Peter, who could not begin service without first being filled with the Spirit (see Acts 2). Even Jesus depended on the Spirit as His source of divine contact, since He had stripped Himself of all divine prerogatives. (Compare Matt. 3:16-17 and 4:1, with John 8:28-29 and 5:30.) Other examples exist: Paul, John, Stephen, the apostles, and so on. The filling of the Spirit is central in this Age. Eph. 5:18 tells us, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." That which fills us controls us. When we are filled with wine, it controls us; when we are filled with the Spirit, the Spirit is in charge. As you move forward, walk with the Spirit so He can direct each step. That is our standard.

Unity through Fellowship. 1st John 1 tells us that fellowship with God enables fellowship with each other. When there is widespread fellowship, there will be widespread unity among believers. When division occurs, what is the reason? Carnality! The absence of fellowship causes rancor and pettiness. Believers stop looking to edify each other, and look for ways to satisfy their own egos. This is what the selfish perspective of carnality produces. Phil. 2:1-4, which is receiving a workout in this book, says the following about being unified in "spirit" (fellowship) and "purpose" (looking out for each other):

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul presents an “if...then” clause in this passage, where he is saying, in essence, “If you are in fellowship, then bring your ‘spiritualized’ minds together to concentrate on joint and mutual service to each other.” This is the most succinct statement of our joint purpose as a church, telling us we are to stay in fellowship and serve each other, which is our highest purpose...and our greatest cause. We are to devote our hearts and our total selves and all our resources to serving fellow believers in ways that lift them up and advance them toward maturity. Any time we are standing before another believer, we should be asking the question, “How can I help you grow?” That is our primary interest in each other.

Chapter 4-3

Faith for Service

All I Have is Yours. In Luke 15, in the “Parable of the Lost Son”, the well-known “prodigal” son is shown to have wasted his inheritance in sinful and irresponsible ways. When he ran out of money, he came back home, where he was well-received by his father. We have studied this parable in the past, and have used it to show how confession gets forgiveness and restores favor. But there is another lesson in this parable, which is worth looking at. Again we draw from Murray for insight. (Endnote 28)

The son who has returned gets the ring and the robe and the new sandals and the “fattened” calf, while the son who has been there all along is thinking: “I have never received even as much as a baby goat to allow me to celebrate with my friends.” He complains to his father, and his father responds with this: “‘My Son’, the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’.” (Luke 15:31-32) The wandering son had been restored to fellowship with his father, which was a joyful time for the father, while the son who has never wandered seems to be left out.

Was the son who stayed home justified or correct in his response to his brother’s return? If you said yes, keep reading. The real question is this: Did he display maturity or spirituality? The answer is “no”. This brother had “hovered” around his father, never straying far, but never really warming up to his father’s provision. He likely preferred the activities and company of his “friends” (symbolic of the “world”). How much is this like us? We are “near enough” to God, we think, but we are sure to keep a certain distance from God, so we can retain a degree of contact with the world. We do the minimum, just enough to stay out of hot water, but zeal for God is often missing. Churches are loaded with this type...the “luke-warm” believer.

The son who stayed home had at his disposal everything his father owned. He was in the vicinity of his father, but he was not “with” his father. He did not “have” what his father offered, because he did not “receive” it. He had no desire to be closer to his father, so he was unable to participate fully in the benefits of the fellowship which his father made available.

Murray said the following, reflecting on the response of the son who stayed home, and applying his example to our spiritual walk:

...if there is a discrepancy between our life and enjoyment of all God’s promises, the fault is ours. If our experience be not what God wants it to be, it is because of our unbelief in the love of God, in the power of God, and in the reality of God’s promises. (Endnote 28, repeated)

The son had it all, but he refused to believe in his father’s love and willingness to provide for him. All that God offers is ours. (Keep in mind that God is a spiritual Being, and His greatest provisions are spiritual. Other types of provision will be adequate, and sometimes sumptuous, but they are

incidental to God's true purpose, which is to bring us into full understanding of, and fellowship with, His Spirit.) The son did not understand what the father wanted to do for him...what the father considered as already belonging to the son. (Endnote 28, repeated)

Here is the lesson: If we do not have God's "fullness", it is not because He is withholding anything from us; it is because we have not grown sufficiently in our faith to receive it. When we are ready, we will receive it. The question we must ask is this: Do I believe in the God who saved me? Do I trust Him? Am I WILLING to receive the life He wants me to have now?

Which son would you say needed to repent? The wandering son, for sure, but—and here is another lesson that is often missed—so did the son who stayed home! Both were out of line. If anything, the son who wandered was better off, because he KNEW he had failed, and was willing to take that failure to his father. The son who never strayed far off thought that he was succeeding, so he was never inclined to acknowledge that he was failing. Here is the moral: It is better to fail miserably, and acknowledge it, than it is to fail in minor ways, and never realize it or confess it. The "wandering" son made progress; we are not sure about the "stationary" son.

More than anything else, the condition of the son who stayed home illustrates the plight of a believer who sits in one place and never grows. He lives a mediocre Christian life, and never really matures. This means that a believer who is "satisfied" with himself and his "Christian" walk will never see the light of *mature* faith, but will live in the twilight of a *weak* faith. On the other hand, if you are "dissatisfied" with the way you are living in the kingdom, there is hope for you. For faith to get off the ground, you will need to know that you are a weak and helpless creature, who needs divine help...who needs to have the gates to grace and divine provision opened up. Without learning to trust in the intentions and resources of the God of provision, you will surely not receive what is already yours.

Clarity on Faith. We do not know how spiritual nutrition actually works and what a growing faith really looks like in the spiritual realm, but we can be assured that *faith builds* as we feed on the Word and get closer to God. When we are in fellowship, it is the Holy Spirit who teaches us, so the divine nutrients of the Word, along with the events and experiences that God brings to train us, cause our faith to get stronger. God is—in effect—*feeding our faith*—or *causing it to grow*! This means that God is GIVING us faith as we confess, study, pray, and endure. The place of our "choice" in the matter is that WE must confess, study, pray, and endure; in so doing, we are choosing to grow and have our faith increased.

Here is where there is much confusion. We do not instantly and immediately, or ON DEMAND, express great faith. Put a better way: We cannot *exercise* faith beyond the faith we have accumulated. We trust within the limits of our own maturity. Our faith pool, or reservoir of faith, is measured at the level of our growth, and that is the amount of faith we can exercise. So we do not need to become frustrated by our lack of faith; we just need to GET BUSY GROWING, so our faith will increase. As we enrich our wisdom and endure our training, faith will get stronger. So our focus should not be so much on straining to "believe", but on attention to the growth regimen that allows God to *strengthen* our faith.

Faith and Service. Attaching faith to growth, we can see that the amount of faith we have to work with is the amount that has been built up through growth routines. With more faith, we can trust God more, which means that we can walk more consistently “in the Spirit”, and operate and serve in His energy. Faith is the key to the full and effective operation of our gifts, as they are used by God to perform His work through us. Through faith, service will happen, even if we don’t plan it or anticipate it. When we trust, God works.

We cited earlier the contents of Appendix H, “Faith and How it is Strengthened”. We refer you to this appendix again, as an opportunity to flesh out the concept of “growing our faith”.

Chapter 4-4

Spirit-led Service

Effectiveness Through Spirit-led Service. When we think of effective service, we envision some kind of product, a “result” from efforts exerted. We look for “fruits” from our labor. Permit an early diversion here to distinguish the “fruit of the Spirit” from “fruits of our labor”, even though both are generated by the Holy Spirit. The “fruit of the Spirit” is the result of fellowship, and includes love, joy, peace, patience, and so on. (See Gal. 5:22-23) The “fruits of our labor”, on the other hand include any acts of service which come out of that fellowship.

“Works”, or the “fruits of our labor”, are actually an *extension* of the “fruit of the Spirit”; i.e., service is the product of fellowship. When we see “fruits” come out of our works, we can know it is because we are serving properly; and the service is proper because it is “Spirit-led”. Our task is not just to serve, but to perform service that gets results. When the Spirit is at the helm, He will produce divine good, bearing the “fruit of the Spirit ” IN us, so that the “fruits of our (meaning HIS) labor” can be produced FROM us.

1 Cor. 15:58b says, “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” How many times has this verse been read, while the nuclear core of the verse...and of our lives...is being ignored? Notice the phrase, “in the Lord”. This is the heart or center of all Christian living. What we must do, so that our efforts are not in vain, is to “labor in the Lord”. This means to work IN FELLOWSHIP, which will be sustained by MATURITY! If we are not cleansed through confession and are not continuing to grow, the work and service that we do will be done “outside the Lord”, which means that our endeavors will be done “in the flesh”, and there will be no effective services rendered.

The component of gifted service that must not be omitted is seen in 1 Cor. 12:4-6, which says, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” The Holy Spirit of the Lord (Jesus Christ) and of God “works all of them” in believers, meaning that God does all the works of service. All gifts and all meaningful service must function under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Without him, service cannot take place...period. He is the distributor, administrator, and director of all gifted operations. Watch the Conductor. Until He waves His baton, sit quietly and count the measures (study and pray and wait).

Trusting for Service. Our flesh wants to reflect competence and strength and intelligence, but these will not be the source for Christian service. We don’t need to be strong and competent, to be effective for God; we need to be *trusting*. In 2 Cor. 12:10b we see Paul’s conclusion concerning personal “weakness”. He said, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” How can God use our weakness? Paul had set this up in verse 9, where he quoted what God had said to Him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” All we need in order to operate...is

grace. God does not need our competence; our natural abilities can offer nothing that He needs. Our role is not independent exertion, but dependent submission. Our job is not to “work”, but to trust; and when we trust, we will surely work...and work...and work.

Further establishing grace as the source of work in Paul’s life, he declared the following in 1 Cor. 15:9-10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” One of my favorite phrases in all of Scripture is this: “Yet not I...” Paul knew where the “effectiveness” of his ministry originated and where it was finished. It is not “I”, but grace, that does the work, whereby it becomes the embodiment of the character of God, exhibited through me when I trust Him to do the work. What we bring personally to a project at hand is of no importance. God does not need us; we need Him.

The Holy Spirit provides our gifts, and then He works them through us. We are to develop the faith we need to trust Him to do it. We are not “letting go and letting God”, because this suggests “passivity” on our part. Our role is very active, because we have the job of incorporating all of God’s techniques and assets into our growth regimen, so that our faith will grow enough for us to trust God to do His work through us. This will require effort from us, but this labor will operate within a “realm of grace”, where we are receiving grace assets through grace techniques, so that grace can do the real work. Rather than “letting go” and letting God work, we should be “digging in” to develop our faith so that we can trust God...to work.

The Filling of the Spirit. We have discussed the filling of the Spirit previously, and will continue to examine it further as we go along, but for now, we want to re-emphasize the importance of our being filled with—or controlled by—the Holy Spirit *prior to service*. We must grow from day to day, so that we will be mindful to confess and trust, which will enable us to be filled with the Spirit from moment to moment. We cannot serve if we are not filled. You are referred once more to Appendix I, “The Filling of the Spirit”, for a complete examination of this crucial doctrine. If you are not familiar with this teaching, it is imperative that you take the time to peruse this appendix.

Serving in the Power of the Spirit. We ask a question now that is seldom heard in Christian circles: Who really does the work? Usually, individuals or groups or entire organizations are seen as the means for getting work done. But for these to be effective, God must direct them, and be behind their completion. If our work is not done through submission to God, it will not be divine service, and any effects will be superficial and temporary. When we omit God from service, it is because the flesh is at work creating “substitute service” or a “facsimile” of God’s work, which God cannot accept or honor or use.

Paul tells us, in 2 Cor. 2:14-16, that the gospel message is being spread abroad, with some accepting and others rejecting. The ability to spread the word in a way that even *some* will accept it requires God’s supernatural oversight; this goes well beyond human capabilities. This is why, in verse 16, Paul asks, “Who is equal to such a task?” Then he answers this question in verse 17: “...in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like [as] men sent from God.” This short excerpt is loaded with spirituality and faith, saying that the one who is equal to the task looks like this:

1. **He is “in Christ”**, meaning he is in union with Christ.
2. **He is “before God”**, meaning that he is standing in the Holy of Holies, which suggests fellowship with God through cleanliness.
3. **He is “sincere”**, which means that he has a serious sense of God’s place in His function, and that he *trusts* God, as he stands before Him *full of faith*.
4. **He is “sent from God”**, showing that He is being led by the Holy Spirit to perform specific acts by divine power.

2 Cor. 3:4-6 confirms that our adequacy for service comes from God. This passage says the following:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

When will we get it that we are “not competent in ourselves” and that “our competence comes from God.” God has “made us competent as ministers” within the new covenant of (spiritual) life, which is given to us by the Holy Spirit. We have competence from the Holy Spirit, WHEN HE CONTROLS US. The main point to take away from this is that God is the source for competent service. If we count on ourselves and our own abilities, we will be disappointed.

In a succinct statement from Jesus Christ, the source for good is made clear. He said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me [in fellowship] and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” If we remain in fellowship, we will bear “fruit”, which in this case is the product developed—or the gains made—through Spirit-driven service. For a full discussion of the “vine and the branches”, see *Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God*, pp. 151-154.

We want to re-visit a passage that is becoming familiar to us, 1 Pet. 4:10-11, to find further evidence that God is the power behind meaningful service. This passage says this:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

We are to use the gifts we have received in the power that God supplies to us when we are “sanctified” conditionally (i.e., cleansed through confession). And those who “speak” should do so from a mature perspective, which will enable them to project the “words of God” through their understanding of divine truths. Here is the outcome: When we act and speak according to His will and leadership, we bring “praise” to Jesus Christ.

Human View vs Divine View. Pulling from an Old Testament example, we want to contrast the

divine view with the human view. This is shown in Numbers 13:30-33, from which we see first of all the *human* view-point:

“We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” (vv. 31-33)

Sizing up conditions in Canaan, beyond the Jordan, ten of the twelve spies that had been sent to reconnoiter reflected this “human” view point. Only two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, projected the *divine* perspective. They said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it” (v. 30). Their declaration portrayed an attitude of faith, not toward themselves or their personal resources, but toward God, as we see in Num. 14:6-10, which says this:

Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.

Our lesson: Anything that opposes us can be overcome by our all-powerful God. And when His strength becomes personal to us, it is because we believe in Him and rely on His enormous power. When we learn to trust Him completely, we will see things as He does.

If we have courage as a result of spirituality, as Joshua and Caleb did, this means that we are filled with the confidence of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to face the tasks which He assigns to us. When we are right with God, we will be filled with the urgency of our purpose, which is to serve, and the One who fills us will be directing our gifts toward meaningful opportunities for edifying others.

Part Five

Opposition to Service

In This Part...

Chapter 5-1. Service will Face Opposition

Chapter 5-2. We Can be Disqualified

Chapter 5-3. Peter's Failures and Successes

Chapter 5-5. Troubles in the World

Chapter 5-5. We Can't Serve Two Masters

Chapter 5-1

Service will Face Opposition

The Law of Sin. We covered the topic of sin thoroughly in the book, *Killing Sin Before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*. In that study, we disclosed a rarely-discussed concept known as the “Law of Sin”. (See pages 34-39 in *Killing Sin*.) This is an actual law that operates within us, and is the principle behind the operation of our sinful nature. This law is found in Rom. 7:23, which says, “...but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.” We studied previously the topics of Satan, his cosmic system (the world), and our own sinful nature, showing how they contribute to sin. And then, just recently, we added the latest: the “law of sin”.

Rom. 7:23, just cited, says very clearly that there is a LAW within us that is at war against godly knowledge that takes us captive and holds us, making us prisoners of sin. This is the guiding principle by which evil works within us, energized by Satan, promoted by the world, and embraced by the sinful nature. This law has power, so much so that it can put us into captivity...and hold us within its fortified dungeon. And we are totally helpless on our own to escape the unrelenting grip of this law.

This law has an odd quality. You would think that, the more good that is being done, the less room evil would have to operate. But with the law of sin, the more that true good is advanced, the more that evil will grow. The more good we do, the more growth we experience, and the more spirituality we attain, the more the law of sin will rise up to counter the good. Good energizes the law of sin. What a dilemma!

Paul describes the pattern of this law in Rom. 7:21, which says, “So I find this law at work. When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” This law is not a set of written statutes given to us, such as the Law that was given to Moses. The law of sin is a vital and driving *force* within us, drawing or propelling us into evil and/or self-righteousness. We must not short-shrift the potency of this force, because it is not only powerful, but it actually grows stronger as our faith grows. A significant impact of this ever-increasing pull into evil is that service may be hampered, or stopped altogether. The more we want to grow and serve, the stronger the resistance will become. Satan is delighted, of course, if we ignore this principle and charge out to serve without adequate preparation and protection.

It is good to report that there is hope for dealing with this law. The balance and comeback for the law of sin is the law of the Spirit. This law is cited specifically in Rom. 8:2, which says, “...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” Here we see truth concerning our eternal “position” in union with Christ. But here we can also glean truth concerning our temporal “condition”, as it pertains to our ongoing relationship with the Holy Spirit. We will see in this study that sin was condemned by Jesus Christ in order that our eternal

standing could be established through Him. (See Rom. 8:3.) And we will also see that—because our sin has been condemned—we can address the sin that remains in our flesh. Christ *condemned* sin as step one, and now sin can be *constrained* in life as step two. Rom. 8 continues, showing how the benefits of our position cross over to our condition, affecting our everyday lives, as follows:

[Christ condemned sin]...in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (Rom. 8:4-8)

This is how those who are saved can live: We can fulfill all of God's laws by "living" in the Spirit. Those who are controlled by the sinful nature will be focused on sinful thoughts and patterns, while those who are controlled by the Spirit will be following what the Spirit wants. The mind of "sinful", or "carnal", man leads to "death", which is temporal (spiritual) death due to the loss of fellowship. Conversely, the mind that is controlled by the Spirit brings the enlivenment of the Spirit, who operates within the restored or reconciled heart of a "spiritualized" (in-fellowship) believer. A believer is out of fellowship when he is controlled by the sinful nature (our nature is under the authority of the law of sin), while the person in fellowship is controlled by the Spirit. The "sinful mind" cannot do right and cannot please God. On the contrary, when the Holy Spirit controls the heart of a believer, righteousness can be produced.

Why is it important to be controlled by the Spirit? Because that is where we can find freedom from the law of sin—now—in *practice*! By staying in the Spirit, we have protection from the law of sin. This evil law can hamper our service the same way it inhibits our spirituality. We must allow God to deal with this source of sin in our lives, if we are going to do our jobs. One concern remains: Since our being in fellowship causes the law of sin to "try harder", how do we stay ahead of it? The answer: By GROWING. Eventually, it will be beaten, if we will continue to move toward maturity.

Opposition to Service. Applying what we see about the law of sin to the concept of gifted service, we can intuit that the law of sin will present opposition to service, because Spirit-led service is a form of "divine good", which the law of sin clearly hates. 1 Cor. 16:8-9 shows this principle at work, saying, "But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me." Paul stayed because service opportunities were presenting themselves, but what is lurking close-by to spoil his service? Opposition! He not only had *a few* human opponents who were after him, but "MANY". He was inundated with opposition to his powerful, gifted service.

We can be sure that Spirit-led service will meet opposition, the most common form of which will be PEOPLE, consisting of both unbelievers and believers, who will come against us. This can be one of the most hurtful kinds of opposition that we can face. It is easy to serve when we get recognition and accolades for our service, but when we get criticism and attacks, opposition can

create unbearable challenges for us. It is at this point that we might want to give up, walk out, and look for an easier path, but this is the time when we can do the most good, serving God in His power, seeking satisfaction from Him, instead of that which comes from others.

The law of sin adds pressure, but grace can increase to meet it, if we are continuing to grow, as we are seeking to serve. When we are growing and serving in the Spirit, Rom. 15:1-2 will be fulfilled, which sets up our purpose, as follows: “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” When we are in the right place spiritually, the need to serve will override self-interests and we will be driven to make whatever sacrifice we must to HELP OTHERS GROW. Our task is to stay close to God and endure by His grace any insults or assaults that come our way. We are not in this because it is easy, but because it is the path to God’s pleasure and heavenly fruit.

Andrew Murray’s Summary of our Spiritual Dilemma. Andrew Murray gave a succinct summary of the two pathways which confront all believers: one path leads to carnality, sin, discipline, and a lack of production. The other leads to spirituality, righteousness, blessing, and productivity. Here is what Murray said:

I want to come to all who are perhaps hungering and longing for the better life, and asking what is wrong that you are without it, to point out that what is wrong is just one thing—allowing the flesh to rule in you, and trusting in the power of the flesh to make you good. There is a better life, a life in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Endnote 29)

We see two problems, both advanced in this quote: The first is allowing “flesh to rule”, which means that we are behind bars, prisoners of the law of sin. The other could be that we are trusting our own ingenuity and ability to equip us for doing “good”. This is the practice of legalism. Either of these approaches for living will not please God, and will not yield satisfying or productive Christian lives. We cannot serve, if we are dominated by sin or self-righteousness. The only way to improve this is to seek the life offered by the Holy Spirit. There is no other way to fulfill our call to service.

Serving is Harder than it Looks. Serving is easy, right? No. Serving properly will be very difficult, despite our greatest resolutions, vows, and determination. We cannot steel ourselves against all the opposition we will face, and we will go down in defeat if we are counting on our own resources to sustain us. Remember Peter’s declaration of unwavering commitment to Christ? “But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown [deny] you’.” (Matt. 26:35) How did that work out for Peter? He was so sure; yet, as we know, he failed (we will see more on Peter’s failings soon). He underestimated the law of sin and his own sinful nature when he made his declaration. His self-actualized will-power was not enough. What does this mean to us? It is this: Doing right and performing service may look easy, but expect surprises! We must never trust our own strength or our own abilities to do God’s work. We must rely on Him, or we will fail miserably.

Chapter 5-2

We Can be Disqualified

Being Disqualified. The idea of disqualification comes from 1 Cor. 9:27 through 10:13. We will not analyze the entire passage, but will select key verses that add light to the concept of being “disqualified”. Our topic is “gifted service”, so we are most interested in conditions that might result in our being disqualified to serve effectively.

The passage cited begins in 1 Cor. 9:27, saying, “No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” There are several truths worth noting from this verse. First of all, Paul “beat his body”, which means that he kept the flesh under submission, which we understand from all our other studies to mean “subdue the sinful nature by using divine resources”. The second thing we notice is that Paul is referring to his gifted service, part of which was “preaching to others”. After he has “preached”, or served, he gives the purpose for his keeping his sinful nature under control: “so that...I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” He has to keep his body under God’s thumb to avoid being “disqualified for the prize”.

What is the prize? Is it salvation? If you think this is possible, you need to go to the book, *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, and read Appendix D, pages 143 and following. Salvation is won by faith in Christ, a once-for-all act, which yields eternal life. The “prize”, then, is something else. The main topic of 1 Corinthians is *gifted service*...how we work together to get it done, the attitude we are to have as we do it, and the removal of any obstacle that might impede it. There are other implications in the term “prize”, but the one we are most concerned with has to do with SERVICE. The danger is this: If our “bodies” are not subjugated and brought under control, we will be disqualified for service. And why is this both difficult and important when we are properly serving? Because evil is rising up to meet our good service, as per the last chapter.

Paul gives an example of being “disqualified” in 1 Cor. 10:1-5, describing the Jews in the desert being prevented from entering the Promised Land, because God was not pleased with most of them. They were prohibited from entering the new territory, because they had not embraced the full goodness of God in faith. The “Promised Land”, for us, is the place of surrender, victory over sin, and rest (as per the last three books). To these we add “effective service”, which is the outcome of maturity and the work of the Spirit. When we reach a higher level of maturity, God will be pleased with us, and real service can begin. The “flesh” prevents service; maturity promotes it. If we are not maturing, and if we are not walking in the Spirit, we will fail to serve, because immaturity and carnality strip us of our badge for service...we will be *disqualified*.

In verses 6-10 (still 1 Cor. 10), Paul describes conditions that reflect an absence of “beating our bodies”, which leaves our “hearts set on evil things”. The following conditions characterized the behavior of the Jews in the desert, acts that we are warned against today. These can dominate our

own behavior pattern, if we are not careful:

- **Idolatry.** V. 7. This includes anything that substitutes for God or that displaces our relationship with Him.
- **Sexual immorality.** V. 8. This includes any form of immorality.
- **Testing the Lord.** V. 9. Anytime we embrace a practice or belief that opposes God, or is opposite from what we see in the Word, we will be “testing” Him, rejecting grace, and refusing His way.
- **Grumbling.** V. 10. Grumbling is a faithless response to God’s training. It is the opposite of “endurance”...and is the inevitable result of a carnal rejection of the benefits of God’s training program, which He has designed for our growth.

The Way of Escape. We have just seen examples of the kinds of things that can disqualify us for service. In a nutshell, *what takes us out of service is succumbing to temptation.* 1 Cor. 10:11-13 describes this condition, and opens up the way to overcome it, as follows:

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

If we are trusting ourselves to keep from sinning...if we are trying to “beat our own bodies” without divine assistance...then we will fail. If we count on ourselves to “stand firm”, we will fall. Only God can PROVIDE a way out of temptation. Do we always accept or receive God’s provision? No! More often than not, we reject God’s provision for dealing with temptation. This is one of many cases when we choose to go our own way, rely on our own resources, and operate in our own strength. We just FORGET God, and ramble on, preoccupied with ourselves and the world. God’s “way out” of temptation is not usually the way we choose, so what happens as a result? We choose to give in to temptation and are caught in the traps of the law of sin.

When temptations come, and we do not draw on God’s provisions for resistance, or follow His way out, sin will overpower us. So what, specifically, are the ways that God provides to make escape possible? J. Hampton Keathley, III, gives an excellent list of provisions which God offers as a “way of escape”. This is what we see in the following:

1. Walking by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:2f)
2. Living in the Word (Ps. 119:9; 2 Tim. 2:16-17; Heb. 3:7f; 4:12)
3. Fleeing or the principle of avoiding undue temptation (1 Cor. 10:14)
4. Praying faithfully and in faith (Matt. 6:13; Eph. 6:18)
5. Watching and controlling our mental processes and attitudes (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Phil. 4:8)

6. Walking circumspectly, soberly (1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7; 5:8)
7. Living by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:5)
8. Reckoning on our position in Christ (Rom. 6:1f)
9. Seeking the right associations and fellowship (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Cor. 15:33, 34)
10. Having right perspectives, values, priorities, and pursuits (Matt. 6:21f; 1 Tim. 6:6f)
11. Reflecting on the consequences. Sin always has its wages—loss of fellowship, divine discipline, loss of effective ministry, destroyed relationships, loss of rewards, and most of all, dishonor to the Lord. (Endnote 30)

Conclusion. We can be disqualified for service through sin. This can be *avoided* through spirituality and maturity, but—if we fail to do these—there is still hope through confession and forgiveness. We can never give up and say that we have gone too far; we can *recover* from failure, through grace. We are “disqualified” until we are restored, but God is always open for business to hear our confession, so we can snap back into fellowship. Even after confession, however, we must not sit down or stop. We must move forward through prayer, study, and endurance of God’s training. If we don’t, our spiritual walk will be like a pendulum, swinging back and forth...toward evil and back again, and then toward evil again...and on and on. And we will go nowhere, because we are not growing.

God has given us the means to “stay qualified”, so that we can help others...as we are intended to do. This is done by growing at a maximum rate until we reach super-maturity, when we will acquire God’s best assets and see unprecedented results from our service. God can certainly get His work done without us, but—if we do not participate in His pre-designed program for growth and service—we will miss the privilege and joy of fruitful service. Paul said, “...take heed...” in 1 Cor. 10:12 (NIV translates, “...be careful...”), calling for us to PAY ATTENTION TO GOD! Think about Him, seek Him, pray to Him, learn about Him, and—ultimately—serve Him.

Chapter 5-3

Peter's Failures and Successes

Peter's Failures. The lesson that is often omitted in looking at the lives of the apostles is the pattern of growth they went through, beginning with wild and naive enthusiasm, proceeding through intense soul-construction and training, and emerging into maturity. Peter's experience represents just such a case. Peter was emotional, physical, and impetuous in his early faith. He was quick to speak and act...and to react...and he got into more trouble than the other apostles. We will give a couple of examples (though there are more), and then in the next section we will see where he ended up.

The first example was seen when Jesus smashed the notion that His death on the cross could be prevented. As reported in Matt. 16, when Jesus explained to the disciples that he must go to Jerusalem to be killed, and then be raised to life on the third day, Peter vociferously remonstrated: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (Matt. 16:22) To show that Peter's resistance was of the flesh (and the devil), Jesus responded with this: "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt. 16:23).

The lesson we are to learn from this specific event is how born-again believers, full of zeal but not yet matured, can express their passion inappropriately, due to residual "human view-point" (or "the things of men"). We are stuck with this until we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom. 12:2) through the growth process. Peter's enthusiasm was strong, but misdirected. He wanted to correct "human" conditions, while ignoring the "divine" plan.

If Peter might be considered as "serving" his Master by trying to prevent Christ's death, we can see that intended service can run counter to God's plan and will. Service done prior to a pronounced level of maturity will not be effective. Until we are mature, it is better that we remain silent. Remember our discussion earlier that Peter did NO service until he was filled with the Spirit. Even then, Peter was not fully mature, as demonstrated in an event that occurred early in his Spirit-filled ministry. (See Gal. 2:11-16) The growth trail to qualified service can be a long one.

The general point we want to establish is that Peter FAILED when he objected to Christ's mission of death. This was an unavoidable part of Peter's "growing up", but he learned his lesson, as per the next chapter, Matt. 17, where he was chosen to witness the "Transfiguration". During this event, Peter's impulsive manner was still in evidence, as he immediately wanted to build shelters for Jesus, as well as for Moses and Elijah, who had just shown up. But he prefaced his suggestion for shelters by submitting to Jesus, saying, "Lord, if you wish, I will put up three shelters..." (Matt. 17:4). He proposed it, but at the same time relinquished it...to the Lord. This showed progress; Peter was growing.

Another example of Peter's failure is seen in Luke 22:54-62, where Peter denies Jesus three times,

just as Jesus had predicted. There is much to learn from Peter's spiritual state of mind, his behavior and his response to his failure. First of all, Peter's enthusiasm exceeded his faith. He was passionate, but not yet fully committed to God's plan ("surrendered"). He was potent for Christ emotionally, but had not yet "arrived" spiritually. He had claimed earlier that he would never deny Christ, but he did; He denied his Savior as Jesus looked him right in the eye. I love the account in Luke 22:59-61a:

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

Can you imagine a worse or more-damning screw-up? Fortunately, Peter had learned enough already to remember what Jesus had told him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown [deny] me three times" (v.61b). Here we see another lesson: Convicted by Scripture, as it were, Peter responded in remorse and shame, thereby confessing his horrible sin. And in those agonizing hours when he expressed chagrin for his own actions, Peter wept tears that watered his growth. It is likely that Peter was catapulted toward maturity in those dark hours, and stepped up to a new level of spiritual strength.

What did Peter do? He had just enough understanding of grace and mercy that he knew to take his failure to God, rather than trying to hide it and compensate for it in some way. He bared his soul before God, and it is apparent from Peter's life thereafter that this allowed God to repair his failure, restore him to a good relationship with Himself, and put him back on the track toward super-maturity and surrender. And did Peter ever get there? Yes, as we shall see.

Peter's Successes. Without enumerating the successes of Peter's ministry, we want to understand the "principle" behind successful service, as delivered by Peter himself. We contrast the view-point in Peter's writings with the view-point he exhibited in the gospels. Peter had come a long way, even though he had failed in ways that exceed even our mistakes. Peter's success was built on his failures. As evidence of Peter's eventual super-mature view-point, we could select almost any chapter from his epistles and see the clear change in him from the time of his denial of Christ. We choose a chapter that we have loved and revered over time, as an expression of Peter's mature perspective at the time he wrote it. The chosen chapter is **2 Pet. 1**. Without quoting the entire chapter, we will cite some of the things we see in this passage that reflect Peter's tremendous progress, as follows:

- He acknowledged God's power as the source of everything we need "for life and godliness". He knew that these come to us through "knowledge". (v. 3)
- He understood the grace provisions *for* holiness and *against* corruption. He declared that these are embedded in God's "promises". (v. 4)
- He knew the steps to maturity, and declared that progressing through the milestones of growth would make the blossoming believer effective and productive. (vv. 5-8)
- Peter took his ministry seriously, especially as he was edging toward the end of his life. (vv. 13-15)

- He remembered the lessons he had learned and the truth he had absorbed, e.g., the message given at the Transfiguration, which was, “This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well-pleased. Listen to Him.” (vv. 17-18)
- Peter had a full grasp of Scripture, which enabled him to see the full scope of its development and its publication, and he gave full acknowledgement to its inspired nature. He said, “...we have the word...” and he advised us to “pay attention to it”. (vv. 19-21).

Peter’s ultimate grasp of the power of God, and his understanding that all believers are dependent on the Holy Spirit for life and service, have become a great source of divine instruction for us. We would do well to follow Peter’s pattern and his lessons for growing and serving. But for us to reach Peter’s level of understanding of God’s love and grace and power, we must fail many times...as we are learning to trust. And as we flounder, we must remember that respite is found in God’s absorption of our failures, **WHEN WE ACKNOWLEDGE THEM TO HIM**. That is our secret for success.

Chapter 5-4

Troubles in the World

People of the Light have Trouble in the World. A major source of opposition to service is the “whole world”. In Luke 16:8b, Jesus said, “...the people of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.” This statement is buried in the middle of a parable (the parable itself does not relate to the point of our present topic and will not be analyzed here). We are interested in the point Jesus was making, one He repeated often concerning the world and the place of believers (or “people of the light”) within it. This is His point: We don’t belong here. We reside in an alien world that operates on an entirely different plane from the kingdom of God (meaning the broader realm of God’s plan, which exists and functions throughout the universe).

Unbelievers and carnal believers function well in the cosmic system, and may even prosper. The central principle of world operations is that the better you know how to manipulate the components of the world environment, the more you will benefit from it. This gets very tricky, because believers must live in the world and work in and through its systems. But there is a way to be “in the world” and not be “of the world”. To occupy and blend with the world without being tainted or dominated by it requires a HAZMAT suit of spirituality and maturity, without which we cannot avoid being infected by the world’s pathology.

This is the odd thing about being a growing believer: It seems the more at ease we are in the kingdom of God, the more the world seems out of control, and the less sense we can seem to make of it. There is something perplexing and untrustworthy about the world; we can never feel quite settled here. This is because we are citizens of God’s kingdom, and what works for “people of the world” will not work for us. The more we allow ourselves to *become* what we *already are*, namely...believers in the Lord Jesus Christ...the more we will want to keep our attentions concentrated on godly matters, and the less we will embrace and pursue the things of the world...its objects, its philosophies, its practices, and its view-points.

We are told not to love the world in 1 John 2:15-16, which says the following:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him [he is out of fellowship]. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father but from the world.

As long as we are tied to the cosmic system, we will not function effectively in God’s kingdom, meaning that we will not be able to serve. It is a matter of attachment. If our affection, attention, and aspirations are directed toward the world, we will not value the things of God. If we are chasing the world, we will be leaving God behind, and we will not grow, in which case we cannot serve.

It seems this is where we must choose: either we will serve the world, or we will pursue God. As believers, we will either be fascinated and captivated by the world's glittering glow, or we will decide to take the road less traveled and go in search of God and our proper place in His program. We can be preoccupied with getting better inside the world, and drawing more from it; or we can look for ways to improve our state and status with God. Our primary task while we are living in the world is simple: Stay in fellowship and keep on growing. If we do not choose to do this, we will—by default—sell out to the world and put distance between us and God.

Backers of the World. The world is actually controlled by Satan. 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are the children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” We also know that we will have trouble here, as per John 16:33b, which says, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” The only effective resistance against the world is found in the victory that Christ has won over it. But this victory belongs to Christ, not to us, and it is only through our participation IN HIM that we can “overcome the world”.

The reason we will have trouble in the “cosmic system” is that it is designed and run by Satan. And Satan and the world have representation within our hearts, in the form of an indwelling evil force. This is the “sinful nature”, which delights in sin and freely serves Satan and the world.

The allies of sin: Satan, the world, and our sinful nature...combine to form an irresistible, supernatural force that makes fellowship, growth, and service virtually impossible. Thank God that He can accomplish the impossible, and that He has provided a way for us to grow and serve, even though we live in a hostile world.

There is much to say about the topics of these allies of sin...these antagonists of service...but we have covered them thoroughly before, so we will refer you now to two main sources for coverage of these. Here are the two sources:

1. *God's Training Program for Believer: Preparation for Living*, pages 55-151.
2. *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide*, pages 13-26.

The second reference is shorter than the first, and covers the main points, but the first one, found in *God's Training Program*, provides a complete and thorough study of Satan, the world, and our sinful nature. It is much better to take the time to read (or re-read) the longer rendition in the first reference.

Essay on The Fallen World. The world is particularly troubling, because it is where we live. It is always “in our face”, much more than God and His kingdom are, as these are invisible to us at the present time. The world is “everything”, because of the laws of nature, the laws of physics, the law of cause and effect, the laws of reality, the laws of men, and the laws of temporal life and death. Yet God's higher world—His “kingdom”—operates according to the laws of the Spirit. These are “spiritual” laws, wherein God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts (Is. 55:9).

From our finite perspective, we have many questions. Why are we born as we are? Why are some born into poverty? Why are there birth defects? And after we are born, why is there so much pain

and suffering, and ultimately death? Why are there so many deadly storms, tsunamis, avalanches, volcanoes, mudslides, and earthquakes? And why is there so much cruelty, inhumanity, and immorality in the world? The answer to these questions and many more like them can be encapsulated into one simple phrase, which is easy to say, but hard to explain. Here it is: We live in a fallen world.

Is God involved in everything that happens? Yes. Matt. 10:39 tells us that He knows when the smallest bird falls. Is. 48:3 says, “I foretold the former things long ago, my mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.” But is God responsible for the bad things that happen? No. They are simply the result of the “fall”, which is overseen by God as He administers His justice regarding fallen man. He is the direct agent of events, at times, while at other times, He simply unleashes Satan to do his evil and destructive work. But God sets limits on bad things that happen, and here’s the rub: the boundary between events that He deems appropriate and what we see as “loving”...is blurred. Guess whose assessment of events is the most accurate.

Bad things happen, generally, because mankind took the “free volition” that God gave us, and used it to choose pride and self, walking away from God in the Garden. The world that exists now is the world we opted for. We fell...and then the world fell. Genesis 3 gives a full depiction of man and the world, as they dropped head-long into free-fall.

When man was created, he was perfect. No pain, no illness, no struggle, no death. But something changed that caused all these to be reversed. In Genesis 3, we see that first Eve, then Adam, disobeyed God and rebelled by eating the forbidden fruit. This caused Adam’s blood, which was passed on to us, to degrade from totally pure to completely sullied, leaving us with a natural love for evil and a disdain for God’s righteousness. The slide into this condition is clearly delineated in Genesis, so that—by Genesis 6:5—man had become completely depraved. This verse describes man’s condition this way: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” The narrative of the continual decline of man continues through the end of Genesis.

This change in man made him “naturally” unacceptable to God; this was the “fall” of man. And then the perfect environment God had formed for man became spoiled because of it. Rom. 8:20 tells us that creation was “subjected to frustration”; then Rom. 8:22 adds, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning...” Gen. 5:29 tells how far the curse of creation went, saying, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed.” Even the earth itself was cursed. We know well that the Cross provides eternal relief for those who direct their faith toward Christ. But we are still here on planet earth, living in this cursed world.

Since we live in a fallen world, what do we do with it? First of all, we have to see it for what it is. It is Satan’s domain and kingdom, within which he has been given a great deal of freedom. We must see the world as being dominated by Satan. (Once again, For the complete story on Satan’s fall, man’s fall, and Satan’s present kingdom in the world, see “The War Against God”, in *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, pp. 55-93.)

Why do we have so much trouble seeing that the world is fallen? This is because we are in the

middle of it. We can't see the "forest", because the trees block the view, just as we can't distinguish drops of water when we look out at the ocean. And we cannot see the world, because we are blended in with it. Our view of the world is distorted and blurred, because we are part of it, and it is part of us. But God is not part of the world, and He sees it for what it is. Even born-again believers will not see the world for what it is, *until their view is revised*...through a process that will encounter nothing but resistance in the world. Godly progress will never be encouraged by the world.

We see two view-points: God's view and our view. For example, look at pain. Pain is temporal and relative, but means little when it comes to the eternal scale that God uses. In the larger context, human conditions and views are less important than God's divine design and perspective. To us, the distance between pain and prosperity are vast, whereas to God they are fleeting and insignificant. This is not to say that God delights in pain in His created beings, but that He knows that they have what they chose, and must live in the world they invited. He offers help, as we have learned, but few will access it.

As human beings we are concerned with externals. But God is concerned with the HEART! We tend to ignore the heart and chase the world, while God wants us to purify the heart and disdain the world. External differences, such as male/female, slave/free, Jew/Greek, poor/rich, or black/white mean nothing to God, because He LOOKS AT THE HEART. (See Gal. 3:28). The only differences that matter to Him are that 1) we become His children through faith in Christ, thus negating "eternal" outcomes from the fall as they apply to us, and 2) that we learn to trust Him as a caring Father. By fulfilling both of these conditions, the heart God sees will be "pleasing in His sight", and the effects of the fall can be mitigated.

But our look tends to be directed outward, and not inward. Thus our eyes are filled with the world. The world is our biggest problem, even though we endlessly see it as a source for good things. We search for meaning and security and satisfaction in the world, because we have not realized that our hope does not lie there. This dilemma was expressed perfectly by Ronald Reagan, who said, with slight alteration, "The world is not the solution to the problem; the world IS the problem." The world is broken, and our danger of being broken BY it because we live IN it, is the biggest peril we face. Its rolling assaults are relentless.

Fallen man in a fallen world deserves eternal punishment, because he has rejected God, but God in His grace has given wretched man a chance to avoid this, by being born again. From the time we are saved, we are destined for eternity with Him, but we are still living in a fallen world, and—because of it—we must suffer, but only *mildly*, compared with eternity in hell. 2 Cor. 4:17-18 frames it this way:

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

John 16:33b says, "In this world you will have trouble [pain]. But take heart! I have overcome the world." If you scooped up all the world into a pile, it would be a stack of "badness"...the good, the

bad, and the indifferent...all bad. All the pleasure, the goods, the entertainment, the meals, the comfort, the possessions, the privileges, the honors, the power, the satisfactions, and the riches can be lumped together with all the things that are universally accepted as “bad”, and ALL OF IT can be tossed out, because it carries no eternal value. Its value is small, on God’s grander scale, because it is in or from the world.

Overall, the world is bad. There is suffering, because the world is fallen. Every bad thing you see is because the world is a fallen place, and every good thing is vaporous and temporary. What matters is God. In Him is constancy and eternity. With Him at the center of our focus we will advance to new view-points through the “renewing of our minds”, and we will see the world for what it is, and know that—though we are subsumed by its fallenness—our hearts do not have to be imprisoned by it. In our hearts, when God is first, we will find freedom from the broken world.

Conclusion. The studies cited from previous references, and those presented in this chapter, disclose that there are potent enemies moving against our service, who adamantly and even violently oppose “good” and the growth that gifted service promotes. These enemies must be dealt with, not through direct engagement in battle, but through keeping our eyes on the Commander, as we gain strength and protection through participation in His training, provision, and power.

Chapter 5-5

We Can't Serve Two Masters

Money. Money makes the world go 'round. It's a rich man's world. Money talks (other things walk). Live by the golden rule: He who owns all the gold makes all the rules. Money is power. Songs and poems and movies and books and television networks and entire cities have risen up to worship at the shrine of this god: money. Money is seen by most as the source of all good things: happiness, security, safety, power, recognition, freedom, and—yes—love. Even churches have succumbed to the lure of money, and what were once centers for spirituality and growth have become centers of power revolving around financial prosperity. Most dreams and aspirations require (more) money, while some of the worst problems we face are based on a lack of it. Life itself depends on money...for shelter, food, clothing, transportation, medical care, comfort, and freedom of movement.

Money is, of course, a necessity, but its usefulness is open-ended, meaning that the line between its meeting our *needs* and satisfying our *wants*...is blurred. When is enough, enough? No matter how much we have, we want more, and our “needs” gradually expand...staying always just beyond the level of what we currently possess. We are generally more focused on what we don't have than on what we have. No amount of money seems satisfactory. The finish line for the money race is always advancing, just beyond our reach.

Oh, yes, I know there are counter-views expressed concerning money. Money is a dirty word. Money is the root of all evil. Money corrupts. Money can't buy happiness. Money is not everything. “Who steals my purse steals trash” (Shakespeare, *Othello*). Such insights are correct and essential, but talk is “cheap”. Within many of those who proclaim such noble assertions, there are hearts pulsating with greed that—underneath it all—simply want MORE MONEY!

God vs. Money. This is the dilemma that all believers face: Whom will we serve? Keep in mind that we operate within a spiritual frame, and that we can't just say, “Oh, yeah, I am overvaluing money, so I will just stop and put it in its proper place as a mere commodity for practical living.” This will not work, because we will not change our values, simply on the basis of our knowing they *should* change. Change will come only through God, as the product of our honoring the stipulations He makes regarding the ways we are to live. And even honoring these requirements will not come from us, through our own ingenuity, resources, or resolve; but through relying on His assets, which will lead to change and improvement. Real change will come only through the grace provisions that enable *spiritual* growth and a walk in His power.

The Bible is clear that we cannot serve God and money. Matt. 6:24 says, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” Notice our choices: “hate God” or “hate money”. This probably does not mean we are to actually “disdain” money (we do need a certain amount of

it), but that our regard for money is to be proportional to its real value. The easiest mistake among all the sins we commit is to over-value money. Money, which has underpinned our physical survival, can easily become the cause for our decline, leading to destruction.

1 Tim. 6:6-10 helps us sort out the place of money, since we are sure that this medium of exchange in society is not to be refused and discarded altogether. We must know the appropriate use and place of money, which we can ascertain only by knowing its true value. Here is what this passage says:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Does this passage say, “Shun all money and have nothing”? No. Does it say money itself is evil? No. It says the LOVE of money is the source of great evil. It is the distorted and illusory overvaluing of money that brings out evil. When our sinful nature is operating, money will be king. When God is king, money will be subordinate. The choice is a spiritual one, not a moral one. When the spirit is right, correct values will be forthcoming. Correct the spirit, and money will be kept in its place.

The passage just quoted says, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content.” If we have basic provisions...if we are fed and covered...we can be content. How is this possible? This can only be achieved through a “godly” perspective, which comes from “godliness”. And where does godliness come from? From God. And how do we access it? Through fellowship, followed by faith.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are spiritual beings, not just physical creatures. The core of our existence is found in God, not in ourselves or in the world. So “godliness” is crucial. When you are godly, you will couple “contentment” with your “godlikeness”, forming a place of *true gain*, from a godly perspective. With godliness and the barest minimum of things that money can buy...just enough to get by...we can be fulfilled and content. Is this primarily because of the things? No. *Contentment comes from godliness*, as we will see in Part Seven.

Otherwise, if we overvalue money we will enter a condition of “discontentment”, caused by attachments to money and its trappings. Carried to its final end, we will be “pierced with many griefs”. Not only that, we will also be overwhelmed with “temptations” that will drag us deeper into carnality, branching into all kinds of thorny sin patterns. The interesting thing about chasing money vs. chasing God is that the first is easy and natural, while the second is difficult and goes against our very nature. Wanting and seeking money is common and facile, while any predisposition to seek God is rare, requiring a deep-seated awareness of Him and a core decision to go after Him.

Eccl. 5:10 provides a succinct summary of the godly view of money: “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.” Chasing money for its own sake is pointless and endless. Satisfaction and happiness

will never come from frantic attempts to acquire large sums of money.

The balancing view is seen in Eccl. 2:24, which says, “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.” We have to work to make money to “eat”, and in that connection our greatest satisfaction will come in doing well the things we do for a living.

We can actually enjoy money, if everything is right. Enjoying money depends, not on amassing it, but on our relationship with God. This is what we see in v. 25 of Eccl. 2: “This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?” (v. 25) Enjoying our money and the kind of work we do to get it, comes “from the hand of God”. God is our source for happiness, not money or the world. Eccl. 5:19 sets this notion in stone, saying this: “Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God.” Eccl. 9:7 adds, “Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.” With God, money and the things it buys can be delightful.

Phil. 4:19 gives us the operating principle for receiving money and the assets it avails to accommodate the needs of believers. Paul told the Philippians, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Paul is addressing the way the Philippians have attended to his needs by providing monetary (and other) gifts that have been useful in sustaining him, and letting them know that God would take care of all their needs because they have been so generous. Apparently, there were a number of believers in Philippi who had the gift of “giving”. They had money and had acquired enough maturity to exercise their gifts freely.

Notice the real message behind what Paul said above. The principle we want to see is this: Giving to the church, or to believers, is something we should all do—proportionate to our income and resources. Basically, however, the heavy lifting on providing monetary support to the church, and individuals within it, falls to those *with money*, who will give extra...assuming they have the *gift of giving*! “Giving” is just another area of gifted service. It is not a stretch to believe that Paul’s declaration of “all needs being met” applies to ANY believer who is performing effective and Spirit-led GIFTED SERVICE. (Phil. 2:1-11 confirms this.) Is this a get-rich-quick scheme? No. Notice the word “needs”. God will always give us our daily bread, if we are walking in His Spirit, but this is not the same as giving us “all the money (or whatever) that we want”. We will also see shortly that a “double-minded man” gets “nothing”! (James 1:7)

As we mature, our “heart’s desires” (Ps. 37:4) will be satisfied, but get this: As we grow, our desires will gradually become more attuned to spiritual things than physical ones (Col. 3:1-2), because we will be “delighting ourselves in the Lord” (Ps. 37:4 again). In other words, when we want more from the *spiritual* realm than we do from the *tangible* world, it is because we have become more “spiritualized”. We are walking closer to God and keeping Him in our minds.

As a result of our becoming more “spiritual”, money becomes less attractive to us. And with maturity, we can rest assured that what we have is what we *need*, so we will be content with God’s provision for each day. Ultimately, with “super-maturity”, what we have is what we *want*, because what we want has been adjusted to what God wants to give.

Whom will You Serve? We will serve God...or money. We can't serve both. If we try to "split" our attention, we will end up with nothing from God. We might get some things in the world, but these will not be from God, and will bring no contentment. James 1:6-8 frames this lesson for us by saying the following;

But when he asks [for "wisdom", as per verse 5], he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

If we are trying to serve God, and—at the same time—spend all our time and energy and thoughts on ways to get "rich", then we will be showing ourselves to be "double-minded"...unstable. We may try to serve God, because we have been told we should, but our hearts are really in our pocketbooks. Here is what this causes: Greed prompts evil, which wrecks one's spiritual life and walk...and when the spiritual life is a mess, even praying for relief will bring "nothing" from God. If we are out of fellowship and/or have not been feeding regularly on the Word of God, our prayers will not be answered. To get what we ask for, we must be in fellowship, growing, and "praying a prayer offered in faith" (James 5:15). Otherwise, we will get nothing. The well of provision will be dried up, until we are restored and begin again walking by faith.

If we try to serve two masters, we will end up serving the one that is "not God". We will either be filled with the Spirit, in which case we will serve God, or we will be dominated by the sinful nature, and will be serving something else. Any half-hearted embrace of God is actually a hearty embrace of the world and all its corrupted values. When we are right with God and have matured, we will not have to "give up" the world; it will just virtually "disappear" from our "values" screen. If we walk the "highway of holiness", money and everything else will assume their proper place, and we will enjoy what we have.

Our attitude toward money will reflect the nature and direction of our service. If we love money, we will serve it, which will prevent the production of spiritual "fruits". And if no fruit is generated, we will be useless. We must redirect our attention and affections, so that money is no longer "king of the hill" and God is the center of our desires and goals. If we want God, we will choose to serve Him instead of money, applying Peter's message to church leaders, which is connected to the operation of all gifts: "Be shepherds [applied to us: "servants"] of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers [custodians of your gifts]—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve" (1 Pet. 5:2). We are commissioned to serve; we cannot permit a passion for money and the things it buys to get in the way.

Part Six

Love and Joy in Service

In This Part...

Chapter 6-1. Introduction to Part Six

Chapter 6-2. Love and Service

Chapter 6-3. Mentoring

Chapter 6-4. Competition among Believers

Chapter 6-5. The Place of Surrender

Chapter 6-6. Happiness and Joy

Chapter 6-7. Joyful Service

Chapter 6-1

Introduction to Part Six

Background from Previous Books. “Service”, as a topic of study, is the caboose of the conceptual train we have put together over the last five books. In the first book, *Bible Basics for Living*, we encapsulated the studies of ten earlier books, to provide a comprehensive course of study covering basic truths for living. These are truths that kick start our growth and pave the way for all intermediate and advanced studies. All Scripture is God-breathed and is designed for our instruction, but I am convinced that teachings that tell us *how to live* are the ones that contribute most to our growth. It is possible to know all the “stories” from the Bible and still not know how to apply grace techniques or access grace assets. Truths that show us how to conduct our Christian lives provide us with methods that advance us along the trail to greater fellowship and faith, and show us the assistance that is available to us to facilitate the process. Nuggets of wisdom on ways to live promote spiritual growth. *Bible Basics for Living* points to these.

The next book, *God’s Training Program for Believers*, pinpoints a time when many believers flake off, simply because of the difficulty of qualifying to walk along the “highway of holiness”. The maturation process takes intensive training, during which God brings or permits events and experiences in our lives that constantly test our faith in order to strengthen it. The “tests and trials” of God’s preparation program for Christian living are inescapable as part of our growth, and this book shows how to “endure” this training and come out on top. The difficulty of this undertaking is often overwhelming...many fall by the wayside and end up wanting to exit the program.

For the few that finish, God’s training leads to an experience of “surrender”, which is the time when preparation is finally over, maturation is complete, and we receive the “fullness of God”. The time of surrender, which is when we reach “super-maturity”, is the time when we finally get the full benefit of grace and the perpetual empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Because of the intensity of training required to reach this point, very few believers ever achieve it, even though it is *open to all*. The entire process of “surrendering” is covered in the third book, *Step by Step toward Surrender*.

Once we surrender, several tremendous benefits emerge. One of these is a kind of “victory” over sin. The process for defeating sin is covered in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*. Once we have reached full maturity, we utilize the “law of the Spirit” to overcome the “law of sin”, and we finally get relief from Satan’s relentless targeting of our thoughts and actions. This is a surprising study, describing a condition that will occur only through surrender.

Another outcome of “surrender” is the unleashing of God’s blessings (many of which are spiritual, as you recall), and the fulfillment of all the promises He has given for unbridled care and prosperity. This is a time of “rest” and “contentment”—outcomes of super-maturity—which are spotlighted in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. The completion of all training and the culmination of all the super-provisions of advanced maturity, lead to joy, a condition which suggests

a virtually unbroken fellowship with God and an unwavering dependency on Him in every way. This book shows how the Jews reached contentment, and how Paul and others, such as the writer of Hebrews, achieved and described God's rest. Through their inspired teachings directed toward us, and the instructional ministry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, we can enter this wonderful place also.

Our Current Study. The outcome of "contentment", as seen in our latest book, may seem a little "selfish", but it has a purpose. It is to equip us for "service", as we shall see in our current study. As it turns out, joy is a prerequisite for unselfish service, and we will examine the connection between these. The short story: joy prompts service.

Joy is connected with "love", which is also a boost for service. The concept of love is often misused and misapplied. Love is generally presented as a condition initiated and sustained through "humanity", but the love that God has in mind (and requires of us) is "divine" love...which comes, not from us, but from Him alone. Scripture makes this clear over and over.

Divine love and joy are two primary outcomes from super-maturity. These stimulate service as nothing else can. We will show in this part (Part Six) the positive effects of love and joy, and demonstrate that, without them, service will be nothing more than exercise. We will begin our study with "love", continue it with other topics (mentoring, the disservice of competition, and the place of "surrender"), and then finish with an examination of the place of "joy" in service. All of these are related to the quality of our service, and we must know about them, to know where we are headed.

Chapter 6-2

Love and Service

All Roads Lead to Service. All of Paul's writings envisage one outcome, an objective which lies at the core of our purpose. All the love, the care, the humility, the unselfishness, the cleanliness, and even the growth, spirituality, and prayer to which believers are called, are linked to our central mission, which is to SERVE. When service is being done in the power of the Spirit, believers who are being served will *grow*, and unbelievers who want the gospel message will get it at just the right time.

We are not being asked to love just because it's a nice thing to do, but to accomplish a purpose. That purpose is to prompt and promote our gifted service, so that it will contribute to the growth of others. We treat our brothers well, because they are our responsibility, *the job that we have to do*, which—by God's strength—we *will* do.

Love and Service. Love is a big consideration, as related to service, since it is the purest expression of divinity in all our spiritual experience. Love is not only “from God” (1 John 4:7), it “is” God (1 John 4:8). Since love “is” God, and is “produced by God”, it is no surprise to discover that love is at the heart of fellowship, unity, harmony, and Spirit-coordinated service among believers.

If believers are out of fellowship, of course, and thereby operating in the flesh, love will be absent, even if outward appearances present an illusion of love. If believers are filled with the Spirit (especially when they are mature, so that fellowship is sustained), then love will REALLY exist, not as a gushing emotion, but as a steady motivation to serve. If you want to gauge your spirituality, look at your sense of urgency. If you have little or no drive to serve, then you have more work to do in the area of growth (alas, this is true of most of us). When all the wheels are greased and the engines are running smoothly, then all will serve, and all will thereby gain. Prov. 11:24 confirms this, saying, “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” When we serve and are served, we contribute, and we receive. That is how gifted service works.

How can we talk about “love” in connection with gifted service, and not bring up 1 Cor. 13, the “love” chapter? This chapter calls for love and humility and patience and kindness...unselfishness, consideration, and forgiveness. All of these are spiritual practices that keep the service lines open. When we love, we can serve. Love is crucial, the cornerstone of anything good that we will ever do. But the purpose of this chapter is (are you ready for this?) NOT love! We did not expect it but it is true: love is not the main subject of 1 Cor. 13.

1 Cor. 13 is about SERVICE. How do we know this? Look at 1 Cor. 12, which is clearly about gifted service. The last word in chapter 12 is “gifts”. The next phrase, at the beginning of chapter 13, continues the discussion on gifts, saying, “And now I will show you the most excellent way”. Way to do what? Based on preceding discussion in chapter 12, the answer is clear: the most

excellent way to exercise our gifts! This tells us that love is being cited as the *means*—the “way”—to our real objective, which is to provide service. All of chapter 13 is about gifted operations. Then, the first phrase in chapter 14, as we saw earlier in this study, concludes the point of chapter 13, saying, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire the *spiritual*, MORE SO, so you may prophesy” (emphasis mine). (Endnote 31) In other words, seek “spiritual things”, or things that increase “spirituality”, so that you can exercise your gifts, such as prophecy. Spiritual things would include grace techniques and assets, which enable us to prophesy, or teach, or encourage, or conduct any of the other gifts that are ours.

The greatest evidence of spirituality is love, and love is the greatest motivator. This is why it is so important to settle the love question before we race into service. The ultimate fruit of maturity is love, as we see in 2 Pet. 1:5-7, where a string of mile markers along the road toward maturity are indicated. We trace our maturity from beginning faith to goodness to knowledge to self-control to perseverance to godliness to brotherly kindness to love. It is clear that love is the END stage of maturity, and we must pass through the other levels before love can be fully manifested.

2 Pet. 1:8 tells us the effects that advancing maturity has, saying, “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Effective service and spiritual productivity depends on the degree to which we “possess” qualities leading to love. The more we grow, the more we love, and the more we love, the more we produce.

Love comes from God through maturity and spirituality, but love is *expressed* through consideration of others. In 1 Cor. 8:1-3, Paul gives an example of such consideration, suggesting that we must be especially considerate of newer or weaker believers, as they urgently need our love and our good example and our service. Here is what this passage says:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.

When we do not accommodate the consciences of those we serve; i.e., when we do things that are questionable, so that a weaker believer might be encouraged to “branch” from his pathway of growth, we do a “disservice” to that believer. EVERYTHING WE DO must be done with an eye toward serving and strengthening other believers. We must say, as Paul did: “Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.” Our mission is to strengthen our fellow believers. This is both the baseline, and the goal, for good service.

We all want to grow equally, so we can serve equally, with the objective of all benefiting equally. 1 Cor. 12:25 expresses this truth in the following way: “...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” We have EQUAL CONCERN for each other, and we are watching for ways to HELP EACH OTHER. I am reminded of white

corpuscles in the blood stream, which race toward an infection. When a fellow believer is suffering, other believers should rush in to ameliorate the suffering. This way, we help each other through the rough spots in life, so that all of us can “keep on serving”.

Rom. 15:1-2 adds to this concept, saying, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” Do you see the love behind this kind of care and service? Service is not “self-service”; it is “bearing with” the failings of others to help them improve and advance their spiritual lives. Paul wanted us to LOVE, so we can SERVE.

John presented the connection between love and spirituality, while Paul emphasized love for service. John gave us the *means* for service, which was spirituality, whereas Paul provided the *application* of spirituality, which is service. John looked at the *pre-condition* for service; Paul looked at service as an *outcome*, which happens when the pre-condition is met..

Gifted service is the proper expression of love. And it is the primary avenue for showing love. Service for others, especially within the areas of our gifts, is virtually the embodiment of love; and without love, there is no meaningful service. So we must pay attention to *love from fellowship*, as taught by John in his first epistle, so that we can perform the services cited by Paul in all his epistles. If we “love before we serve”, we will surely “love serving”.

The framework for loving service is given in Rom. 12:9-14, which allows us to look inside the mechanics of gifted service, as follows:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

The list of commands given here to direct our service is lengthy, but worth highlighting, so we will replay the required conditions for service, all emanating from “sincere love”, as follows:

- Hating evil.
- Being devoted to one another.
- Honoring others above yourself.
- Never lacking in spiritual enthusiasm.
- Serving the Lord.
- Praying faithfully.
- Sharing with those in need.
- Serving the Lord.
- Practicing hospitality.

- Blessing those who persecute you.
- Rejoicing with those who rejoice.
- Mourning with those who mourn.
- Living in harmony with one another.
- Not being proud.
- Associating with people of low position.
- Not being conceited.

Reaching such high standards is a tough slog, even for mature believers, let alone for those just beginning to grow. The moral: if we're going to operate "in love", we will need to build ourselves up quickly and single-mindedly.

Chapter 6-3

Mentoring

Timothy and Epaphroditus. The account of Timothy and Epaphroditus, each with different levels of maturity, is given in Phil. 2:19-30. This account will demonstrate the legitimacy of the concept of mentoring as a means for exercising gifts for the purpose of edifying. We will not quote this entire passage, but will highlight key statements in it that show the respective growth of these two “disciples”. We will also indicate how each turned out, as a result of mentoring.

Timothy had reached super-maturity. He was young (1 Tim. 4:12), disproving the theory that age has anything to do with spiritual maturity, and proving that concentrated training brings rapid growth. The pace depends on interest and commitment, which Timothy had in abundance. He was so advanced in his maturity that Paul declared, “I have no one else like him” (Phil. 2:20a). Then—to show evidence for Timothy’s maturity—Paul added the following:

...who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. (vv. 20b-23)

Timothy demonstrated sincere love (“genuine interest in your welfare”) and strong faith (“Timothy has proved himself”), which are clear marks of maturity. Also note an outcome of Timothy’s maturity, his service (“he has served with me in the work of the gospel”). So Timothy achieved maturity quickly, because he was an ardent student of the Word, and thus he was able to serve in exceptional ways.

Epaphroditus had achieved a high level of maturity himself, having gone through rigorous training. But he was not yet at Timothy’s level, even though he was prepared to serve. We know he was not at Timothy’s level, because there was “no one else like” Timothy. Epaphroditus’ training had no doubt been high-intensity (e.g., “Indeed he was ill, and almost died.”), but it clearly prepared him for super-maturity and the service it made possible.

The thing that is unique about Timothy and Epaphroditus is that both were tutored and mentored by Paul. We see an example of this in 2 Tim. 3:10, where Paul said, “You [Timothy], however, know all about my teaching...” (2 Tim. 3:10). Assuredly, Timothy learned in the group setting, where Paul taught all believers within his hearing; but Timothy was also mentored constantly by Paul in a one-to-one format. The history of Timothy is seen as interwoven with Paul’s ministry throughout 1st and 2nd Timothy, and Paul referred repeatedly to his relationship with Timothy as “a father to his son” (e.g., Phil. 2:22).

Epaphroditus also had a close and personal relationship with Paul, as suggested in Phil. 2:27b, which says, “But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.” This close association gave Epaphroditus a rare opportunity for mentorship from the

greatest Bible teacher of all time, and this prepared him for a special time of devoted service for the Lord. Phil. 2:29 shows the “honor” which Paul said was owed to Epaphroditus for his maturity and service. This verse says, “Welcome him [Epaphroditus] in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him....”

So we see that personal, individualized instruction and guidance can result in super-maturity, and can even have the effect of “accelerating” movement toward it. The suggestion is that gifted service is often done on a personal basis with one believer teaching another...or through the exercise of other gifts that are directed toward individuals, such as faith or prayer or showing mercy or personal admonishment. Even the gift of giving is to operate primarily as an exchange between one believer and another. (We do acknowledge the necessity and validity of “corporate giving”, which can be done as gifted service, or simply as personal support for the larger work of the church.)

Individual service can develop close relationships, so that extended mentoring can take place over time, until a less-mature believer reaches a higher plane of strong faith and spirituality. This process is not one that is particularly structured or formalized, but one that will take place naturally, when the Spirit’s leadership is followed. A strong, mature believer may provide mentoring to more than one within the same time period, or service may be targeted to just one, who will sit at the feet of the mentor until he or she reaches maturity.

Verses on Paul’s mentoring of Timothy. To further establish the authentic use of one-on-one arrangements in gifted service, we offer the following passages, which reflect the special relationship between the “server” and the “served”, as seen in the case of Paul and Timothy:

Acts 16:1-3—He [Paul] came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

1 Tim. 1:2—To Timothy my true son in the faith.

2Tim. 1:2-5—To Timothy, my dear son: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

1 Cor. 4:17—For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

A General Note on Mentoring. Whether we are called to be ministers of groups, such as those who teach at gatherings, or find ourselves among those who quietly and effectively minister on an individual basis, we can know that the edification of one or a thousand is the same with God, as

long as we are doing the work in His power. If we follow, He will lead us into the service to which He has called us. Our assignment is to follow the precepts of the following passage, quoted frequently in this study, which gives us the attitudinal framework for service:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil. 2:1-4)

If we are walking by means of the Spirit, we will have the proper attitude, and we will serve as we should. This will be true, whether the service is directed toward groups...or is meant for one (or so) who will get our devoted attention. Either way, we should always serve for the same reason that Timothy served, which is that we have reached a sufficient level of maturity to have become interested only in the building-up of others. We must understand that this is our greatest purpose.

Chapter 6-4

Competition among Believers

General Observations. Starting from scratch, when we begin identifying our gifts, the first thing we do, more than likely, is to look around to see what others are doing. The danger is that we will look at those who are successful and effective, and decide, “that’s what I want to do”, believing we can duplicate the actions of others and achieve the same results they do. But remember, it is God who chooses the gifts, and He who places and guides their operation. It is not up to us to *decide* what our gift is; it is ours to *discover* it.

Discovery of our gifts, as we have discussed, depends on learning and applying the techniques for spirituality and growth, which will enable us to see what gift God wants to operate through us. If we determine our gifts by identifying with the gifts of others, we can chase an “ideal” for years, and practice it and cultivate it, but IF THE SERVICE WE ARE DOING DOES NOT MATCH THE GIFT WE ARE GIVEN, WE WILL FAIL. Even worse, we may do great harm. Look to God for your gift, not to others.

One of the things we must realize when we are exploring giftedness is that some gifts are “public” and visible. Others are “private” and sometimes even *invisible*. The gifts we have been granted are not based on our own ambition or our needs, but on the needs of those God knows we will be serving. Our task is to learn our gifts and then prepare to have the Spirit work them through us.

Once we have identified our gifts, we must be careful not to enter competition with other believers. We must remember to “honor others as better than themselves [ourselves]”, and not to place ourselves above fellow Christians. If we are serving for attention, our motives are wrong, and we will not be effective, nor will we be rewarded. Service cannot be simultaneously competitive and Spirit-led. When we compete, we are refusing to serve.

Disciples Competed. The disciples competed to see who was the “greatest” among them. This is what we see in Luke 9:45-46, which says this:

An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.”

There they were, keeping company with the God of the universe and the Savior of the world, and what was their concern? Each wanted to see if he was better than his buddy next to him. Competition can be a good thing...in the world...even though it can be the cause of great destruction. But in the Christian life, there is no place for it. It will prevent service from being effective. The secret to effective service is humility, that great harbinger of maturity, from which will spring spirituality and the heart of a servant.

In Luke 22:20-22 we see the ugly head of jealousy and envy, spurs for competition, rearing itself again among the disciples. Jesus was telling them one of them would betray Him, and their response was immediate and defensive. In pride, they asserted emphatically (in my words), “Not I! In fact, I am so far from such despicable behavior that I am the “opposite” of a betrayer...I am probably the best and most loyal servant in the world.” Thus the question of superiority came up, as described in Luke 22:24, where they argued as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. Jesus no doubt listened to them for a minute or two, before He said the following:

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

This is a new way of thinking, where smallness and weakness are recognized, and personal power and strength are disregarded. You see, God does not need our strength or anything about us, except our recognition of His greatness and goodness. When we see Him in all His grandeur, we will surely see ourselves in our hopeless and low position. It is then that God can work through us. But when we want to make ourselves bigger, even in the name of Christian service, we get in God’s way and eliminate any possibility that good can come from what we do. If self-promotion is our aim (and it certainly may be, according to the drives of our sinful nature), then we can do nothing for fellow believers.

Verse 31 describes the process very well, saying, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Simon was under attack, as all growing believers are, with Satan seeking permission from God to bring suffering and pressure to test him...and hopefully to derail his faith. Jesus was praying for him, that he would remain faithful. But Jesus knew he wouldn’t, and that it would not be until he “turned back” (repented and grew) that he would be able to strengthen his brothers. And what was coming up that would require Peter’s repentance? It was the denial of the Savior, which Christ predicted for Peter at that time. (See v. 34)

What prevented the growth of the disciples, and disrupted their spiritual walk and service? It was competition. At the time when they needed the greatest humility and mutual support, they became petty and directed their energies inward toward their own feelings and egos. When a believer is competing, it is because he is proud of his own ability, even his “spiritual prowess”, which shows that he has much to learn before he will be ready to serve effectively.

Comparisons Come from Self-promotion and Undermine Service. James 3:13-16 warns against conditions that underlie unfruitful comparisons. When you read through this passage, it is easy to see why consumption with “self” prevents “service”. Here is what these verses say:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

When we compare ourselves with others, envy is invited into the dining rooms of our hearts to sit and grow fat at our table of wants. It is almost impossible to measure our own personal worth or skills or assets, without noticing all the other attributes which others have put on display. Then the comparisons begin, and the battle lines are drawn. Let the games begin! We can now compete! Our goal is now to be the “best”. And what is the result? It is “disorder and every evil practice”, whereby service is quashed.

Goals related to being like (or “better than”) others, are anti-biblical, self-centered, and self-promoting. These have nothing to do with God, so we must evaluate our intentions. Do our hearts yearn for God and His way, or has the world consumed our outlook and desires, even as we join other believers in the name of “service”. Comparisons create a condition of “disservice” among believers, from which no growth will be forthcoming. As a result, the good we attempt falls flat.

2 Cor. 10:10-12 seconds the motion from James, saying, “We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.” It is not WISE to compare or compete, because it reflects a misunderstanding of grace operations and the workings of gifted service among believers. The purpose of service is never to HIGHLIGHT AN INDIVIDUAL! The purpose of service is to bring glory to God by causing other believers to mature. When maturity is advanced, God is glorified.

Building on the passage quoted above from James 3, we can add verse 17, which gives the antithesis of comparative self-service, showing how godly wisdom (emerging as spirituality and maturity) provides a better alternative. This verse says, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” This rich nugget of truth shows the antithesis of self-service, which is service done in the wisdom and power of the Spirit, yielding the “good fruit” of the Spirit.

Chapter 6-5

The Place of Surrender

Revival through Surrender. Graduation from God's training program takes place on the day of our consummate act of "surrender". This is the moment at which we finally reach maturity or "super-maturity" as we have called it. We have been crushed under the press, smelted in the crucible, and squeezed by the shaper. And now we are through. Now we get our wings, and the victory celebration can begin.

We have been through the deepest, darkest valley, although God was assuredly at our side (Ps. 23). Today, we are trekking out of the valley into the sunshine. This is akin to being brought back from the dead, the time when we attain the highest peak of Christian experience. Hos. 6:1-2 frames this process, saying the following:

Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.

This is not resurrection from physical death, but rather the revival of our spirits, which have undergone extreme pressure to prepare us for this time of yielding and submission. Such surrender is absolute and permanent, to the degree that we maintain our path of spirituality. We can still slip, but at this level of maturity, falling back into an extended pattern of carnality is less likely.

Along the road that leads to maturity, there will be mini-surrenders and mini-victories, as we experience "more grace" incrementally. We cannot view the Christian life as one long, dismal and difficult experience; but neither is the life of a believer seen as some portray it: a perpetual array of unending excitement, pure health, and boundless prosperity. We will increasingly witness the joy and peace of fellowship as we grow, but we can also expect to see the trials and tests of our faith, as God causes or allows pressures that propel us toward spiritual adulthood. (For the full picture on our training, see the oft-mentioned book, *God's Training Program for Believers*.)

We enter a parenthetical note here to distinguish training from discipline. Training and discipline can be synonymous, but we discriminate between the two, viewing discipline as correction...and training as advancement. With training we are moved along the path toward maturity, while with discipline, we are nudged back on the path after straying due to sin and rebellion. Discipline goes on until we are cleansed through confession, after which training can resume.

Surrender Described. For a succinct description of surrender, we turn to the book on that subject, *Step by Step toward Surrender*, which we quote here:

This is the giving of our all. This is our intended destination, the Shangri-la of our Christian faith, our highest service, and our finest hour. It may seem a little artificial or contrived to call this highest point of maturity "surrender"; it might be called "rest", or the "fullness of

God”, or “ultimate-maturity”. Whatever label we give to it, this maximum point of spiritual growth is the moment when God becomes the center of everything, not a peripheral interest. This is a time when a mature believer realizes that anything “God-like” must come from “God”. We will call it “surrender”, because that term fits, and because it is used in Scripture. Reaching this point means the development of “full faith” leading to “complete release”. It is a time when we see God fully, trust Him unreservedly, and discontinue self-effort completely. It is a time when we relinquish all of God’s work to God, and lay ourselves...all we are and all we have...before Him, submitting our bodies to be the gloves He will wear to accomplish His divine purposes.

(*Step by Step toward Surrender*, pp. 150-151)

This is surrender, the time when all we have done: the confession, prayer, and study; and all we have endured: the suffering and pain of intense training...has brought us to the fullness of God. We are ready now to move out...and to serve as never before.

Promises Fulfilled. The outcome of training—and the surrender that is subsequent to it—is the unleashing of blessings that God promises throughout His Word. Surrender is the time when the promises will be completely fulfilled. Heb. 10:36 says, “You need to persevere [endure training] so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

Doing God’s will opens the promise-gate. And what does it mean to “have done the will of God”? We are told in 1 Tim. 2:4 that doing the will of God has two parts: 1) being saved, and 2) coming to a knowledge of the truth. And what is promised for each? In the first part, which refers to salvation, we are promised eternal life. In the second part, or the Christian life, we are promised a temporal life that is “truly life” (as per 1 Tim. 6:19). True life is based on “knowledge of the truth”...or maturity. We are interested in the second part, from which we secure the following, in light of Heb. 10:36 (shown above): Through advanced maturity, we will do the will of God as His children, which will fully activate His promises.

This is worth repeating: When we have done the will of God, we will see the promises pertaining to life here on earth brought to fruition. Super-maturity and walking in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit will enable us to receive what He has promised. Watch for it: When we are fully matured and doing God’s will, a flood of blessings will be released to us. (Once again, we refer you to Appendix G, “The Promises”, so you can review what is in store for surrendered believers.)

One of the promises that we have studied is that we will be able to defeat sin and escape the grip of Satan when we surrender. For more details on this concept, please read *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You*. Another is that we will enter God’s rest at surrender, and receive His joy and peace. This is discussed thoroughly in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, which is the last step we took in our journey through the stages of surrendered life. Now, we want to apply the attainment of contentment to our present pursuit, which is the completion of our service mission here on earth

Love and Peace...and now Joy...in Connection with Service. We have seen “love”, which is the fruit of the Spirit; and we have examined “peace”, as a process involving fellowship and a walk in the Spirit. We also introduced “joy” earlier, in connection with service, but now we want to expand

our view of joy to see its full implication for us as we prepare to do exceptional service for the Lord. We are launching “joy”, or “contentment”, into its greatest application, which is “service”. We will see how this works in the next two chapters.

Chapter 6-6

Happiness and Joy

Happiness. According to the world's philosophies, and borne out in experience in this "world which is not our home", happiness is basically a state of having a positive outlook. If we have positive feelings, we are said to be "happy". This applies to believers and unbelievers alike, and hinges on three conditions: 1) our innate "tendency" to be either happy or unhappy, 2) what life has "taught" us, and 3) the events in our lives. We will look briefly at each of these:

1. Happiness is based to some degree on our inborn traits, or our inherited "disposition". This aspect of our happiness derives from the biological formula for our personality, including brain chemistry and function, and other physical attributes. Pre-existent mental and emotional tendencies within the personalities of many people lend themselves to sustained positivity and happiness. Others are blanketed with a relatively sour outlook toward life from day one.
2. Happiness is also governed somewhat by the experiences of childhood and the nature of the upbringing and socialization that has gone on. Childhood events shape our psychology, while adoption of the values and styles of those having power over us when we are small contribute to our habits of thought and action. As a result of these influences, we will see our environment as largely positive...or as negative. We are "pre-set" to respond in a particular way toward life and what it brings.
3. Happiness is based substantially on current events in our lives. Anyone knows whether he is cold or hot, hungry or full, healthy or sick, safe or in danger, welcomed or shunned, or strained or relieved. Things just happen. Even if events are the direct result of our own decisions, the impact of things happening to us and around us will always intrude into our thinking and feeling life, either buoying us upward or pulling us down. How we feel is often dependent on the merits of what is happening. It is hard to be happy when things go poorly.

So we see happiness operating from three sources, which can be baked down into two arenas, one external and the other internal. From the outside we get input from the world that encourages either happiness or misery. From within, an internal response occurs, causing us to react positively or negatively to the input we have received. When we react positively, we are said to be "happy". Once again, this applies to believers and unbelievers alike, and is pretty much the way things work "in the world".

Joy. Many things are claimed as "Christian", when they are actually experiences common to the human species and are thus more corporeal than spiritual. For example, morality is a *human* experience, even though it branches into the *divine* if it is conducted by a spiritual believer. Another example is *happiness*, which is a human experience...with a counterpart in the divine realm called *joy*. In spite of what many have said, *happiness* is not our goal in the Christian life; our objective is to

maintain *spirituality*, which leads to love, peace, and JOY!

Spirituality and its outcroppings...love, peace, and joy...culminate in service. Examine the chosen word “culminate”. It means “to reach the highest point or level.” There can be no question that the highest level of our participation in God’s plan, program, and purpose...is gifted service. This is where we are intended to live.

Joy, as we will show in the next chapter, is the stepping stone into this elevated level of service. But joy is not happiness, *per se*, because happiness is a response from humanity, whereas joy is a response from spirituality. That which emanates from humanity will not be effective in the spiritual world. Happiness that comes from the world must rely on *external or internal conditions in the world*, and is confined to worldly experiences and outcomes. Joy depends on *spiritual conditions*, which overshadows all worldly conditions.

The difference between mature, spiritual believers on one hand and unbelievers (or carnal believers) on the other, is their evaluation of negative events. Maturing believers know that suffering is an opportunity for growth, and that what seems “bad” is actually “good” in its final effects. This is not true for immature or carnal believers, who are left with only the same resources that unbelievers have...their humanity...to deal with misfortune. Recognizing God’s training as “good” shows a prevailing attitude of “endurance”, and endurance is our transport through tests and trials. This is the mindset held by *maturing* believers only. When we know that our present experience is essential and that it leads somewhere good (the “Promised Land”, as we saw in our last book), it becomes more tolerable, even a source of “joy”. (See James 1:3)

Believers who are attached to the world generally remain unhappy, because they are defining their outlook based on the world’s standards. In this posture, they are carnal, and discipline will tend to remove from them those things in the world most commonly associated with happiness. Even Christian groups can fall into a mercenary trap, by promoting or extolling the value of things in the world (especially money) as sources for happiness. This creates a false sense of hope that the world can provide what we need, when in reality what we need does not come from the world, but from our Father.

Joy, as viewed in Scripture, is the same as stability, constancy, and perseverance...in the face of setbacks, persecution, pressure, and pain. We certainly do not invite or “glorify” suffering, but we recognize that it is impossible to reach surrender without it. At the same time, we are learning that it is *possible* to go through loss and affliction without losing joy. Joy is frequently associated with suffering in Scripture, as shown in James 1:2-4, which says this:

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

We have joy when trials come, because we know where they lead, which is to maturity. The proper response of a maturing believer who is encountering intense training is one of joy. Paul said the same thing as James in Rom. 5:3-5, which includes this statement, “...we also rejoice in our

sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance...” Is this a joke? You’re telling me I am to do the exact *opposite* of what comes natural for me when I encounter suffering? “Rejoice” in suffering...who does that? The answer: only the most mature (or the most-stringently maturing) can find joy in suffering. This does not mean we are to be “happy” about our suffering, as the world defines it, but we are to have “joy”, which means to keep our eyes on God, acknowledge that He is still in charge, and hold on to an attitude of acceptance and, yes, even *thanksgiving*, for the privilege of growing into greater faith and a stronger relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Spiritual joy, then, is not the same as emotion. Our spirit on one hand, and the seat of our emotions on the other, exist in different parts of the heart. Emotions are probably part of the “soul”, or perhaps the “mind”, but they are not directly resident in the spiritual place in our hearts where the Holy Spirit lives. (For more on the “immaterial” make-up of man, see *Bible Basics on Walking in the Spirit: Pathway to Production*, pp. 3-17, which includes a complete chart on the contents of the heart.) For joy, believers do not need for their “environment” to change; they only need to change and improve their “spiritual” condition. When this is done, joy will come.

THIS IS IMPORTANT: Joy is a state of standing our ground in the face of adversity. It is keeping on, persevering, remaining steadfast, showing patience, trusting, and enduring. Joy is predicated on faith, and will be sustained to the degree that we have grown into a *mature* faith. Joy is STRENGTH IN THE SPIRIT, based on STRONG FAITH. It is likely that such joy will spill over into our emotions, but an emotional manifestation is neither a prerequisite for, nor a reliable indication of, a righteous spiritual state. (Emotions, along with our bodies, are “offered” for service, thereby becoming subordinate to spirituality.)

Happiness will come and go, and we use the term frequently in Christian sermons and writings. But we must remember that happiness in the world is quite different from joy in the kingdom. I have often confused the terms “happiness” and “joy” in the past, but now I truly understand the difference between them, and I am happy to be able to share this with you.

Now it is time to get into the meat of this study, which is the effect of joy on gifted service. This is next.

Chapter 6-7

Joyful Service

General Scriptural Outlook on Service. Joyful service is based on thorough preparation, and we have studied in some detail how we get ready to serve. As a “sweep-in-the-corner” move, we want do a quick survey of Scripture to feature service-related truths that need more emphasis, or that may not have been presented at all. These will provide or reinforce important truths concerning service, and will serve as a springboard for our discussion on the connection between joy and service. Here are some key passages, with comments, that serve to flesh out our discussion of service up to this point:

Rom. 7:6—“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” Service is done, not by self-discipline and self-motivation, but by the Holy Spirit, who empowers believers for service...prompting, motivating, instructing, and protecting those who serve by His strength.

Rom. 15:1-2—“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” The right attitude toward the weak and our “neighbors” is to “please” them, meaning to support them through our gifts in order to build them up.

1 Cor. 9:14—“In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” Pastors and evangelists who are full-timers, should get a “living” for their service.

1 Cor. 9:19-23—“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like those under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” Adapting to your “company”...without compromising your Christian principles...shows a special commitment to serving by removing unnecessary barriers to your message. This suggests that we leave behind petty differences and our own ego needs to eliminate impediments to our service. Service is not for SELF, but for others. It is admittedly not “natural” for us to deny our basic self-awareness and our need for approval, which means that “selfless” service will require “supernatural” empowerment, as we have seen.

1 Cor. 12:14-26—The first part of this passage (verses 14-17) presents parts of the human

body as symbols for the different gifts that believers have. Then verse 18 discloses that God organizes these parts (representing gifts) into a coordinated unit...or a functioning “body” of believers. Verses 21-26 show how ridiculous it is for any part of the body to “act like” or “envy” other parts, stemming from a false assumption that others’ gifts are somehow “superior”. Verses 24b-25 assure us that ALL gifts are important, and “honorable”, saying, “But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” The key to smooth and unified functioning of the body is “equal concern for each other”, so that, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (v. 26). Can you imagine if the body decided to head out in a direction, but the legs wanted to go another direction? The body would get nowhere...or head out in the wrong direction! There is no room for selfish independence when we are exercising “equal concern” for each other. The emphasis of this passage is on “equality”, which supersedes the notion of personal aggrandizement. (For more on “equality”, see *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, Appendix C, p. 128.)

2 Cor. 9:12-14—“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” There is a kind of reciprocity suggested in this passage, that must pass between believers, as each serves others, and each gets served. The exchange is mutually beneficial for all believers, and God is glorified in the process.

Gal. 5:13—“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” We are free, but that freedom should be exercised to grow and become spiritual, not to indulge our sinful nature. As a result of our growth and spirituality, we will be able to serve in love. So we see two areas of control in this verse: one belonging to the sinful nature and the other belonging to the Spirit. With the sinful nature, we will indulge ourselves; with the Holy Spirit, we will serve.

Eph. 2:10—“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God pre-designed our service. If we are staying with God and following His blueprint to stronger faith, we will fulfill His plan by serving His children, which is tantamount to serving God Himself.

Eph. 4:7-16—This passage links service with the advancement of maturation among those served. It discusses, first of all, the instructional gifts apportioned to “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers”. Then it branches into gifts operating throughout the body to cause growth of all its members. Three verses emphasize the outcome of gifted service, as follows: 1) verse 13, which says, “...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge

of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”, 2) verse 15, which says, “...we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ”, and 3) verse 16, which adds, “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Gifted service causes growth.

Rom. 12:1-21—This chapter in Romans deals comprehensively with the practice and motive for gifted service. The practice is seen in verses 1-8, which shows the preparation, condition, and nature of our service. This is summarized in verses 4-6, which says, “Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same, function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.” In verses 7-8, sample gifts are shown, suggesting that service is not to be done merely as an exercise, but as a committed and Spirit-driven act of love. Verses 9-21 show our proper motivation, which is “love”. These verses tell us what motivational love looks like, and clearly establishes that love must be “sincere” (v. 9) for service to work. Such love—the love that serves—is generated through faith (synonymous with “sincerity”), and energized by the Holy Spirit (who Himself is synonymous with “love”).

1 Pet. 2:4-5—“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We grow, so that—like the priests—we can serve and make sacrifices. Jesus sacrificed for us; ours is now to sacrifice in ways that please Him. Remember that only what GOD DOES actually PLEASES HIM, so OUR TASK is to find out how to let Him do HIS WORK *through* us...so He will be pleased *with* us. We have offered fifteen books now that tell us what the Bible says about how this is done. For a quick synopsis of the principles covered in these books, see Appendix A, “How the Christian Life Works”.

Maturity Leads to Contentment (or Joy). The trailhead for the path to joy...or contentment as we have often called it...is the point at which we begin to grow. The process for growth is straightforward and we have covered it well in previous studies. To review the techniques leading to maturity, which in turn leads to surrender and contentment, peruse pages 47-84 of *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*. This provides our latest discoveries and views related to the attainment of super-maturity.

Contentment at Last. Maturity, extended and perpetuated, becomes super-maturity. Super-maturity leads to surrender, which culminates as contentment. Contentment is also known as “peace”, and “joy”. We have primarily used “joy” in this study as the synonym of choice, but want to pivot now to the use of its duplicate, “contentment”, which was the term used in previous studies. Contentment is the time of maximum *faith*, when many wonderful things happen, such as the following: understanding of God’s love is fully realized, God’s fullness is received, surrender is completed, victory over sin is achieved, promises are fulfilled, and the “Promised Land” is entered.

For more on reaching and savoring this magnificent level known as “contentment”, please read pages 85-116, in *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*.

Protection from Attacks against Contentment and Service. The most effective living and serving that believers can do takes place at the level of “contentment”. This is why Satan, the world, our sinful nature, and the law of sin must unite to damage or destroy our contentment. They want to take our joy away, and—most of the time—they do a pretty good job of it.

The target for attacks against contentment is found in the area of the heart. I guess we could call these intrusions “heart attacks”. Attacks on the heart (mental attacks) are the worst, because they cut off the engine for service! Without *peace*, or contentment, we cannot think clearly or conduct ourselves according to truth, and we cannot serve. This is what we see in Phil. 4:4-7, which says this:

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This means that God is within reach and that His protection is essential for us to “exercise gentleness”. Gentleness—or love—parlays into service, which works in direct opposition to evil and rebellion. Protection becomes increasingly essential, because Satan is lurking nearby to *take away* our contentment, *jumble* our peace, and *disrupt* our service. He must remove contentment and peace, as well as love, because these are the internal components for service, and service sets him back.

Do you get the feeling that all this is too big for us; that we cannot stop Satan? You are correct. We can’t. This is why we must defer to God to deal with the devil’s subterfuge. We must take any mental anguish that Satan is bringing on us directly to God...unload it on Him. And how is this done? Through *prayer and petition*! (Phil. 4:6) We must pray for protection. When our prayers are heard, because we are maturing, God will cover us with His peace, which will shield us from attacks on our hearts...i.e., His peace will “guard” our hearts.

Eph. 6:10-18 confirms this truth, calling for us to put on the armor of God for protection, which basically means to grow and walk in the Spirit. We isolate two pieces of God’s armor in this passage to show their link to God’s protection. These are *faith* and *prayer*. “Faith” is seen in verse 16, which says, “...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” “Prayer” is seen in verse 18, which says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Here, then, are the moving parts involved in our accessing protection and peace: Faith is the *condition* preceding our protection (suggesting maturity and fellowship); and prayer is the *medium* for calling in that protection. Finally, peace (Phil. 4:7) is the *outcome* of protection. This means that increased faith with prayer summons the restoration and stabilization of the heart (its “peace”), with the result that contentment is realized.

The reason contentment is so important is that Satan cannot penetrate it. It consists of faith, rest, peace, dependence on God, and spirituality, which he cannot overcome. When we reach super-maturity, and contentment is constant, we can whisper a word of supplication and the walls of protection will go up. This is why we must COMMIT to the following: perpetuation of growth, achievement of surrender, and the acquisition of contentment. Satan will shy away from us once we reach a state of contentment, because contentment has such powerful connections behind it. The presence of contentment is like a repellent for Satan, fulfilling James 4:7, which says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” This sentence actually says, “Keep on resisting the devil, and at some point he will flee from you.” When we acquire contentment, Satan hits the trail.

Keeping our Sanity. Ever feel like you are going nuts trying to keep up with all the requirements of Christianity? Ever feel incapable of meeting all the standards that God has set? This is normal: to feel like a failure and to feel helpless in being able to clear God’s high bar. And training can sit on our chests like a Mack truck. But there IS hope! We don’t have to get all tangled up with events: shattered dreams and relational setbacks and financial collapse. Even with the *worst*, God can KEEP US FROM LOSING OUR MINDS. That is what is meant in Phil. 4:7, which we saw just above, where God says, “...the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” He will *protect* our minds. But what is His condition for doing this? Where do we find protection for our fragile minds? We have already suggested it, and now want to affirm it.

The mechanism for protection is seen in verse 6 of Phil. 4, which tells us what to do instead of breaking down: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Ask Him for relief! He will give peace and protection! If you do not find peace when you do this, it is not because of God. He wants to give you His peace. The problem is this: There is something missing in YOU. Are you growing? Go through your checklist. Have you been confessing your sins to God? Have you been studying? Do you acknowledge God’s presence in your daily life? Have you even asked for wisdom and strength? If you take care of these things first, then your mind will be stabilized. We won’t understand it when this occurs, but it will happen...the “peace that surpasses understanding” will come.

Protection of our hearts is one of the greatest benefits of prayer, which can come even if we ask for specific things and don’t get them. With protected hearts, we will be shielded from enemy fire as we move forward into greater faith, greater grace, and greater service. With sufficient progress, we will accomplish our highest achievement, which is acquiring the stability and strong faith that lead to—and then sustain—contentment. This is the unexplainable joy that comes with super-maturity and surrender, and this is the most certain form of sanity.

Final Word on Protection and Prayer. 1 Pet. 5:7-10 helps cement the notion of prayer as a means for expressing our faith and keeping us safe. These verses say...:

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world

are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

We could spend a book on this passage, but we limit our look here to principles that confirm our position that there is *protection*, even before we reach contentment, and certainly after, if we use divine techniques that qualify us for it, and if we use God's method for activating it. Here is what we do, and it's almost too simple: Once we are current in our confession and our studies, we "cast our anxiety" on God, which means we PRAY. God can then strengthen us as he restores us, so that we will be able to resist the forces that want to hold us back. 2 Thess. 3:2-3 adds this: "And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one." Prayer brings strength and protection. Is. 41:9b-10 then gives us assurance of assistance, which we know comes through prayer. This passage says the following:

...from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

It is clear in context that this message is for Israel, but IT APPLIES TO US. (Whenever a principle or promise from the Old Testament fits with one established in the New Testament, IT APPLIES TO US!) God will deliver us, if we will *pray* while we *grow* toward maximum joy, where we will ultimately do great things for the Lord...by His strength! The point: God will sustain servants who come to Him and rely on Him.

Full protection will happen when we reach super-maturity...and even before that, if we are *really* moving toward surrender. But wherever we are, at whatever stage of growth, we must always REMEMBER TO PRAY! (For a full study on prayer, please see *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer: Pathway to the Throne*.)

The *protection* we seek through prayer and growth will increase as we move toward contentment. Contentment is highly significant, because it is an internal event, which allows us to square off with the greatest threats to our peace...those that come from within ourselves. Contentment displaces anxiety and doubt; this lets us know that the first and greatest area for improvement is *inside* our hearts. We want to see only *contentment* there.

Contentment Opens Doors to Service. This is the main point of this book. Contentment enables gifted service. Our focus here is not on contentment itself, since contentment as a topic has been thoroughly covered in previous studies (namely, *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*). In our last five books, we conducted a thorough examination of events leading up to contentment, as follows: understanding God's love, getting the fullness of God, surrender, and victory over sin. Then we took the next step, which was to explore all the conditions and events that form the basis and opportunity for entering the "promised land", which is manifested as "contentment".

Now we are ready to see how contentment, the final and greatest change within us, contributes to

our main purpose for being here, which is to discover our gifts and use them in Christian service. How does our contentment...our joy...affect our service? We will see.

To begin with, we must acknowledge the requirement to *serve* in “contentment”, or “with gladness”. Ps. 100:1-2 describes this commandment, saying: “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” The word “worship” includes “service”. Worship is bowing the knee, most particularly within our hearts, before God. In worship we deeply acknowledge God’s presence and power. How does this relate to service? The answer is a question: What is service, after all, if it is not bending our knees before Him and sincerely acquiescing to His will, allowing Him to do His holy work through us? Service is an active form of worship, wherein our faith is expressed toward God to do that which only He can do...namely, to produce righteousness and to CHANGE MEN’S LIVES!

The application of our reference from Ps. 100 is this: We are to *serve with gladness*! This can be mixed with other kinds of worship (such as those that happen in church gatherings), but there are many other occasions when we serve...times when we are alone, or perhaps working one-on-one with a believer in need. Anytime we worship—and in this study, anytime we *serve*—we are to do so with gladness, or with joy and contentment. If we have not attained a measure of contentment, whatever feverish activity we may do with the best of intentions, we will not be “serving”!

Service is perfected by contentment, because when we are no longer self-absorbed, we look out, away from ourselves, to consider the needs of others. With contentment, we become free to think and act in the interests of our Christian brothers and sisters.

Service Wrapped in Contentment. Contentment exists BEFORE we serve, because we have matured and are confident in God’s power to work through us. Contentment exists WHILE we serve, because we are filled with the Spirit, whose fruit is “joy” (Gal. 5:22), and whose power is “working mightily in us” (Col. 1:29). And contentment exists AFTER we serve, because we see the fruits of our efforts, which bring good effects to those we serve, and great joy to us as we see our contribution to their advancement.

Paul had this wrap-around contentment. He was content *before* he served, indicating that—with “food and clothing”, he was content. (1 Tim. 6:8) This contentment was based on what he had “learned”, as per Phil. 4:11, which says, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”

He was also content and confident *while* he served, as evidenced by the statement he made after proclaiming his own contentment, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13). Paul was “in-step” with God, and therefore he was content. Contentment requires that all spiritual requirements be met; i.e., *spirituality enables contentment*.

Finally, Paul found joy *after* he served, saying in Phil. 4:10a, “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me.” Their “renewed concern” indicated their recovery and subsequent growth, which reflected an advancing concern for others. Witnessing their growth gave Paul great joy. It doesn’t get any better than that. Paul concluded in 1 Tim. 6:6 that “godliness with contentment is great gain.” Service gives, but it also claims priceless treasures for the servant. We

see this again in 1 Tim. 6:18-19, which says this:

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

The treasure we lay up through generous and unselfish service is available to us here and now, and this is the foreshadow of what we will have in the next “age”. What we can have now is “treasure” for this time, which is embraced through contentment. Contentment is knowing we have what we need, to do everything God intends, and meanwhile we are assured that ALL other needs will be met. Phil. 4:19 says, in context with providing gifted service, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

When we serve, we rejoice; God’s peace stays with us. Phil. 4:9 assures us, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” When we stay in fellowship...study and train and grow...until we reach the fullness of God and all else that follows, we will live not only in His strength, but in His peace. This is life lived in the bounty of “much-more” grace (James 4:6).

Spiritual Overflow. In the book *Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last*, we ended with an analysis of Psalm 23, as it pertains to the doctrine of contentment. We want to re-visit this stirring song from David, and look for a new connection with service.

We find the truth we are looking for in Ps. 23:7, the second half of the verse, which says, “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” It is not a big leap to link this passage with service, as we will show. “Oil” is a symbol for joy, as per Ps. 45:7, which says, “You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” “Cup” is another symbol, representing a vessel for receiving what God offers; this vessel stands for the heart.

That which overflows the heart (the cup), is contentment (oil...the oil of joy...evidence of spiritual empowerment). Contentment is realized as the fullness of God, expressed through His Spirit, offered by His grace. This is not emotion, but a spiritual condition, wherein we are so close to God, so “full” of Him, so motivated by His love, and so content in His peace, that our hearts are virtually overflowing with care for His children. And what spreads outward from this is service.

Ps. 16 ties all this together, showing the cup, the oil that is poured into it, and the joy that the oil represents. Verse 5 says, “Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure.” Verse 9 shows the *content* of this “portion” and the *cup* that holds it: “Therefore my heart [my cup] is glad [full of joy] and my tongue rejoices [worships and serves]; my body also will rest secure [in contentment]...” Verse 11a concludes, “You have made known to me the path of life; you fill me with joy in your presence...”

By following the “highway to holiness”, and taking all the necessary steps for reaching maturity, we have prepared for the service to which we are called. Our cup is full and overflowing, because we have reached the rest and contentment that comes with surrender and victory over sin. Our

contentment is constant, because our faith has grown. Our joy is overflowing now, and our hearts are brimming with love and compassion for those who need the service which our gifts offer.

Our cup overflows. We are fulfilling our purpose, following God's plan, and completing our mission. We are doing God's will and pleasing Him; therefore, we are living at the very top of human experience, because our humanity has been saturated with the Spirit of God. That is our intended testimony. The thought of being in such a place keeps us going...and growing...because we know where we are headed.

We Can't Help Ourselves. When we reach maturity and constantly live by faith in God's grace, and walk by His Spirit, we will not be able to stop ourselves. We will serve, not because we want to honor the commandment to serve, or just because we are free to serve, but because we cannot stop ourselves from serving...not if we are in the place of spiritual completeness, where we are perpetually influenced by the Holy Spirit. Service, then, evolves not just as what we *do*, but who we have *become*...namely, surrendered believers.

In 1 Cor. 9:16, Paul saw himself as having reached the point where he could do nothing more or less than serve. This is what he said: "Yet when I preach the gospel [form of service], I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" In a sense, we become O.C.D. about serving. We can't seem to get enough of it. In Acts 4:20, Peter described it like this: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." If we try *not* to serve, the need will burn within us. Our desire to serve will become that strong. Jeremiah said, "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." When we reach this point, we will become slaves to God's will, which is the greatest freedom we can ever know.

Conclusion. Through growth and spirituality, we will serve in ways that please God, help others, and leave us totally happy with the results. This is a wonderful time...a time of being carried along by the Holy Spirit. Most of us are not there yet. But we are moving. If you are reading these words, I believe you are moving. Do not expect to step onto the mountain-top in one day. And do not try a short-cut. Practice will not help you. You do not need to become more "skilled"; you just need to learn to trust more. You will not learn to serve by serving; you will learn to serve by quietly and humbly growing in all the ways you can, by all the means that God makes available. Just keep maturing. You will get there. And you will serve well, at the right time.

Part Seven

Organization of Service

In This Part...

Chapter 7-1. Gifted Operations

Chapter 7-2. Gifts of Romans 12:6-8

Chapter 7-3. The Equippers of Ephesians 4

Chapter 7-4. The “Offices”

Chapter 7-5. Concentrated and Devoted Service

Chapter 7-1

Gifted Operations

Two Kinds of Operations. When it comes to gifted service, there are two kinds of operations in a church: one formal, the other informal. Formal service is pastor-led, scheduled, structured, and largely instructional. Informal service is more unplanned (in human terms) than formal service, and is a time for connecting abilities with needs...largely outside the formal operations of the church. Time is allowed for both of these, and believers should be aware of their need to serve each other *outside* the church setting, as well as within.

A third type of service might be seen in large-group initiatives, such as an effort to feed large groups of hungry people, provide medical services to specific areas where concentrated needs arise, and so on. Our focus in this study is on formal and informal operations within the purview of a local church. The way that individual gifts fit in with *all kinds* of projects make a survey of the practice of “group” efforts—inside or outside the church—non-essential to our current topic.

1 Cor. 14:20-40 provides guidelines for “formal” service, explaining how “services” are to be conducted (please read the passage). For the sake of brevity, we condense Paul’s description of properly-conducted formal operations into one word: ORDER. He calls for *structure* and *organization* as protocols for coming together for worship, instruction, prayer, singing, and spiritual focus. He instructs that all these should be done in a manner that allows for concentration on the message of the day, so that collective learning and participation can take place, without the disruption that would be caused by overt, individual expression.

This is worth noting: Formal “worship” is not a *social* event. It is a time of disciplined focus. The need for orderliness is the reason that Paul says tongues are *permitted* during formal services, as long as their use is not disruptive. And, for the sake of efficiency and “staying on topic”, he instructs that a “prophetic message” that is burning within someone’s heart will need to be held back until a time is allotted for it to be spoken. There is no “blurting out” or spontaneous eruption of verbal expression, in a “tongue” or otherwise, as this would detract from the message being delivered by the pastor/teacher, and/or others. There should be NO INTERRUPTIONS during the structured service; otherwise, a kind of chaos will emerge and there will be no meaningful instruction...and therefore no opportunity for growth.

“Informal” service includes any operation of gifts outside the formal service. This avenue for edification and help comes in several forms: 1) private, such as the gift of prayer, ordinarily being conducted in isolation from others, 2) one-on-one, such as practical helping or giving between individual believers, 3) small-group, such as home gatherings for study and prayer, and 4) individual support for formal meetings or other gatherings, such as making a facility comfortable for participants, and/or removing unnecessary impediments to planned activities.

Discussion of “informal” gifts claims a lion’s share of attention in this book, more so than gifts engaged within formal services, though we will touch on these to see how they are supposed to

work (such topics as pastor, evangelist, prophet, etc.). The major distinction between the two kinds of service are, as follows: Formal operations are usually directed by the pastor, whereas informal service takes place outside the pastor's direction, in the form of gifts being exercised by spiritual believers.

Both formal and informal services are important. Informal gifted service pertains to most of us, but formal service, especially that done by the pastor/teacher, has the greatest impact on the church. This makes it crucial that we know what to look for when we select a pastor.

Selecting a “Formal” Service for Yourself. We discussed the topic of “picking a church” at some length in *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word*, Vol. 2, pages 49-60. Picking a church amounts to picking a pastor. When you look for a pastor, you want to know that he is *prepared* to teach the Word, that he has the *gift of teaching*, that he actually *teaches* his flock, and that what he teaches amounts to *truths for living*!

You don’t need someone who focuses on social events, funerals, weddings, and hospital visits. These can be done by those with specific gifts for such requirements. (See Acts 6:1-4.) You want the pastor to spend his time STUDYING so he can TEACH. If he organizes his church and delegates tasks to church leaders, he can direct traffic as a pastor, and still have time to study. This will enable his people to be fed with truths that foster their growth, as his teaching will consist of more than “morality” or “prosperity” messages. He will feed them with *meat* from the Word. It is also worth stating that believers who are sitting at the pastor’s feet to learn do not need to be entertained or titillated or stirred up...they need *correct information* that tells them HOW TO GET CLOSER TO GOD!

Once you pick a pastor, it is VERY important to avoid a common error: making the pastor the only “gifted” operator in the house. Service must be de-centralized, to some degree. ALL believers are gifted, and all who have passed infancy should be engaged in service. It is easy for us to become spectators and observers, rather than active participants in God’s holy work. No one gets a pass on service; we are all obligated to grow and serve. If the pastor is doing his job, all those in his congregation will be learning about gifts, and will be mastering all doctrines relating to spirituality and maturity that enable gifts to work. This will prepare believers in his care for great and significant service.

Chapter 7-2

Gifts of Rom. 12:6-8

Information from Steven J. Cole. Steven J. Cole is a pastor in Flagstaff, Arizona, who has written an excellent article on those gifts cited in Rom. 12:6-8. (The title of the article is, “Humility in the Exercise of our Gifts”.) We will draw from this article and mix Cole’s terse descriptions with our own to frame the gifts shown in the passage indicated. (Endnote 32)

We begin by quoting Romans 12:6-8 in its entirety, for your reading convenience, as follows:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Cole looked at each of these. His views on these will not be foreign to us, as we have mentioned many of them before, but we will use his outstanding organization of information to help us compress a voluminous topic into a smaller space. Cole presents and discusses each gift given in Rom. 12:6-8, and tells how each is used. His portrayal of each gift will help us understand the organization of gifted services. Here is what we gleaned from Cole concerning these gifts:

1. **Gift of Prophecy.** If prophets and their close colleagues—apostles—exist today, their role has certainly changed. The new condition in this Age is the existence of the completed Word of God, so that the need for “direct feeding of truth” through the active voice of a prophet is no longer needed...as it was at one time. The role of the gifts of “prophet” and “apostle”—assuming these are currently active—would be to provide depth and clarity to God’s truth...AS IT IS PRESENTED IN THE WORD...without adding anything to it. Prophets of today would be manifested as those with special understanding and insight into God’s published message to believers for the Church Age.

Prophets in existence at the present time would have, it seems, a special kind of spiritual “intuition” or “discernment” concerning God’s truths, probably beyond the gifts of many pastor/teachers or evangelists. The gift of prophecy could possibly be adjunctively resident in a pastor/teacher, but is just as likely, in my view, to be a gift in “non-pastors”, who contribute to what pastors are teaching...perhaps *many* pastors. The gift of “spiritual intuition” in modern-day prophets would operate as an ability to see connections and overviews in Scripture that enable the development of principles not seen by others. This might be shared directly, or passed on through pastors and other teachers who study what the “prophets” have said.

Rom. 12:6b says the following in the NIV: “If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith”. The NIV offers a footnoted alternative for this interpretation, which

I like better: “If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in agreement with the faith.” When we see “faith” used with the article “the”, we know that Scripture is highlighting *itself*. “Faith” in this case means the “truth of God’s Word”. What this is saying to the prophet is this: The gift of prophecy must be used in agreement with God’s written truth, and CANNOT ADD TO THE WORD OR DEPART FROM IT. This means that whatever a “prophet” presents must be based on the WORD ALONE!

1 Cor. 14:29-33 tells us that prophets may speak in a setting of formal worship, if they do so in a controlled and orderly way. Prophets must add *clarity* to God’s message, not *confusion*. Prophecy, then, CAN be oral, but the gift itself operates after a careful consideration of what the Bible already says about any topic being explored. Modern-day prophecy, assuming that it actually exists, must REFLECT SCRIPTURE.

2. **Gifts of Service.** We use the terms “serve” and “service” in the general sense of serving God and fellow believers. But there is a specialized usage of the term “service”, which is used to distinguish a category of gifts, called “gifts of service”, that is differentiated from “instructional gifts”. So there are “service” gifts and there are “teaching” gifts. For the sake of Cole’s argument, we will acknowledge that service gifts can be seen as those which fall outside the area of “instruction”.

Service gifts can be broken down further into “spiritual” gifts and “practical” gifts. Spiritual gifts would include, for example, faith and prayer; whereas practical gifts would involve such functions as administration or helping. Keep in mind that all gifts are important and essential. You can determine for yourself where gifts fall into the respective categories, as you proceed through an examination of the gifts in Romans 12.

3. **Teacher.** Teachers should teach! They may be pastors...or not...but those with the gift of teaching should TEACH. In 1 Tim. 4:11-16, Paul told Timothy to command and teach the truth, telling him specifically in verse 11, “Command and teach these things.” “These things” refers to the contents of verses 1-10, but especially verse 8, which says, “...godliness has value for all things...” In other words, Paul was saying to Timothy, “Teach the truth, which should always be focused on godliness”. Timothy was a pastor...instructed to teach!

Paul reinforces and extends this charge to Timothy with other commands, saying in verse 13, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” He then adds, in verse 14, “Do not neglect your gift...,” and in verse 15, “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them...” But there’s more: Paul admonishes, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them.” It is clear by Paul’s instruction to Timothy, that teachers should give 100% of their time and energy to their instructional gift. There is no gift more accentuated as a full-time pursuit than that of teaching. This is the gift that requires the most, and does the most good. This is why the amount of spiritual and practical preparation that goes on prior to effective teaching is enormous.

4. **Encouragers.** Encouragers are the cheerleaders for believers on their team. The

encourager motivates, challenges, and reminds of important truths from the Word. He is the one who makes you “want” to move forward, to grow, and to use your gifts effectively.

5. **Giving.** Giving goods and money, and other kinds of giving, go along with this gift. Those with the gift of “getting it” will likely also have the gift of “giving it”. Many will try to satisfy the first half of this gift and then promptly forget the second half. But those who “have it” should share generously with those who do not, thus helping those in need. This is not just so “those without” can live better, though that is good; this is most-importantly to *remove barriers* that might stand in the way of study and spiritual growth.
6. **Leadership.** This gift implies organizing, administering, steering the church, and directing sub-parts of church operations. Pastors often have some form of this gift. Leadership can be broken into specialties, such as dealing with money, managing construction and buildings, arranging meeting schedules, organizing outreach programs, and so on. Leaders must have initiative, problem-solving abilities, and inspirational qualities that move believers under their authority to go to work. Leaders must know the believers in their church and use their gifts appropriately to benefit the whole body. Most of all, leaders must be ON THE SCENE (or “diligent”). Leadership is not a role for the faint of heart or the lazy. They must be battle-ready at all times.
7. **Showing Mercy.** Mercy will not be shown without genuine compassion, the kind that comes through fellowship with God. The word “cheerfully”, which reflects the manner in which mercy is to be shown, implies the operation of contentment, which means the joy of the Spirit, a condition brought on by cleanliness and maturity.

Through this discussion of Rom. 12:6-8, we see the placement and usefulness of specific gifts within the church. We will continue to look at specific roles, including a more in-depth look at the crucial role of pastor/teacher, and others, as we present the next two chapters on the “Equippers” and the “Offices”.

Chapter 7-3

The Equippers of Ephesians 4

Who are the Equippers? The equippers are those who directly prepare believers to exercise their gifts. We have touched on them before and now want to extend our earlier remarks. The equippers are the trainers, who teach their believing “trainees” how the Christian life is to be lived, or—in the case of unbelievers—show them how they can become Christians. We will look at the four primary “equipping” roles cited in Eph. 4:11, which presents this: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...” These gifts were given for a special purpose, which is expressed in verses 12 and 13, as follows:

...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

All gifts are intended to “edify”, or build-up, believers, except for evangelism, which is designed to convert those who have not yet believed. The “building-up” gifts in Eph. 4 are specifically configured to bring believers being served to such a level of maturity that they can start exercising their own gifts. The objective is to “prepare God’s people for works of service”...*gifted* service. The gifts for “equipping” are these, as we saw in verse 11: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. We will look at each one.

Apostles. Apostles were early church leaders with multiple gifts. Their gifts were basically used to establish the fledgling church in the 1st Century. Apostles were distinguished by their meeting the *criteria* for qualification as apostles, and by the *nature* of their performance. We will look at each of these separately, as follows:

1. Apostles were screened according to their continual contact with Jesus prior to the crucifixion, and by their first-hand experience with Him after the resurrection. Each apostle was present with Christ throughout His three-year ministry, and each was a witness to the resurrected Christ. This is shown in Acts 1:20-22, where Peter said the following, in regard to picking Judas’ replacement:

“For”, said Peter, “it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,’ and ‘May another take his place of leadership.’ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

Whether Matthias, the one chosen by the “Eleven” to become the 12th apostle, was the “anointed” replacement for Judas is another discussion not to be conducted here. What we will say is that Paul indisputably became an apostle, even though he did not meet the

requirement of going in and out among the original apostles, from the time of Jesus' introduction as the Messiah to His death on the cross. But did Paul satisfy the most important qualification for being an apostle...viz., he could testify that he had seen the resurrected Christ!

1 Cor. 9:1 confirms that Paul was accredited as a "witness" to the resurrection, since he saw Jesus on the road to Damascus. This verse says, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?" Paul did meet the criterion of being an eye-witness to the risen Jesus.

1 Cor. 15:7-8 helps us understand why he became an apostle, even though he was not present for the initial introduction and presentation of Jesus. This passage says, "Then he [Jesus] appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born." Jesus appeared to Paul, satisfying the first condition. But what about the second condition? Can Paul be an authorized apostle, even though he did not serve with Jesus while He was in His earthly body?

The answer is yes. Paul was alive, but not physically in proximity with Jesus during the Lord's earthly ministry. I believe his being "abnormally born" covers this, since he was just "in a different location" at the time. Paul's "abnormal" acceptability as an apostle allowed for variation in the criteria, so that—even though he did not sit at Jesus' feet as the other apostles did—he was qualified by his *exceptional* observation of Christ's resurrected body.

2. The second distinction of apostles, the "performance" aspect of their ministry, was that each could work "miracles", as we see in Acts 5:12a, which says, "The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people." Rom. 15:18-19 confirmed this trait in Paul's ministry, where he described his own experience with signs and miracles, as follows:

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.

A study of the context surrounding these and other miraculous deeds performed by the apostles shows that this ability was unique to them. These acts included healing and even the restoration of life, among others.

The purpose for these spectacular abilities was to verify that God was behind them, so that Christianity could receive a kick start in its establishment. These miracles also validated the ministry of the apostles. The gift of apostleship was FOUNDATIONAL, and once the church was well underway, and—more importantly—*when the Word was completed*, this particular gift was probably no longer necessary. It is likely that this gift no longer operates, and I would scrutinize carefully anyone who claims to be an apostle today.

Prophets. The purpose of the prophets was to receive God's revelation. It is almost certain that apostles were also prophets, and were able to receive the transmission of God's Word directly. We

stated earlier that this purpose has surely changed, since we now have the full and immutable Word of Truth; no more is needed. All we need now is *clarification* of truth, for those believers who want it and seek it.

We stated earlier that the gift of prophecy, if it is operational today, may be simply the ability to dig out and express in some form the truths that are resident in the Word. They see the truths in the Bible in a deeper way, and view God's reality and operations more clearly than others. With this gift, they can share with those who have communication gifts, such as pastors, so that the truths these "prophets" discover can be disseminated to believers at-large.

A very important truth must be driven home concerning the function of a "prophet", and that is this: NEVER should a prophet, or anyone else, add to or take away from the written message of God to His people. To alter the Word in any way is a serious violation, and any claim to have the ability to do so is from Satan. It is certain, then, that the original purpose of prophecy...to intercept divine revelation...has ended. This is likely what 1 Cor. 13:8 means when it says, "But where there are prophecies, they will cease..." Many use this passage to prove that prophecy, tongues, and revelation ("knowledge") will all be eliminated when the Word is completed. This makes sense, but it must be recognized that God can use whatever gifts He chooses at whatever period of time He decides. He can add gifts to the list or withdraw them, at any time. We cannot be overly dogmatic about the specific gifts He is using or not using at this time...except to say that no so-called "message from God" can be used to alter or expand the completed Word of God.

It is possible that some "residual form" of the so-called "temporary" gifts is still at work. But it is also important to note that their operation WILL SURELY NOT BE EXACTLY THE SAME AS THEY WERE DURING THE EARLY CHURCH...while the Word was being encoded. Those who try to slavishly superimpose these gifts onto this time will assuredly misuse them, and do more harm than good.

The prophets, like the apostles, were the basis or foundation for the church, as we see in Eph. 2:19-22, which gives us a panoramic view of the Church Age, as follows:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

It is well-established that apostles and prophets were the foundation for the church. Jesus was the cornerstone in the foundation, and beyond that He is the essence and substance of all that is built on the foundation. The edifice built on Christ and His work, as administered by the Holy Spirit, is the place where growing believers become the bricks that make up the house that God is building. The fact that apostles and prophets were part of the "foundation" probably means that their mission of creating a solid "sub-structure" was essentially completed when the church "building" was underway.

Evangelists. The term “evangelist” comes from the Greek word “*evangelos*”, which means “messenger with good news”. The purpose of the evangelist is to spread the good news of the gospel to a lost and dying world. Evangelism as a gift operates to get the saving message of Christ to as many people as possible. He is a “teacher” in the sense that he instructs unbelievers in the way of salvation, and then directs them toward places where (hopefully) they can feed on the milk of the Word and grow. He is an “equipper” in that he provides truth that the unsaved need, in order to enter an eternal relationship with God.

This gift, like giving, showing mercy, encouraging, and helping, is a concentrated form of what all believers are supposed to be doing. All believers are evangelists, even though the scope of “gifted” evangelism reaches far beyond the capability of the average believer. Eph. 5:16 tells us that we must be “making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” We should communicate the gospel anytime the occasion permits. Col. 4:5 extends this command, saying, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders [unbelievers]; make the most of every opportunity.” How should we view unbelievers? As prospects for salvation. We must see them as potential brothers and sisters, and behave accordingly.

As an evangelist, Paul asked for prayers, as we see in Col. 4:3, which says, “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.” Paul was the conqueror, and was asking for help from the support team back at the base. He wanted prayers for the fulfillment of his mission, which was to broadcast the gospel message effectively. His specific objective for prayer was this: “...that I may proclaim it [the message] clearly, as I should” (v. 4).

Evangelists are the “crusaders”. Others are “ambassadors” (i.e., not conquerors), who are ready to speak in behalf of their King. We are all responsible to give the King’s message, anytime He directs. He knows who is seeking the message, and He will make sure that it reaches those who want it. Those of us who are not gifted as evangelists are on alert, awaiting orders to deliver the message, always ready to “answer everyone” with the truth. (1 Pet. 3:15)

It is likely that the gift of evangelism, though introduced in less-spectacular fashion today than it was with early-church evangelists, is still fully operational, with the added advantage that modern technology enables the gospel to instantly reach all populations in all parts of the earth.

Pastor/Teachers. When you look around at all the churches that have lost their way and are embracing every kind of worldly notion or religious falsehood around, you will discover that the blame lies mostly with the pastors of these churches. Even pastors who are “basically good” have an Achilles heel that prevents them from moving to the center of their real purpose, which is to *instruct* their members...so that believers who listen to them can advance toward maturity.

The pastor is the ONE PERSON that we know for sure is responsible for using his gift to “prepare God’s people for works of service”. This also makes him the most dangerous character in all of Christendom. He has enormous power and influence, and it is possible that he will lead his flock right over the cliff. His job is to make sure his congregation understands how spirituality and maturity operate, and to keep these in focus as primary themes in his instructional message. If he

stays on message and on task, his people will be equipped to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The pastor is also the ultimate “leader” of his church, but, if he is not careful, he can get buried in the minutia of church work and problems. To avoid this, he must farm out the tasks of “operations” to those with gifts to perform them. His job is—at its core—to STUDY and TEACH. The greatest leadership and “shepherding” he can provide is in the message he delivers to them...telling them how to live life *close to God*.

The question arises: How often should he be communicating with them? If Paul is any kind of model for this, the pastor should teach EVERY DAY! Once or twice a week is not enough to keep believers growing. They need to be fed every day to keep their minds on divine matters. We all drift almost instantly if reminders are not in our faces to help us remember God. This is especially difficult given the nature of the fast-paced, information-laden world in which we live.

Only when the pastor keeps the feeding trough full for his group will they be able to feed sufficiently to grow and become outfitted for meaningful, gifted service themselves. If the pastor has been teaching, the question he can ask the members is this: What are you doing to help each other? If they look at each other with blank stares, this means he has not cultivated a service mentality within his group. On the other hand, when enough believers in a group reach maturity and understand their mission, they will faithfully accelerate each other toward growth, and an unstoppable machine will be on the move.

Help for the Pastor. Some say that the “elders” mentioned in the Word are actually “pastors”, but I see the role of “leader” or “elder” as different from that of “pastor/teacher”. I see elders and other leaders as having administrative or similar roles that serve adjunctively with the pastor’s leadership, with the objective of *relieving the pastor* of distractions that could interfere with his study of the Word...as he prepares for the frequent instruction he is charged to provide.

“Chief executive officer” is a good description for the pastor, and under him are various roles akin to the offices of “chief operational officer”, “chief financial officer”, and so on. Elders might be considered operational officers, who take on the mantle of organizing many roles in the church so that the pastor is not overwhelmed with pragmatic church operations. (We will say more about pastors, elders, and others in the next chapter.)

I particularly like the passage in Acts that shows the apostles unhooking themselves from certain managerial and functional responsibilities of leadership in the church. This is found in Acts 6:1-4, which says this:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

This can apply to the work of pastors. Pastors, who are ultimately accountable for the SPIRITUAL well-being of believers in the church, must take on the mantle of teacher FIRST; then other roles can be looked at, mostly with a view toward turning them over to those with gifts for taking care of them. Even the role of counseling can be shared with those in the church who have this gift. If the pastor cannot even find seven believers who are mature enough to saddle the work-load surrounding the church, whose fault is that? If the pastor is teaching and providing spiritual leadership, capable and gifted servants will rise up and take on the labors of church organization and function.

We will say more about various church “offices” and leadership roles in the next chapter, titled “The Offices”.

Chapter 7-4

The “Offices”

Officers are Gifted Ministers. We must be reminded that all believers are equal, and that all believers function meaningfully only by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. All have sinful natures, all fail, and all require mercy and forgiveness to be cleansed from the sins which they commit. If you are among those who think that you do not require grace and that you do not sin, you are operating in the flesh from the outset, and you will not be doing God’s work, no matter how busy or highly-recognized you may be.

We must also remember that “officers” are simply God’s servants, as we all are. Those in positions of authority do well to humbly assess their own status. Church leaders are “leaders among ministers”, as we all have a ministry of our own, and will never do anything worthwhile apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit through our gifts, whatever those gifts are.

There are several categories of church leadership recognized in Scripture, which we will note here. We will look at “overseers”, “deacons”, and “elders”, as seen in line with the ultimate church authority—the “pastor/teacher”—whose role we discussed above.

Overseer. The overseer, sometimes called “bishop”, has a special gift of leadership, as he occupies a key supervisory role in the church. He seems to have all the responsibilities of a pastor, except for teaching, even though he does have the gift of teaching and can use this gift in an *ancillary* capacity. He will probably be doing some teaching, but hardly in the way required of the pastor/teacher.

The qualifications for an overseer are stringent, with stipulations that are more restrictive than any other church position. This is what we see in 1 Tim. 3:2-7, as follows:

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

The office of overseer, it seems, is like that of assistant pastor, or perhaps head deacon. At anytime except during formal services, the overseer is the most visible leader in the church (during formal services the pastor gets most of the attention). This is why his requirements for conduct and decorum are so strict. He is the model for Christian maturity in the church.

Elder. Titus 1:5-9 describes the requirements for an “elder”. This passage tells us that elders must satisfy the following conditions:

Must be blameless, the husband of one wife (his current status)

Not overbearing
Not quick-tempered
Not given to drunkenness
Not violent
Not pursuing dishonest gain
Hospitable
Loves what is good
Self-controlled
Upright
Holy
Disciplined
Knowledgeable (see verse 9)

This is quite an impressive list. And did you notice the similarity between these requirements for an elder, and those for the overseer? This is probably no accident, because they are likely the same position. The elder, or overseer, is the “go-to guy” for the church. He is the one to call first. His position pre-dates even that of the pastor/teacher, as Titus was told to appoint “elders”, even before pastors were engaged to teach and lead the congregations of new churches. Elders may even be central in the selection or termination of the pastor.

There may be more than one elder in a church, but it seems more likely that there should be a single elder assisted by others, such as deacons, whom we will examine.

As we stated in the last chapter, the elder is seen by some as identical with the pastor, but I believe the position of elder is that of a “generalist”, with wide-ranging responsibilities; whereas, the position of pastor/teacher is more specialized, concentrating on the role of teaching. The elder deals more with practical matters and tangible concerns, though he also backs the pastor in teaching, encouraging, counseling, and so on.

Here’s the point: The pastor is always the ultimate authority, because he is strengthening the spiritual life of his congregation, which must be kept as the central theme and purpose for the church. The spiritual aspect of the church takes the highest priority, so the pastor occupies the highest rank. If the pastor must deal with practical matters, he can pass much of this on to his “elder” and others.

Deacons. 1 Tim. 1:8-13 describes the requirements of a “deacon”. They must be respectable, sincere, sober, honest, and spiritually mature, *before* they are selected. They must also be the husband of one wife and manage their households well.

Deacons are the departmental managers for the church, with a plethora of “as-needed” roles added on. They serve a variety of administrative roles, and/or perform duties essential to church operations. These may include accounting, music direction, buildings, outreach programs, missions liaising, educational programs, home study groups, electronic services (a new gift), children’s instruction, personal assistance, and on and on. Wherever there is a need for coordination and oversight for specific objectives, deacons can be found to accommodate it.

Deacons basically serve under the authority of the elder, who answers to the pastor, who is in turn appointed by the elder, deacons, and others. There is a balance of “powers”, designed so that no one person can dictate the affairs of the church without accountability. “Checks” and “balances” exist in the church, so it seems that a certain quality of service would prevail. Unfortunately, leaders often lack the thing that is most needed in any church operation, and that is a *commitment to growth*—both of themselves, and of those they lead. They are “playing church”, rather than functioning as part of the body of Christ. There is also a lack of dedicated emphasis on operating under the aegis of the Holy Spirit. And what is the fundamental cause for these failings? They are the result of a colossal failure on the part of the pastor/teacher to teach truths for living!

Doing God’s Work. All offices are occupied by “those who have gifts” to do God’s work. This will only happen if their spiritual condition and maturity-level are right. More than anything else, the leaders in the church must make *their own spirituality* the highest priority in their lives, and make God the focus of their attention. If God is first, and they rely on His Spirit for direction, they will be placed well, and they will serve well.

In their demeanor and their conversation, church leaders must exhibit the values and truths they have learned from their pastor, and they must honor God in all their dealings. If either the pastor or his leaders fail, perchance due to personal self-aggrandizement or self-promotion or some other distraction, then the church will become disjointed and weak. Look around. Weak churches are on every corner. This is the result of POOR LEADERSHIP!

Is there a church anywhere that is teaching the full “power” behind the “godliness” that so many profess? Many pastors call for man-dependent performance with only human nature as its underpinning. Listen to the messages. Preachers everywhere call on their congregations to “become more” on their own, rather than allowing God to be Himself through them. This is a promotion of confidence in man, and such a “religion” doesn’t need God. Many “ministers” teach that WE can do it all ourselves, with the result that God becomes a mere backdrop for our “show”. Where are those who teach the truth? Where are the leaders? Where is Andrew Murray? Where is J. Hampton Keathley, III? Where is Lewis Sperry Chafer? Dearest God, we pray for leaders.

Chinese proverb: When the pupil is willing, the teacher will appear. Perhaps the pupil is not willing.

Chapter 7-5

Concentrated and Devoted Service

Jesus' Troupe as an Example for Service. Luke 8:1-3 provides a good example of devoted service, showing how Jesus and his followers conducted their ministry. Their approach can be applied to gifted service in the church today. Here is what Luke said:

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

From this example, we can glean several principles that help us understand the interactive function of our gifts. Here is what we see in this passage:

- We must be willing to *go wherever* we are needed and *do whatever* is required...in order to exercise our gifts.
- We should align ourselves with as many gifted believers as we can to support them, and receive their support in return.
- Women are gifted just as much as men, and should serve up to the limits of their gifts and their faith.
- Some of the gifted believers in our periphery will provide extra financial support for church operations, as well as for the upkeep of any servants in need.

From this passage we also get a small taste of the “flavor” of devotion shown by these followers of Christ. They spent a great deal of time on the road, in all kinds of weather, encountering more opposition than support, confidently declaring the message of the “kingdom”. This is the flavor of commitment that we want among ourselves, the ambience of dedication that we want around us. This is the kind of concentrated attention to God to which we aspire...put simply, we want to be singularly devoted to God's work, as they were. So what is stopping us? We have discovered along the way that competition for our thoughts and beliefs is intense and compelling. God can easily become secondary in our lives, when His place is upstaged by appealing lures from the world, which are clearly designed to *draw our focus away from Him*.

Constant focus on God, or ongoing acknowledgement of Him, is the difference between just being a Christian and “living the life of Christ”. If we have believed, we will be saved, but in the meantime, if we do not master the drill for walking in God's strength, we will live much as unbelievers live, and depend on the world for comfort and support. The test of our devotion is this: Do we want more of God, or do we want more of ourselves and the world that we live in? We will

pursue what we want more of, and *that is what we will get*. We must *seek Him first*, or we will only dabble at service, and will never satisfy God's purpose for our lives.

The Early Church: Another Example. There is no better model for the way a church is supposed to operate than the early church. Acts 2:42-47 describes the interaction and fellowship of the earliest members of the church, as follows:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The teaching and wonders and miraculous signs done by the apostles is the equivalent of pastor/teachers instructing their flocks today. Because they MET EVERY DAY to focus on God as a matter of highest priority, they were all "filled with awe" (God-conscious), they were "glad" (content), and they were "sincere" (full of faith). These were mature believers because they "enjoyed" the favor (gifted service) of all the people. This means they *served each other, not that they were popular in their communities*. As a result of their maturity and devotion, look at their fruit: "...the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

This is the model for commitment and mutual growth that takes place when the pastor/teacher instructs daily, and his pupils gather to feed on the Word...every time the doors are opened. This is what is missing. Growth is DAILY, not just once a week. If all believers get is watered-down teaching once a week, the chances for growth and service and fruit will be NIL! There will be no service without growth and there will be no growth without daily instruction of some kind, supplemented with cooperative gifted service. (Attention is called again to Appendix F, "Ways to Study".)

Whole-Heartedness toward God. God insists on surrender as the highest form of living that we can do through our devotion to Him. It is only through constant access of His love and grace and mercy that we can reach surrender, that time of unreserved yielding to Him.

Deut. 6:4-5 tells us what is ultimately required of us at surrender, as it was for the Israelites, saying, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." This is no partial commitment or occasional attention; this is the total giving of oneself to the service of God, by growing into unquestioning faith in Him.

In Matt. 22:37-38 Jesus restates the commandment of Deuteronomy 6, as we see here: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment." When we reach the point that we can sincerely say we love God with all our heart and that He is all we want, we will then be able to surrender to His

service, live in constant awareness of Him, know that He is near, and acknowledge that He is everything. This is when we will be able to fully sacrifice...and serve.

Through surrendered devotion, that time when we receive the “fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19), we will know what it means to say, “Here am I; send me” (Is. 6:8). We will be able to say, “I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13). We will declare, “His divine power has given me everything I need for life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3). We will be “mature and complete, not lacking anything.” We will “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) and “live by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). We will bear the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), “shine like stars in the universe” (Phil. 2:15), “fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7), and we will rest in the truth that God’s “grace is sufficient” for all things (2 Cor. 12:9). We will “live—not as unwise, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15). We will “be clothed with compassion” (Col. 3:12), and “live in order to please God” (1 Thess. 4:1). And we will dwell in the Promised Land (Heb. 3 and 4).

And much, much more. We are not there yet. We are on the way. We are not devoted, but we are getting closer. We must not be discouraged and we must not quit, as we are training for life in the Promised Land. We must believe that God is bringing us along one failure and one weakness at a time, and that He will bring us at last to the plane where we will live in perpetual strength and blessing, and know then that His walk is at last ours. Until then, we must persevere. How? Confess, study, pray, trust, endure, and repeatedly yield to Him as we move toward ultimate surrender and service. It can happen. We believe it.

Conclusion

In a nutshell: The key to Christian living is to find out from the Bible what God wants, and then to discover what He offers to help us satisfy His requirements. By using His techniques and accessing His assets, we will be following God's plan for our growth in knowledge and grace. This advancement in maturity, leading to a reliance on the Holy Spirit, will eventually lead to a level of maturity known as "super-maturity".

When we reach super-maturity, as so few do, we will graduate from God's training, understand the love of God, receive the fullness of God, reach the point of "surrender", achieve victory over sin, enter the Promised Land of contentment and blessing, see the fulfillment of all promises pertaining to living, and step up to unprecedented gifted service and production.

As we are moving toward the ultimate goal of super-maturity, we will increasingly recognize and use the gifts which God has given us for service. When we know what our gifts are, we can begin to use them, although we will surely fail many times before we succeed, and may even feel at times that our gifts are for nothing. But we believe what God says about the work of His Spirit, and we know that—if we keep on growing—we will reach a time of great production. The final outcome of all our growth will be the ability to serve in special ways that will please God and help others.

The purpose of gifts is to "edify" or build up. And what are we building up, or adding to? The faith and maturity of others. When we look at our service to determine our effectiveness, we can ask ourselves, "Am I increasing the growth opportunity and faith of those I am directing my service toward?" When we reach a level of maturity...and dependence on the power of the Spirit...that our gifts can function properly, we can be assured that there will be good effects from our service, and the growth of those we serve will be enhanced.

All the loving and caring and kindness we are called to exhibit are funneled into one purpose: the exercise of our gifts. We care most about the aspects of fellow believers' lives that can be affected by our gifts. For example, we notice others' hunger or personal needs more when our gift is that of "giving". We are more attuned to spiritual dips in others if our gift is that of "encouragement". If we are maturing and walking in the Spirit, we will be drawn to those who especially need our specific brand of service. If we teach or lead, our targeted attention is broadened to include all those under our care. Whatever our gifts, there is a place for them to operate, and good will come from them, if we keep on growing in our faith.

When we grow to the highest level of surrender, we will have the rest and contentment that come from being close to God, and that contentment will form the basis for the greatest service imaginable. Through our faith (maturity), love (spirituality), and contentment (peace and joy), we will see others built up as a result of our service, so they can go on to serve still others through their own spirituality.

We do not begin service by serving. We begin by *preparing to serve*. We do this by frequently confessing our sins to the Father, praying constantly, studying endlessly through all available means, trusting to the outer limits of our faith, and enduring the training exercises that God brings to us (often seen as suffering). When growth gets underway, service can move forward commensurate with our burgeoning faith. Meanwhile, the timing for the initiation of our service must be directed by the Holy Spirit...and cannot be rushed. Reject pressures to “do more” from those who urge you to serve before you are spiritually prepared; they will send you off in directions that will *prevent*, rather than *promote*, gifted service.

Don’t be anxious or in a hurry. Be still. Wait. Grow. It is better to do one thing right than many things incorrectly. Service is about quality, not quantity. Hold steady. Get stronger day by day. You will be called. And then you will surely fail along the way, but submit deficiencies and defects to Him. He allows us to “reset” over and over. Keep growing. He will equip you. Persevere, brothers and sisters. Remember: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him” (Is. 64:4; also 1 Cor. 2:9).

Appendices

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Appendix A

How the Christian Life Works

This brief study encapsulates the essential steps and/or components of the Christian life, summarizing meaningful events in the lives of believers, from infancy to full maturity. This synopsis gives a thumbnail sketch of the truth, as we have seen it and taught it. Here, in essence, is how the Christian life works:

1. Every human being with consciousness has an awareness of God, as elicited by observation of the created world. But not everyone wants to pursue God, and hell itself would not convince human beings who are negative toward God to seek Him. Some, however, have an interest in God, and are open to truths about Him.
2. Those who have “positive volition” toward God will get the gospel message, which is this: Christ has paid for the sins of mankind, removing the sin barrier between man and God. Those who want the truth...get it. All that remains is for them to believe that the work of Christ was actually done for *them*, and that He is alive today—as God and *with* God—to receive those who believe in Him, placing them into the royal family of God. When any human being believes in Jesus Christ, he is instantly and eternally saved, and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
3. Immediately following salvation, the infant believer must feed on the Word of God to grow. As he grows, he learns how the Christian life is lived, and begins to implement the techniques he acquires, which accelerate his (or her) growth.
4. Unfortunately, salvation does not remove the sinful nature, which, from birth, has a love for sin and a resistance toward God. The result is that sins occur frequently in the life of a new believer, even though his “zeal” for godly things is evident.
5. One of the techniques a new believer should learn is *confession of sins*. Hiding sins from God keeps them on our sin record, which God has a clear view of. He wants us to have the humility to recognize that we are weak, but He is strong, and confession shows that we trust Him to remove our sins and help us toward improvement. Confession brings God’s forgiveness.
6. When we sin, we lose fellowship, or communion, with God. The result of this is not the loss of salvation, but our being cut off from the positive influences of the Holy Spirit within us. Instead of the Holy Spirit controlling us, our sinful nature takes over. But when we *confess our sins*, we are forgiven and the Holy Spirit resumes control. As new or intermediate believers, we must confess constantly to stay afloat, since, if we are not in fellowship, we will not be able to move forward spiritually. Fellowship only lasts, after all, until we sin again.
7. Satan, his world, and our sinful nature combine with the “law of sin” to conspire against us

and take us down spiritually in order to move us away from God. They know that if we can be kept at a distance from God and His strength, we will be powerless to resist sin or self-made righteousness. The forces of evil are supernatural and we cannot stop them, apart from the power of God. Fellowship with God strengthens us against them. Unfortunately, very few believers follow a consistent pattern of confession that would enable them to STAY in fellowship and thus resist evil. We must confess and return to God when we sin, which is often. (If we do not, God will correct us through discipline to prompt us to confess and be restored.)

8. As we are confessing, we must also be *learning more about God* and His systems. This means we must become familiar with God's grace techniques and assets, which are designed to enable us to access God's strength. God's grace systems will enable us to live in the power of His Spirit. When we are faithful in our confession and our learning, we will spend more and more time in fellowship, which facilitates our growth.
9. We will learn along the way to pray effectively, think about God constantly, give thanks consistently, and—most importantly—trust incessantly. These will help us grow to the point that we can stay in fellowship so faithfully that we can live in the strength of the Holy Spirit.
10. If we continue learning and applying what we know, fellowship and learning will converge, beginning a symbiotic exchange in which each aids the other. The result is *advanced* growth. In other words, if we are confessing often to stay in fellowship, and are absorbing God's truths, we will be advancing rapidly in our spiritual capacity for communion and service.
11. What is it that grows when we confess often and spend time learning God's ways? It is our faith. As faith strengthens, our perspective of life and God evolve to look more like His, and faith underpins our "walk by the Spirit", which is perpetual dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.
12. By growing our faith, we advance toward maturity, which is our goal. But growth has a price...a cross we must bear.
13. An unavoidable aspect of growth is *training*. This is seen in Scripture as tests and trials, or—put simply—as pressures and suffering. Believers often ask why things seem to keep happening to them, even when they have been seeking God and doing all the right things. If they are "doing right", why does suffering still come? This is the answer: God is testing them to advance their faith and promote their growth.
14. By learning the Word and enduring God's training, we move toward the completion, or "perfection", of our faith. This requires enormous commitment to God's program, because—as much trouble as I had accepting this when I first started studying—the road to maturity is painful and difficult.
15. If we grow enough, we can actually reach super-maturity.
16. As super-mature believers, we can understand God and His love, and fully comprehend

and implement His grace methods. This will give us the “fullness of God”, and prepare us for the final step in our spiritual growth.

17. Ultimately, super-mature believers can *surrender* to God, thus reaching the highest level of spiritual functioning and communion with God. This is the ultimate Christian life!
18. Victory over sin occurs when we surrender, because God puts Satan back on his heels, and permits us to live without his unrestrained evil influence.
19. Contentment, which is the “blessing” aspect of surrender, fills our lives as we live in a state of yieldedness to God’s will. This is the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey, where God’s promises are fulfilled and our lives consist of godly joy and happiness.
20. Service to God and His children is maximized when we surrender, resulting in great fruit and the accumulation of rewards in heaven.

This is the Christian life, with its struggles and victories. For details and scriptures on the steps and/or components of this life, see the following books:

Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations (This is a comprehensive, step-by-step course, providing essential knowledge for Christian living.)

God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living

Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God

Killing Sin before Sin Kills You: A Survival Guide

Entering the Promised Land: Contentment at Last

These can be downloaded for free, or purchased, at the following website:

www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com

Appendix B

Growth of Believers

The Beginning. Growth is prominent in Scripture as the means for getting closer to God and as the only way to get ultimate victory in the Christian life. Growth comes *before* victory. It is astounding that so many “preachers” make an appeal for salvation by promising instant victory, prosperity, peace, power, and happiness, simply by becoming born again and saved. This is false advertising. Being accepted into the Army Ranger program does not mean you are instantly a Ranger. A step has been left out: growth through study and training. When someone becomes a child of God, he or she is an infant...a neophyte. *Newborns* need a mild form of nourishment and gentle care in the beginning; certainly they are not ready to be sent out on a “job” for the Lord. It will be a long time before they are ready for that. They must grow first. How absurd is it to think we can do anything in the Christian life without maturing? The notion of an infant operating heavy equipment comes to mind. Totally ridiculous.

Newborn babies need milk. So says 1 Pet. 2:2-3: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” In the beginning, all a new believer should do is feed on the Word. Techniques can be acquired as growth occurs through knowledge. These include confession, prayer, and so on. If their growth trajectory is going to take them beyond infancy to childhood, and then past childhood to adolescence and maturity, they must be increasingly prepared for the exigencies and demands of their developing Christian life. This means they will need to understand how difficult advanced training can be, and know the benefits to be gained by enduring its difficulties.

2 Pet. 3:18a shows the objective for us at any stage. This passage says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Grace and knowledge are the soil in which God gives us growth, which is enabled by our sitting at the feet of the Master (the Holy Spirit of Christ) to learn and to blossom. Here are some verses (with comments) that describe the growth that new believers may do:

Eph. 4:12-14a—“...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants...” When we are prepared through the operation of gifts exhibited by mature believers (vv. 9-11), we can leave infancy and move on into deeper and richer teachings.

Eph. 1:17—“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” Paul is praying for the Holy Spirit to be in charge of their hearts, so they can LEARN and thus

KNOW GOD BETTER.

Col. 1:9-11a—"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way [and here are the ways we please Him]: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father..." We see clearly what pleases God: good works, GROWING, being strengthened with His power to endure and trust, and giving thanks. What are these? They are works done through growth, which leads to the enablement of His power, beyond which all we can do is give thanks. "Thanks" is giving credit to God as the one who completes the good works.

Ps. 119:9-11—"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." For a beginning Christian to stay pure and avoid sin, he must enter a concentrated period of study (basic training), whereby he not only understands what he is being taught, but is able to process it into his heart by treasuring what he is hearing. Treasured knowledge—hidden in the heart—becomes wisdom, which can be applied to situations in life.

1 Cor. 3:1—"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed you are still not ready." Trigonometry is not taught in the first grade, because the young students are not ready for it. So it is with those young in the faith...they must work up through the concepts to reach a level when advanced teachings make sense and can help them. Otherwise, the teaching they hear is just gibberish. New believers must be started at the beginning...and no steps can be left out in their curriculum as they prepare for higher-level instruction.

Starting up the Ladder. We start at scratch when we are born again, and we can sit on that spot, or we can begin the race. We are offered the choice of going our journey alone, or we can hitch a ride; this means that we can attempt to live the Christian life in our own strength and by our own ingenuity, or we can learn how to live in God's strength and by the directions given in His Word. The choice sounds intuitively simple, but the percentage of believers choosing to live life God's way, and by His power, is minuscule. Believing is hard, whereas self-effort is comparatively easy. But this is the lesson of maturity: Faith is the key to doing worthwhile work, and work without faith is meaningless (logically, it would follow that faith without works is a dead faith, as per James 2). Our object is to grow by building our faith.

So, we start with milk, involving simple concepts and tasks, as follows: 1) understand the cross and what has happened to us, 2) grasp that we sin as believers and must confess, 3) comprehend the need for and the place of prayer, and 4) accept that we must study to grow. Often, these concepts are ignored or abandoned for less "spiritual" pursuits, such as manning a soup kitchen or greeting

folks outside the church on Sunday morning. These are fine, if that is the gift and assignment of those doing it, and IF THOSE DOING IT HAVE TAKEN CARE OF THEIR GROWTH. Great caution is needed in dealing with new believers, because it is so hard for them to turn around, once they have headed out in a wrong direction. (No one is harder to teach than someone who is settled in his own understanding of the Bible, even if he is wrong.)

The danger is that we will enthusiastically adopt causes, activities, or doctrines that *undermine*, rather than *promote* our growth. We can end up being zealous, but for a cause or belief that is not supported in Scripture. Rom. 10:1-4 describes this condition, as follows:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Primary reference here is to the Jews choosing the law as the means to salvation, rather than accepting the righteousness of Christ. But this also illustrates the pattern followed by believers who want to live their lives by "works" and legalism, rather than by grace and faith. The big test for any doctrine or truth is this: Where does the power come from for fulfilling what is called for in the teaching? If the power of God is omitted in the process recommended, REJECT THE TEACHING! Accept only those teachings which exalt God, and which depend for their fulfillment on His resources, rather than those of man or the world. 2 Tim. 3:5a captures this concept very well, saying, "...having a form of godliness but denying its power." This is why teachings on the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives are so important. We can be sincere, earnest, excited, and settled in our beliefs...and be dead wrong. Once again, ask the question: Where do we see the power of the Spirit in what we are being asked to believe and/or do? New believer, you soft cluster of clay, choose the way of power. Mature believer, promote the power of God among new believers.

Gal. 3:3 echoes this point: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" When we know what to look for, we can begin the faith curriculum, which will lead to our growth. Heb. 6:1 kicks us off, saying this:

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance [describing our act of turning to Christ for salvation] from acts that lead to death [moving away from practices of "works"], and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

In other words, once we are saved and have been introduced to fundamental and basic doctrines of God and salvation, we can "leave" these and move onward into studies that show us how to LIVE IN GOD'S POWER TO PRODUCE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. We can graduate into studies which the writer of Hebrews called "solid food", as shown in Heb. 5:12, 14; solid food is characterized by "teaching about righteousness" (v. 13)...meaning "spirituality".

The growth that we seek does not come through "busy-ness" in churches or organizations (some

may even promote “important” causes), but through the quiet assimilation of truths, especially truths for living, which are obtained from God’s Word. This is accompanied by the practice and training that God brings or allows to cement our burgeoning faith. Faith and love do not come to us just because we decide it would be nice to have them. They are the result of extended growth and significant amounts of time controlled by the Spirit. Growth and spirituality come from *many* decisions over time...arising from a thirst for God and a commitment to tirelessly search until we have found Him. The hungry believer wants to find—not just a home, because we have that—but the very heart of God. And the more we discover about Him, the more we will grow.

Moving on Up. We talk at length about the core grace techniques and assets, but there are some that have been brought up in the past that have perhaps received too little attention. We frequently cite the most crucial techniques: confession, prayer, study, trust, and endurance...along with the newer ones, surrender and defeating sin...and there are sub-techniques emanating from each of these. But there are other important procedures that beckon our attention, such as thanksgiving, fear of the Lord, acknowledging God, preoccupation with Christ, believing the promises, waiting on the Lord, being still, being humble, glorifying God before angels, and living in God’s plan. If you have not read the ten original books covering both the main techniques, and these, hopefully you will have the opportunity to go through them, so that you can build a stronger foundation for our more-recent studies.

We want to move now into deeper concepts of growth, looking further into the Bible’s instructions on how we can move closer to God and mature our faith. We are now getting into the area where we have to run with the big dogs...or get off the porch. We are called upon, as believers well on our way to maturity, to “obey”. This must be clarified. Rom. 6:16 helps by saying this:

Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

For believers, obedience means using the techniques...which leads to righteousness...such as learning about love and grace, believing the promises, enduring training, and accessing the gifts of mature believers. Obedience means following the blueprint for growth, as we saw in *Killing Sin before Sin Kills You* (p. 124), where we showed how Col. 3:1-17 lays it out. Take time to read this powerful passage in the Word. It shows how believers who are building their “faith and love”, and those who have “understood God’s grace in all its truth”, are maturing, and can now be filled with “knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” This will lead them to “live a life worthy of the Lord” and to “please him in every way”, which will enable them to “bear fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God”. And what will happen when they grow? They will be “strengthened with all power according to his glorious might”. See why we want to grow? What could be better than being strengthened with the power of Almighty God? How wrong we are to try to depend on our own puny resources for Christian service, rather than the infinite power of God!

We act, but God empowers. Which comes first? The power. But action will come and fruit will

multiply AS WE GROW! By the time we reach maturity, we will be walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, and will be ready to move on to “surrender” and contentment. Then we will enter His rest, where we will find ourselves worked to the bone. But we will not tire, as Isaiah 40:31 says, “...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

One of my favorite promises is found in Ps. 92:12-15, which says this:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

This promise contains within it a study of growth, which is broken down into a sequence for our advancement, as follows:

1. The “righteous will flourish” means “those in fellowship can grow”. Fellowship, or the filling and teaching of the Spirit, is a base requirement for growth.
2. “...planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God.” “Flourishing” reflects an elevated state of growth, meaning that maturity is reaching a higher level, one which is being recognized in the “courts” of God.
3. “They will still bear fruit in old age” shows how those who stay “righteous”, and/or those who walk in the Spirit, can bear exceptional fruit, into perpetuity. The final outcome of growth, and our greatest goal, is to walk so close to God that the work God does is the work we are doing, which brings great benefits to us...and glory to Him.

We will show where this growth is headed throughout the remaining studies in this volume. Growing in grace and knowledge keeps surfacing as our most important goal as believers, and as the way to our most-significant service.

The Place of Prayer in Growth. One of the greatest producers—as well as a great product—of maturity...is prayer. In other words, the effectiveness of prayer depends on our growth (degree of faith), while prayer reciprocally advances growth. Paul constantly stated that he was “praying” for the growth of his listeners, and he asked them to pray for him. And there is little doubt that we should pray for ourselves, such as we see in James 1:5-6, where we are told to ask for wisdom...and throughout the gospels, where Jesus strongly emphasized our need to pray regarding all practical and spiritual matters. Paul also highlighted the need for prayer, especially when it comes to getting protection from Satan, but in all other areas as well, as shown in Eph. 6:18a, which says, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.”

When we make requests of the Father, we are asking Him, “Have I grown enough to get the answer I seek?” For example, when we ask to be delivered from a sin that is haunting us, God will examine our growth—the size of our faith—to determine if we have matured enough to get this privilege. When our faith reaches a certain level, we will receive protection from that particular sin, and will be able to resist it. If this doesn’t happen right away, is God ignoring us? No. We have just not matured enough to qualify for this privilege. When we are not receiving respite from a particular

temptation, we have our orders: KEEP GROWING! And KEEP PRAYING! Relief will never come without prayer, even though in the short term, temptation may continue as part of the training phase of our growth.

For an absolutely delicious drink of heavenly water, spend some time with Andrew Murray. His words are a great reflection of God's greatness and truth. His emphasis on prayer was clear, as exemplified in his devotional book: *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. From that book we extract the following:

As we take His word from the Blessed Book and ask him to speak to us with his living, loving voice, the power to believe and receive the Word as God's own word to us will emerge in us. It is in prayer, in living contact with God in living faith, that faith will become strong in us. Many Christians cannot understand, nor do they feel the need, of spending hours with God. But the Master says, and the experience of His people has confirmed, that people of strong faith are people of much prayer. (Endnote 33)

There is little we can add to this. Murray is saying that we will grow when we spend time with God in prayer. We don't even need words, at times, but can just sit in quiet awareness of God, and admiration of the life He brings. There's nothing quite like it.

For a complete discussion on prayer, check out *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer: Pathway to the Throne*.

The Place of Study in Growth. Growth is crucial to everything we want to do in our spiritual lives. Without growth, we will not be able to trust God, walk in the Spirit, pray effectively, produce spiritual fruit, build wisdom, or resist sin. We will be useless to God and will never achieve His will or fulfill His plan for us. Once we comprehend the *importance* of growth, we must acknowledge the greatest *facilitator* for growth: an understanding of God's Word. The Word gives us all we need to know about God and His grace apparatus, and it tells us how to use all the assets that grace provides.

2 Tim. 3:16 tells us that the Word is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Learning truths that *tell us how to live* will 1) make us "stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured [full of faith]" (Col. 4:12), and will 2) fill us with "knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9). But it is not just *knowing* the Word that prompts our growth; it is understanding it and absorbing it as wisdom *by believing it and treasuring it* that enables it to be placed on the launching pads of our hearts for application to our experience.

Through our learning of the Word from the Holy Spirit, by means of direct study and the gifts He has given to our fellow believers around us; and through the processing of divine truths by believing them and treasuring them...we will be changed. We will actually be "transformed through the renewing" of our minds (Rom. 12:2). As we study and understand the Word, we will see how to use the techniques God provides to enable us to increasingly depend on Him to produce His life in us. The Christian life is all about understanding what God is doing, seeing how we fit into His purpose,

and signing up for His training with unswerving commitment.

We see the necessity and value of the Word's wisdom declared throughout Scripture. For example, 2 Peter 3:18 commands us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 2:2, another example, calls for us to desire the truth, so that "by it you may grow in your salvation [the Christian life], now that you have tasted that the Lord is good". There other examples. God gave special instructional abilities to teachers of various kinds "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature..." (Eph 4:12-13a). Paul fully understood the value and impact of *learning* God's Word. This is verified in a statement which described his own role in *teaching* God's Word, found in Col. 1:28, which says, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone [believers] perfect [mature] in Christ." Paul knew his teaching would have the effect of increasing the maturity of his audience. This is why he called on the Philippians to stay on the learning track, saying this:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ... (Phil. 1:9-10)

So, an endless array of passages in the Bible call for us to *grow in the Word*. This is because nothing nurtures maturity like understanding God's Word, particularly the truths that specify how we should *conceive of Him*, and how we should *live by Him*. Prov. 3:13 caps it, saying, "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding." (For a full discussion of the importance of learning the Word, please read "Training in the Word", a chapter in *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.) There is no substitute for listening to God's Word to help us grow.

Waiting as a Part of Growth. J. Hampton Keathley, III, presented a series of sermons that gave a complete discussion of the doctrine of "waiting". These sermons have been encapsulated into written form and are listed under his name with the title, "Waiting on the Lord". These are available at www.bible.org. As is usual with Keathley, his coverage of the topic is thorough and informative. Our comments here will incorporate his concepts and conclusions with our own, to see how waiting on God applies to our growth. (Endnote 34)

We have indicated clearly that there is a lot to "do" to grow (not as a matter of "works", but as a matter of accessing grace techniques and assets). So how can we "wait", while we are growing? The first thing we must understand is that waiting is not sitting on the couch doing nothing; waiting is an *active* process...not a *passive* one. While we are waiting, we will be "doing" growth-promoting activities, such as praying, studying, and so on; and in our hearts we will be trusting to the full level of our accumulated faith. Waiting actually includes a "confident expectation", so that true waiting can only be done when it is accompanied by believing.

Ps. 130:5-6 says the following: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope [faith]. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning." God had the "more-than" phrase stated twice, apparently for

emphasis, to show the intensity of waiting that He expects. He wants us to “wait intensely, with confident expectation”. That does not sound passive.

God has a time for doing things, which is always the perfect time within the scope of His plan. Generally, we want things to go according to OUR plan, but God’s plan is the one we must live by, which means that—at times—we will be waiting for His time to come around. But the time in between does not need to be wasted, as time spent growing is always time well spent. If God has something He wants to give us, or wants to have us do, that will come when God is ready, pending our being prepared to *receive* and/or *do*.

As we grow, we know better each day who the Lord is. As we know Him better, we trust Him more, because we see Him for what He is...our loving Father. Like the psalmist, we can say, “But as for me, I am like a green olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God’s unfailing love for ever and ever” (Ps. 52:8). And because we have confidence in God’s love, we can add, “And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in thee” (Ps. 39:7). (Endnote 35)

We are not just waiting on blessing or relief or insight or strength, though we wait for these; we are waiting on God Himself. We want more of Him, and Him alone, not just what He brings or gives. *He* is the prize. *He* is the ultimate gain. *He* is all the blessing we need. When we know this, the wait will be over, because we will have arrived at the point of faith and growth that allow us to live in contentment. Ps. 37:7a says, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently [in faith] for him...” (Lam. 3:25) We want only Him and He is the one for whom we wait: “Patiently wait for God alone, my soul” (Ps. 62:5, NET).

And what is the result? The answer for this is found in Is. 40:31 (NET), which says, “But those who wait for the Lord’s help find renewed strength; they rise up as if they had eagles’ wings, they run without growing weary, they walk without getting tired.” Supernatural strength and energy will come to those who are waiting, and they will see divine good produced through them, because of their rising faith. “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun” (Ps. 37:5). Trusting, waiting, committing...there is so much to do. These contribute to growth, and they grow as they are practiced. We cannot wait to begin waiting; we must begin today. The old military slogan must now be fulfilled: Hurry up and wait! “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord” (Ps. 27:14).

Suffering to Grow. One of the hardest lessons for me to accept was that Christians must go through a certain amount of suffering to grow. I do not know the exact formula for arriving at the suffering/growth ratio, but I do know that there is pressure and strain involved in our growth. Tests and trials...and temptations...are all allowed in our lives to give us spiritual “reps” for building our faith. The choice we have is whether to take the crooked and rocky path of growth...all uphill...or to just coast and slide down a slippery slope of ease, which has been smoothed and oiled with Satan’s deception and our ignorance. Growing is not an academic or philosophical process; it is real-life, involving real pain and pressure. (See how many recruits to Christianity *that* message will bring.) We will grow...or we will shrink.

I used to believe that not growing would bring only painful discipline (which it certainly can), and that confessing, praying, and studying could only bring blessing. But I discovered, after considerable resistance to the concept, that real growth requires intensive training, and that the experience will be rigorous and demanding, sometimes painful, if it is to be effective.

Ps. 119 speaks of our being “afflicted” to convince us to pay attention to our spiritual growth. This is what we see in verses 67, 71, and 75, respectively:

Verse 67—Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

Verse 71—It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

Verse 75—I know, Oh Lord, that your laws [your Word] is righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Whether this affliction is the result of discipline, or is allowed for training, its purpose is to get us into the Word, and on the path of growth. We see this concept in many passages in Scripture. Here are a few of them that make this clear: we must suffer in order to cement our growth gains:

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

1 Peter 1:6-9—In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 4:12-13—Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

Many other scriptures and examples of suffering for growth exist in the Bible. Paul’s training provides a clear case where suffering was used to strengthen and “build him up”. The following passages illustrate the mold for growth, as demonstrated in the experiences of Paul:

2 Tim. 3:10-12—You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Cor. 11:23-29—Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received for the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own

countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

How can we not be moved when we hear of Paul's suffering? Paul was also tempted unbelievably, as we see in 2 Cor. 12:7-10, which says the following:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

As we grow, tests and temptations will become stronger, which increases the need for us to grow ever more vigorously to stay ahead of them. An end to the training is coming, if we persevere, and we will see how that can happen to us, especially in Part 2. Until then, we must endure, persevere, and remain constant. A picture of *perseverance* is seen clearly in another case of Paul's suffering for growth, found in 2 Cor. 4:8-10, as follows:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

When we finish the training, the very life of Christ will be seen "in our body", so that we can glorify Him through the teaching and strengthening ministry of His Spirit. Then, when the race is done, we can lay our gold medals at His feet, at which time He will say, "Well done."

The Results of Discontent in Suffering. Ps. 106:32-33 leads off this important discussion of "discontentment", and shows what happens as a result of a faithless response to tests and trials. This passage says, "By the waters of Meribah they angered the Lord, and trouble came to Moses because of them; for they rebelled against the Spirit of God, and rash words came from Moses' lips." The story of the Jews in the desert is a poignant picture of the way believers often reject grace and provision and turn away from God in rebellion and self-willed independence. It also shows how suffering for *training* can become suffering for *discipline*, and how our hard-headedness and hard-heartedness can drive us further into carnality and darkness.

Ps. 106:43 portrays the posture and behavior of the Jews in a negative stance toward God, saying of them, "Many times he delivered them, but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin." Being "bent"...warped, crooked, twisted, and gnarled...describes a believer who stops growing, and who collapses into worldly carnality, self-service, and unbelief. This is not so much an aberration, but rather is almost the standard operating procedure among believers; how few there are who have the true perspective of God, and who want God on *His* terms. Most have their own

agenda and ideas of the “good life” and how to get it, and they go the easy way of living in and for the world. This includes the “religious” crowd, who are characterized by self-righteousness and self-styled worship and service.

The story of the Jews being delivered from Egypt is well-known, but little understood. Deliverance from slavery through the parting of the waves of the Red Sea is symbolic of the conversion experience, when salvation comes to anyone who decides to believe the gospel of Christ. This represents the time of entry into the Christian life, which—until we mature—is like a desert. The newly-freed Jews, who had seen the Passover of the Lord and had just witnessed the parting of the waters of the Red Sea (one of the greatest miracles of all time), were no longer under the bondage of Egyptian oppression. They “saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians”, with the result that “the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant” (Ex. 14:31). Yet notice what happened next: Once the singing and celebration subsided, about three days after crossing the Red Sea, the Jews laughed one last time and then looked around them. Oh-oh. They saw sand and waste. By the way, Moses, what will we eat? And where is the water? Omigosh...what have you done, Moses? And then they started to complain.

They finally found some water, but it was bitter, and—even though they were complaining—God gave them a way to sweeten the water by throwing a piece of wood into it. There was, of course, a miraculous change in the molecular content of the water, but the Jews took it as a matter of course. Then they complained about hunger, and God once again...with grace and patience...met their needs, this time with manna and quail. This was another miracle, accepted with dismissal by the Jews. One of the lessons we can learn already from this story is that miracles, not even the parting of the Red Sea or the provision of supernaturally-delivered food and water, can persuade people to *believe*, when they are inclined to *disbelieve*.

The Jews had the Red Sea, then water, then food...which should have convinced them forever of the reality of God and the benevolence of His grace. But memory of miracles is not enough to sustain faith. When the Jews were tested again by a water shortage, miracles were forgotten and they began to doubt and quarrel. But before we tell the rest of this story, we want to give the moral, which is this: All the proof in the world will not persuade a stubborn heart to believe. On the other hand, those who want God and keep growing will (sooner or later) find truth and blessing in the worst of circumstances, and will give thanks that He cares enough about them to train them. This is, as you might suspect, the testimony of a mature believer. But those who have *not* matured, who are living by sight and not by faith, will look to the deceptive world and their misleading surroundings for affirmation of God’s goodness; unfortunately, these will only confuse them. Where they should be looking is into God’s Word, which will teach them of His love and patience and provision, and will explain the purpose and worth of His adoring discipline and training.

Here is what happened when their water, and their faith, dried up. After a few weeks in the desert, where God in His grace had been giving them what they needed for survival, they came to a place which was later named Massah (meaning “place of testing”) and Meribah (“quarreling” and

“complaining”). It was there that God gave them a mid-term exam. The test consisted of another condition of “no water”, as we suggested, and it was there that their failure of the test had serious consequences. (Take note: God’s testing is always an opportunity for growth, but it is also an opportunity for failure.) The Jews saw that there was no water, and took that as the final reality, quickly discounting God’s love and care for them. They complained to Moses, saying, “Why do you [Moses] bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst” (Ex. 17:3)? And they blasphemed, “Is the Lord amongst us or not” (Ex. 17:7b)? See how quickly God can be forgotten? We always tend to ask, “What has He done for me lately?” instead of “How does God feel about me, and what is His plan?”

The issue is this: “discontent at the time of testing”. How can we prevent this? How can we avoid complaining and becoming alarmed and upset when challenges and setbacks come? The answer is simple: by trusting in God. Admittedly, that is not easy when we are looking right into the face of disaster and misfortune, perhaps even death, and what do we see in these to validate our faith? Perhaps little. It is easy for some to glibly exhort, under such circumstances, “Just trust in God!” But we will not...we will not trust...not at first...not until we are prepared. We must fail, and perhaps fail over and over, until we have failed enough, and taken our failures to God enough times, that our faith will have GROWN enough to meet and match our pressures.

The Jews failed at Meribah, and even then God was gracious and gave them water. But there were consequences. As a result of their failure to trust God, God in His infinite wisdom, knowing how long it would take them to build their faith, allowed them time to grow. The amount of time He knew this would take was a whopping FORTY YEARS! They would be under intensive training for forty long and difficult years before their faith would reach the level that they could cross the Jordan to face the uncertainties and challenges of the Promised Land. He was preparing them, teaching them to trust in His Word, as per Deut. 8:3, which says this:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

How long will it take us to learn this same lesson? Perhaps forty years. Hopefully less. But if we stay with instruction from the Word and believe what we learn, we will accelerate the process of training, so that we do not have to spend many long years learning to confidently depend on God’s grace for our physical and material sustenance and our spiritual strengthening. Until we have reached a sufficient level of maturity, we will not be able to do anything *but* complain and be anxious and doubt God. That is why we must exercise all the grace techniques which God has given us...so we can weather the tests and absorb the benefits of training, and so we can keep growing. Eventually, growth will lead us to rest and peace in the Promised Land, as we shall see.

The real lesson here is complicated. We don’t ask for more faith *in this moment*, because the faith we have right now is ALL THE FAITH WE ARE GOING TO HAVE...at this time. We need more faith today than we had yesterday and more faith tomorrow than we have had today. But today our faith is just what it is. To make it bigger, we must feed and water it, and allow God’s pruning and

husbandry to make it stronger and more productive. We begin today, and continue tomorrow, and the next day, and we never stop, because we will never get the faith we need by halting and starting again. We must keep moving.

We must keep our faith GROWING, and never take a day off. If we do not persevere and endure, and we slide back as a result, what will happen? The suffering and testing that we are going through will be EXTENDED, as it was for the Jews at Meribah! We *grow*, so that the next test will be one that we will *pass*, as the Jews finally did; or perhaps it will take ten more failures, or one hundred, to come to the place where we are prepared to enter the Promised Land. The more attention we pay to our maturation now, the sooner we will get there.

Rejection/Persecution as a Form of Testing and Trials for Growth. Luke 6:22 describes a form of suffering experienced by believers that can be either physical or psychological. These contribute to our growth, but make no mistake; either condition can be severe and painful. Here is what this verse says: “Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.” This hatred can come out as attacks in the tangible world, or they may be seen as hateful speech or ostracism that makes us feel unloved and worthless.

You might think you are exempt from such rejection, because you are not a “super-warrior”, but it is not always the most-visible Christians who suffer the most. If you are doing God’s will and are in fellowship, even though you are alone or just privately going about your spiritual routines, you can be under attack the same as a believer who is teaching truth to thousands. Satan will be whispering accusations against you in the ears of God, yes, but also in the ears of those who know you, convincing them to hate you and think ill of you, even if you have done nothing wrong. And if you have wronged them in some way, Satan will have extra ammunition to use against you...through them.

Rejection will come to *growing believers*. But we can be blessed, even under persecution. “Blessed” means “happy”, which is what will characterize the experience of a believer who is serious about his growth. As we grow, we will find joy and peace in rejection, because our perspective will come to incorporate the view that God is either allowing...or bringing...events that will give us the *greatest opportunity to advance and move closer to Him*. We will come to see grace in all that God puts before us, and we will know that He intends all training for our benefit.

Appendix C

Invisible Heroes

Sometimes we think of super-believers as those who are most visible and openly influential. But that is not God's view. He is NOT looking for OUR competence or greatness; He is looking for us to HUMBLE OURSELVES and ACCESS HIS ABILITIES. This is what angels are watching for...hearts for God. Even when we are in our eternal state, the angels will be watching for our reflection of God's greatness, even though our "names" will be recognized by Him. Rev. 3:5 says, "He who overcomes [follows the grace-life] will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels."

Angels will be applauding the grace that has been shown through us. The greatest heroism is that which is recognized by angels, and possibly never seen by humans, obscure acts of devotion and faith, such as those performed by prayer warriors agonizing in remote closets, or faithful supporters giving time and treasure to the limits of their abilities...in secret...and worshippers who quietly listen to the Word being taught day after day. Ordinary believers can be *invisible heroes*. These are the ones *we* may never notice, but *God* does. These are the ones who will get huge positions and rewards in heaven.

The point is clear: glorifying God is not necessarily a string of overt acts seen by humans. Even more than that, it is that which ANGELS recognize as devotion to God...unseen things...things not on a list. It is possible to sit alone in a room and glorify God, just as it is possible to perform great acts of religious service and still dishonor Him. It is the HEART that God sees first and foremost, and it is what angels measure to determine spiritual quality or its absence.

We do not need to fret that we are not "accomplishing" enough. If we are learning and our faith is growing, this will take us to the kind and level of achievement that God wants. Paul understood this, as evidenced by what he said in 2 Cor. 6:9a, in which Paul saw himself as "known, yet regarded as unknown". Jesus described invisible heroes in Matt. 6, especially verses 1-8, where he said worship and giving are better done inconspicuously, rather than ostentatiously...to be "seen by men". He said our "light" should "shine before men" (Matt.5:16), but He meant *God's* light, not our own.

Being recognized by man is not as important as being approved by God. He is the judge. And angels are the primary audience. Any believer can be extraordinary, even those who are never seen. Remember this: Every time we glorify God we score a point for the home team. But when we don't, we are chalking up points for the opposition; we are aiding and abetting the enemy. This is why training is so important, not just within our own limited environment, but across this grand stage we're on, with all its eternal reach and implication.

Appendix D

Gifts

Introduction. When we speak of a gift in the spiritual realm, we do not refer to something we possess after it is given to us. A gift from God is not “turned over” to us to own and exercise by our own will, even if we hope to use it in God’s service. If we believe our gifts are OURS, pride can set in and neutralize the effectiveness of the gifts. He gives specific gifts so that He can operate in special ways within us, and throughout the arenas of our lives, to complete the purposes He has planned for us. His divine *will* targets individual believers and the collective body of believers (the church) as beneficiaries of these gifts. Gifts are opportunities for us to have God fulfill *in* us what He has determined to complete *through* us.

Gifts are provided so that each believer can serve other believers in specific ways that advance the cause of Christ within the church and in the world. Perhaps in no other way is Scripture more concrete and definite about the function of God’s power than in the area of gifts. As it is with all other aspects of the Christian life, God is in charge; He is the initiator, the actor, and the finisher of every worthwhile task we will ever be a part of. Yes, our bodies and minds will be engaged in normal and sensible ways as our gifts operate, but—if we are in fellowship and know what we are doing (i.e., know God’s Word), God will be the one operating His gift in us and around us, and He will get the glory that only He deserves.

There are some surprising implications surrounding the topic of gifts from God. We will not spend much time exploring the different *kinds* of gifts, or in analyzing the *function* of specific gifts. These have been treated thoroughly in other works by other students of the Word. Our primary focus here, as always, is to see how *God* operates. Regarding gifts, we want to see how God works in the dispensation and use of these gifts, and what these mean to us. We will also address in this study some of the conflicts that have arisen pertaining to gifts.

Definition. A gift from God is the power of the Holy Spirit configured to function within an individual believer in a special way for the purpose of assisting and strengthening other believers in order for God to be glorified, and/or to advance the gospel of Christ.

God Gives Gifts for Service. God gives gifts so they can be used in service for the body of Christ. It all started with the ascension of Christ. Ephesians 4:8 quotes Psalms, saying, “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.” Christ “gave gifts to men” for a reason. These gifts are to bolster, support, and strengthen all the believers in the church. A strong church, then, will promote the gospel for unbelievers. God has ingeniously aligned all believers and all gifts to function harmoniously so that all the spiritual needs of all believers are met. Each believer has a contribution to make to the group, by God’s grace and through His strength, so that all believers benefit. Paul told the Corinthians that they were “not lacking in any gift” (1 Cor. 1:7). God provides for the needs of every believer, and many times He uses other believers to do it.

The gifts that believers use are not for “money-making” or personal aggrandizement, but for service. Eph. 4:15-16 says the following:

...speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Each believer has a part in helping other believers; each must use his gift to serve others. We see this clearly in 1 Pet. 4:10, which says this: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” Our gifts take many forms, differing greatly from one believer to the next, but the motivation is the same for all of them. The moving push comes from *love*. Eph. 4:2 tells us to support each other in love and to be “completely humble and gentle [and]...patient”. Eph. 4:15, cited above, calls for us to “speak the truth in love”. Love is the basis for the operation of our gift. 1 Pet. 1:8 makes a tender call for us to “love each other deeply”. When we love with God’s love, the service we are called to do is fulfilling and satisfying, because it is rooted in love.

Love is the driving force behind our gifted service, and it is also the objective. We serve because we love, and love is increased when we serve. Look at Eph. 4:16 again. As our gifts bring their benefit to each of us, we will “grow and build up” our love. Love...God’s love...makes each believer work, and brings the church together as a unit. Then, whether it is from an individual believer, or from the church, God’s work can get done. God’s work in us is a rich and fruitful product of our maturity. Can you imagine what would happen if all believers became mature?

Gifts should also be used with God’s *strength*. 1 Pet. 1:11 admonishes us with this: “If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” Gifts exercised outside God’s power are simply “talents”, and represent OUR efforts to do God’s work. These will not be sufficient to bring praise to God through Jesus Christ. To do God’s work *God’s way*, God has to do the work.

The Gifts. The gifts themselves are contained in lists or groups in several places in the New Testament. We want to look at some of these. Eph. 4:11 tells us this:

It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The gifts of prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are designed to move believers toward maturity, so they can know the “fullness of Christ”, and fulfill God’s purpose for each of them, and for the church. By consistently accessing the teaching ministries, we grow and mature, which enables us to get close to God, where we live in His light.

Romans chapter 12 gives us another discussion of gifts and cites several gifts that operate in the body of Christ. Rom. 12:3 sets up this discussion by saying that you should not “think of yourself

more highly than you ought to think, but rather think of your self with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.” God gives us our gifts consistent with our faith in Him and His Word.

Rom. 12:4-6a describes the function of our gifts in the body of Christ. We all have important assignments, which is why we should be neither proud nor ashamed when it comes to our gifts. Verses 4-6a says the following:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Verse 6b continues, beginning a delineation of specific gifts, saying, “If a man is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.” Once again, we see that gifts are affected by the level of our faith. In other words, maturity affects not only effectiveness *within* our gifts, but the *kind* of gift we get. Prophecy, for example, is repeatedly seen as a prominent gift, and will be given only if great faith exists in the person receiving this gift.

Verses 7-8 lists other gifts, as we see in the following:

If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

All of these gifts are for helping other believers do the job *their gifts* prescribe. So you not only have God to help you operate your gift, you also have the assistance of other believers. All this, once again, takes place in a circle of love and support. The next verse (Rom. 4:9) reminds us, “Love must be sincere.” With sincere love (the kind that comes from being close to God), we will see gifts functioning and flowing among believers throughout the church.

One more passage that cites gifts and discusses their operation is seen in 1 Corinthians, chapter 12. This chapter is often cited in discussions of gifts, because it is a rich resource for understanding the place of gifts in our lives and in the church. Volumes can be, and have been, written concerning the concepts in this chapter, so we will make every effort to streamline our discussion about them.

1 Cor. 12:4-6 says, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.” God operates His gifts differently from one believer to the next, but the Holy Spirit is the power for all of us, so that all work (and righteousness and fruit and love) is done by God. God *works* all gifts in all believers.

1 Cor. 12:7 gives us this: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” Each gift is a “manifestation” of the Spirit. If we want to see God at work, we only have to look at a mature believer *in fellowship*. This is as close as we come to actually seeing God...seeing Him working in mature believers.

1 Cor 12:8-10 lists significant gifts provided through the Holy Spirit, as follows:

- Message of wisdom
- Message of knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Miraculous powers
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing between spirits
- Speaking in different languages
- Interpretation of languages

Verse 11 adds this: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” Gifts are chosen, implanted, and implemented by God.

In 1 Cor. 12:12-26, Paul uses the analogy of the human body again to depict the importance of all gifts. No gifts are non-essential. They all count and contribute. All are to be equally honored, which is not to say that all gifts are equally “sought after”.

1 Cor. 12:27-30 tells us that each believer is a part of the body of Christ, which is the church. In the church God gives specific gifts, arranged in a certain order of priority, as we see in v. 28.

1. Apostles
2. Prophets
3. Teachers
4. Workers of miracles
5. Healing
6. Administration
7. Tongues

These gifts are desirable, some more than others. The result of this varied desirability is that some are “strived for” with greater intensity. In the middle of verse 30 (1 Cor. 12), Paul says, “But eagerly desire the greater gifts.” But what happens if we all want the same “coveted” gifts? This may be a problem. The NIV is the source for the translation of this phrase, but the translator offers an alternate translation in a footnote, as follows: “But you are eagerly desiring the greater gifts.” I believe this translation is better, because it does a better job of setting up v. 31...which in turn introduces chapter 13. These believers were striving for the better gifts, and perhaps competing for the “top spots”, causing division and envy in their ranks. Verse 31 says, “And now I show you the most excellent way.” The better way is *love*. There is no competition in love. Remember that love is both the motive *and* the objective of gift functions. Love motivates gifts, and love increases because of the exchange of services.

Verse 31 introduces the classic “Love Chapter”, which is 1 Corinthians 13. The topic is “love”, but Paul is still thinking about gifts, a subject he wants his audience to know more about. 1 Cor. 12:1 says, “About spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.”. In chapter 13, Paul is citing

love as a context for the operation of gifts. He sees love as the beginning and ending of all gifts, and presents it as superior to the gifts themselves. Without love, the gifts are meaningless. This means that the act of excluding God's love and power from the operation of a gift makes the gift dormant and fruitless. We will not be productive outside of fellowship and maturity, because the function of a gift depends on the control of the Holy Spirit, and a full understanding of Scripture.

What we have gleaned from chapter 12, and so far from chapter 13, is that we should make every effort to find our gifts, and when we know what they are, we should be happy with them. If we operate in love, we will be happy with our own gifts, and for the gifts God has chosen for others.

One final point in this section from 1 Corinthians comes from chapter 14. In this chapter, Paul provides a perspective of the comparative value of tongues and prophecy. It appears that believers in Corinth were making too much of the gift of tongues, and were emphasizing them to the point that it was interfering with Bible study. Paul said tongues are great, and that he himself spoke in tongues more than any of them. But he told them that *prophecy is better*, because it is understandable and instructive. Prophecy helps all believers in the church, whereas speaking in tongues helps only the person speaking, unless the person himself, or another person, interprets what is being said. Paul wants order and clear purpose to prevail in church meetings, so that believers can be strengthened through increased teaching and understanding of the Word. We will say more about tongues and related gifts shortly.

Being Worthy of Our Calling. When God gives us our gifts, He is “calling” us to service. We will see more about the process of “calling” later in this study. At this point, we want to look at our requirement to make ourselves “worthy” of our calling (Eph. 4:1). God calls us to be saved, initially, and then He calls us to serve. Our task is to be “worthy of His calling”, as those who have been saved, but also as those who have been given a gift for service.

Eph. 4:4 says, “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” There is unity in the church as a result of the specific call to service given to each believer. There are many jobs, but one mission. As we launch our role in achieving the objective God chooses for us, Eph. 4:1 tells us to “walk worthy of the calling in which you were called” (Endnote 36). To walk worthy of our calling and our gift, we must be confessing our sins, studying Scripture, praying, giving thanks, acknowledging God, expressing fear (and faith) in the Lord, staying God-conscious, trusting God's promises, surrendering to God's will, submitting our bodies to God's service, and learning God's will for our individual lives. If these sound foreign to you, please read, or re-read, *Getting Closer to God*. As we get closer to God, we will be able to walk worthy of our calling.

Paul again expressed his concern about readiness for service among believers in 2 Thess. 1:11-12, as follows:

...we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him,

according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was praying that they would fulfill God's will in their lives through their faith (resulting from maturity), allowing God to fulfill the purposes He had given to them. The outcome of this is that Jesus Christ can be glorified *in them*. Note especially that verse 10 says, "by his power he [God]" does the fulfilling. Phil. 2:13 echoes this notion, which we have seen over and over again, saying, "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." He gives us the will, and He works within us, to "act" in the fulfillment of His good purpose.

God gives gifts to allow us the privilege of having Him work in us to do the things He wants done in our lives and in the church. I personally do not believe He *can't do without us* (He can), but He gives us a chance to tag along as he does His work. I am reminded of a child that goes to work with his father, where he is dazzled and amazed at the things his father can do. We have to stay out of the way, but God lets us come along. The joy and privilege of being with Him at His work are boundless.

As we seek to walk worthy of our calling, we are told in 2 Tim. 1:6 to "fan into flame the gift of God". This is one more call to move toward maturity. We see this again in 1 Tim. 4:13-16, where Paul admonishes Timothy, saying:

Until I come, attend to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not be neglectful of the gift in you, which was given to you through prophecy, with laying on of the hands of the elderhood. Meditate on these things; be in these things in order that your progress may be plain to all. Hold on to your self and to the teaching; continue in them; for doing this, you will both deliver yourself and those hearing you. (Endnote 37)

The essence of not neglecting one's gift, or "fanning the flame" of a gift is the putting of ourselves passionately into the study of God's Word. We cannot say we believe God, or live for God, or serve God, or want more of God, IF WE DO NOT SPEND TIME learning about Him in His Word. Bible study is not an adjunctive activity that we do occasionally or incidentally. Serious, committed, *daily* study of the Bible is the only way we can find and practice God's will, especially as seen in the operation of the gift He has selected for us. When we study, our "progress will be plain to all". Our gifts will really work when we mature. God picks the gifts and (as we shall see) sets the timing for their being given to us. Our part is to keep moving toward their impartation and implementation by becoming full-grown believers.

Commissions from God in the Old Testament. We saw earlier that Christ gave gifts upon His ascension. The big gift, of course, was the release of the Holy Spirit into the souls of post-resurrection believers. That big gift, the Holy Spirit, brought many smaller gifts, the ones we receive to do special things for God. God's Spirit was not given in this way to Old Testament believers. Gifts, as such, were not the same as we have now. But that's another study. What we know is that God commissioned selected Old Testament believers to accomplish specific tasks. Here are three examples:

1. Gideon. In Judges 6:11-8:35, we see the story of Gideon, who was called on by God to

deliver the Israelites from the Midianites and Amalekites, desert nomads who rode camels to raid the farms of the Jews. Gideon was called, but delayed, twice laying out fleeces to test God and make sure he understood that God was really in the call...and perhaps to find an excuse to get out of the commission. He finally acceded to God's call, and was very successful. It is interesting how many times God's call is resisted by believers, in the Old Testament, and even now. When we answer the call, good things happen.

2. Jonah. The classic "resister" is Jonah, as seen in the book of Jonah. Jonah was called to go and preach in Ninevah, which is in Assyria. The region was crawling with violent and cruel "gangs", and lawlessness prevailed. It was not safe, especially for someone challenging the behavior of the local thugs. Jonah's reluctance is understandable. The mission seemed suicidal. But God was calling, while Jonah was resisting. God's response to Jonah's refusal is well known: God prepared a fish to swallow Jonah. While the fish was at work digesting Jonah, Jonah was at work digesting God's call. By the end of three days in the belly of the fish, Jonah agreed to go to Ninevah, where he was quite successful. If we resist the gift and calling God chooses for us, we may find ourselves in a dark and uninviting place that really stinks.
3. Moses. Moses was called on to convince Pharaoh to release God's people, and then to lead them out of Egypt. We see his calling in Num. 12:1-16. Buried in this passage, in verse 3, is a citation of the quality that made Moses most attractive to God. This verse says, "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Gifts and their successful operation are often associated with humility, as we see in the following:
 - ☐ Rom. 12:3—Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.
 - ☐ Rom. 12:16—Do not be proud; do not be conceited.
 - ☐ Eph. 4:2—Be completely humble and gentle.

Moses was the prime example of humility, yet he provided strength and leadership for his people through seemingly impossible times. Gifts thrive on humility.

Paul's Calling. In Rom. 1:1 and 1 Cor. 1:1, Paul identifies himself as a "called apostle". He was "a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1). Eph. 3:7-8 is more specific, saying this:

I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people [note the humility], this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ....

Here they are again: God's gift, God's grace, and the working of God's power, swirling around in the life of an humble believer with a well-defined mission. Paul was mature, full of faith, surrendered, and unequivocally committed to doing things God's way. The tree he planted by God's grace is still bearing fruit. To God, he was a servant; to us, he is an absolute hero. Thank God for

Paul, for his perseverance and faith, for what his teaching means to us every day. Thank God for calling Paul, who prepares us to be called, as well.

Paul knew Who called him, and what he was to do. He knew Who sent him, and proclaimed it by saying, “Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father...” (Gal. 1:1).

The Timing of Paul’s Calling. There is much that we want to say about God’s time and timing, and we begin with the timing of Paul’s calling. The calling of Paul has a dual meaning, as it does for each of us. God “calls” us to be saved, knowing in eternity past that we would believe in Christ. And God “calls” us to service by imparting gifts to us. These events might happen at the same time, as they did with Paul, who was called to be saved, and called to preach, both at one time. Or they might occur at different times. The timing, as you might suspect, is up to God, and He can do WHATEVER He wants, WHENEVER He wants.

NOTE: There are respected students of the Word who believe *everyone* receives his gift at salvation. This could be so, but evidence exists that the operation of our gifts are products of advancing faith and maturity, as we shall see. It could be that they are received in “embryonic” form, waiting to “hatch”, or to be “fanned into flame” (2 Tim. 1:6).

In Gal. 1:13-16, Paul describes his calling, as we see in the following:

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man....

Notice that Paul’s life did not seem particularly useful as preparation for the ministry. He persecuted Christians, and was absorbed in the teachings and traditions of a law-based belief system. But he was picked out by God for his mission before he was even born. God knew what Paul was going to do, and hand-picked him long before he was actually put into service, a calling that was already being prepared at the time Saul (Paul), an unbeliever, was terrorizing Christians.

One of the often-overlooked truths of God’s Word, one that tells us so much about God, is the immutable, undeniable fact of God’s foreknowledge. He can plan things, well in advance (as in an *eternity* before something happens), because He knows the end from the beginning. Rom. 8:28-30 spells this out, referring to God’s selection of those who are going to be saved. Here is what this passage says:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Do I believe in predestination? Yes. Do I believe in man’s free will? Yes. How can these be

reconciled? By understanding the foreknowledge of God. God “foreknows” those who will accept Christ as their Savior, and He plans the occasion and time of their salvation, as He did for Paul. He does the same thing for the granting of our gifts, and for *every single detail of our lives*. God is in charge of all outcomes, and has enfolded them into His plan.

God is in Absolute Control. God is in control of everything. We confuse this, sometimes, because we think *we* are in control. Dan. 2:20-22 gives us samples of things that God controls, as follows:

- Wisdom and power
- Times and seasons
- Setting up and taking down kings
- Knowledge
- Secrets of the deep
- Light

God controls technology, economies, weather, the working of the components of time (planets, sun, moon, stars), knowledge, governments, and light (energy). These are representative of the extent of God’s control, but they make a pretty exhaustive list. There is really nothing that He does not control.

Since God is in control, each of us must examine his response to God’s authority and power. James 4:13-15 reminds us that things we plan must take place within the scope of God’s power and God’s will. This passage says the following:

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money”....Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”

These verses call attention to one small thing that we tend to forget: God is in charge of absolutely everything, including what we do today or tomorrow. If it is not God’s will that we do “this or that” today or tomorrow, it will not be done. God has absolute power over everything, including life and death. At the same time, we have free will while we are alive. So how can God’s absolute control and our free will be brought together? What is there that enables God to implement *His will* without removing the *free will* He has given us?

Here is how it works: God has foreknowledge, as we have said. He knows the choices we are going to make...every one of them for all of our lives...and He knows every infinitesimal detail of every event or non-event since pre-time. He not only knows what is going to happen, He knows what to do about it. He fashions His “will” around the events He knows will be caused by our “choices”. God’s perfect response in planning each moment so that our choices remain intact while His will is done is testimony to His infinite genius and capacity. We *must* see God’s infinite power in this, and “fear” it (in our case, “trust” it).

Only God has the power to bring about all the events in the world in such a way as to allow our

choices to be made freely, while He implements divine actions that maintain the integrity of His will. He makes both realities co-existent and true. We have free will; God has absolute control. This does not mean that God “likes” everything that happens, but that what happens complies with His will *under the circumstances* (the conditions that are brought about by our choices). On each page of history, God arranges it so that everything that happens works for good for believers who walk with Him. And *ultimately*, perhaps *eventually*, God’s purpose, will, and plan are fulfilled.

Our task in time is to learn to make choices that correspond with His will. Thus we see the importance of learning more about Him and getting closer to Him, our great God. In the very chapter that talks about gifts, Romans 12, we see in the first two verses the need for us to surrender to God and be changed (by maturing) through the process of study, so that we can know God’s will. This passage says this:

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

Notice that mercy, or *forgiveness* must be seen before we will be prepared to offer our bodies, be renewed in our minds, and find God’s will. Confession of sins is the first step toward spiritual renewal, maturity, and service.

God’s Timing. God comes to us in time...in His own time, and in the time that He owns. His timing is perfect, fitting into the framework of absolute control that we just discussed. Gen. 1:4-5, and 14-19, tell about God creating morning and evening, and days and years. In effect, he created time. God existed before time, so He is not limited *by* time. He exists both inside and outside of time. Here are some verses that show God’s relationship to time:

- Exodus 3:14-15. “God said to Moses, ‘I Am who I Am....This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. This is God’s name *forever*.”
- Ps. 93:2. “Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.” The scope of God’s existence is eternal.
- 1 Chron. 16:36. “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.” He is the God of Israel from one end of eternity to the other.
- Heb. 13:8. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Christ is co-eternal with God the Father.
- Jude 1:25. “...to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.” Into the past forever, into the future forever, glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to Jesus Christ.

God’s time is not our time, although He can operate *in* our time. We must get the picture of God’s

control of time, down to the tiniest micro-second. As a “mono-phasic” person (that can do only one thing at a time), it is hard for me to imagine how God can keep up with all that He does. But His job is in good hands (His own). I am sure it is easy for God to look at us and say, “I can see that if this job is going to get done right, I’m going to have to do it myself.” Thank God He does it. I have the feeling that, when we try to do *His* work, we must look like buffoons.

Seeing Ourselves in God’s Time. Let me remind you that our topic is “Gifts”. I assure you that what we are saying ties into that topic. The things we are considering now feed into a greater understanding of the place of gifts, and give us a framework for their operation.

We begin now to see ourselves in the larger world of God’s absolute control of everything, relating to a Heavenly Father that is not only greater than time, but invented it. We do have a place in His time, and it is time to see where we fit in.

Eccl. 3:1 says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” This is the most significant truth we can learn concerning time. We have often heard that everything has a place. But here we see that everything has a time. God controls the “what” and the “how” of our lives, and He also controls the “when”. When God determines that the time is right for a thing to occur, it will happen...not before...and not after.

One of the most beautiful, God-acknowledging passages in the Bible is found in the book of Acts, chapter 17, verses 24-28, which reads, as follows:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and [He] does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Do you get the size? The scope? The power? The control of everything, including time? This is our God. He determines times and places throughout eternity, yet He is inside of you, waiting for you to reach out to Him every day, to acknowledge Him, to draw near to Him.

We can get close to God, but we will still not know when things are going to happen. In Acts 1:6-7, the disciples asked Jesus, “Is it time?” Here’s what they asked specifically, and how He responded: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He answered, saying, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” God sets the times and dates for everything...by His authority. Eccl. 9:11-12 substantiates this truth, saying the following:

I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the mighty; nor even bread to the wise; nor even riches to the men of discernment; nor even favor to knowing men—for time and occurrence happen to them all. For man also does not know his time. (Endnote 38)

No matter one’s station or status, no one knows “his time”. We do not know when our lives on

earth will end, because *God controls time*. Heb. 9:27 tells us “each man is destined to die once.” The operative word is “destined”. The time for us to die is established, a time of God’s choosing.

God does everything on the schedule He makes. 1 Pet. 5:6 says, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” He will lift us up when it pleases Him. When we get in a hurry for God to act or move, we are operating in human-viewpoint time, not God’s. His schedule is timed to perfection. His time is right.

Even our salvation takes place at a particular time, as we see in Eph. 1:4-5, which gives us this description of our “adoption” into Christ:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will....

See how far back the foreknowledge of God goes? He chose us “before the creation of the world”. He knew our names and that we would respond to His universal call to salvation, even *before* the first beam of light pierced the darkness of pre-creation.

God also planned our production for Him. The good things that will come as a result of our relationship with Him were designed long ago. Eph. 2:10 confirms this, by saying, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” God anticipates every sin confessed, every prayer, every moment of attention to His Word, every act of love, every giving of thanks, every acknowledgement of His Deity. And He plans around it because He knows it is coming. When we get close to Him, we participate in His perfect will and He becomes the executor of His own plan through us.

Waiting on God’s Time. If God is in charge of time, and if he gives us our “gift” when it pleases Him, that means our job will be to prepare to receive that gift. 1 Cor. 12:11, cited previously, told us that God gives us our gifts “just as he determines”. The timing and manner of dispensation of those gifts will be decided by God, and not by us. We might feel impatient sometimes when we feel God’s schedule is not quite up to the 21st Century pace. We want it NOW. But God wants us to *wait* for the right time. Here are some verses that calm our anxious hearts, calling for us to trust, hope, study, and “wait”:

- Ps. 37:34. “Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land.”
- Is. 26:8. “Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you.”
- Ps. 33:20. “We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield.”
- Ps. 27:14. “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”
- Ps. 130:5. “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.”
- Mic. 7:7. “But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.”

- Hab. 2:3. “For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”
- Ps. 38:15. “I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord, my God.”
- Ps. 37:7. “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways when they carry out their wicked schemes.”

When we truly understand that it is God that controls everything, we will know that even in waiting, we are blessed and cared for. God loves us. He is patient with us. He is forgiving. How can we choose to go the way of *our* choosing and ignore the opportunities God gives us to access the control of His Spirit, the truth of His Word, and the work of His kingdom? How can we not surrender to so great a God? How can we not wait for His time? How can we refuse His gift? Wait for it. He will give it at the right time.

The Conflict Over Whether Some Gifts Are Temporary. We are going to discuss here the notion that certain gifts are temporary, and did not continue beyond the early church. Our current observation is that many Christian groups espouse and practice the so-called “temporary” gifts as part of their worship and service to God. Many argue that these gifts are not the continuing expression of spirituality that these groups claim. It is difficult to ascertain the correct scriptural position on this issue. It is possible that God may have allowed a little vagueness about the operation or cessation (discontinuance) of certain gifts, so that He could introduce or remove their function in ways we cannot describe. He can use them for now, take them away for awhile, and bring them back, as needed. That is, of course, His divine prerogative.

Gifts in question include apostleship, prophesy, healing, “miracles”, tongues, interpretation of tongues, discernment of spirits, and others. One of the proof passages used by those who believe certain gifts are temporary is derived from Eph. 2:19-20, which says this:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Kick-starting the church called for special spiritual gifts, according to one interpretation of this passage, and then once the church was underway, or when the “foundation” was completed (with Jesus as the “chief cornerstone”), these gifts were no longer needed. They had served their purpose, and could therefore be discontinued. The foundation is laid *once*, and after that the building is erected on top of the foundation. Only one foundation can be laid. Apostles and prophets, part of the foundation, were engaged at *one time*, but their “foundational” work does not need to be repeated over and over

Another argument that some gifts may be temporary is based on an interpretation of Rev. 21:14, which says that the names of the twelve “apostles of the Lamb” are written on the twelve foundations of the wall of the Holy City of Jerusalem. This list seems to consist of only twelve apostles. Those claiming to be apostles beyond the main twelve do not have this confirmation that

they are legitimate.

Probably the best known passage used to dispute the current viability of certain gifts today is found in 1 Cor. 13, verses 8-12. This passage is used to suggest that the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and special revelation (knowledge) are temporary and do not exist today as authentic spiritual gifts. These verses say the following:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

The argument that this passage anticipates the cessation of tongues, prophecy, and special knowledge is compelling. The case is made that the “perfection” that is anticipated is the completed Scripture. When it is completed, it will be perfect, and then we will “know fully”, so these special gifts will be unnecessary and will “pass away”. This is because we will have everything we need in the completed Bible. The counter-argument is that the “perfection” cited is actually Jesus Christ, Whom we will see “face to face”, and then each of us will “know fully, even as I am fully known”.

These arguments have been made and countered by accomplished scholars, and the discussion continues between opposing sides. The disagreement will not be settled here. But we can, perhaps, create a new framework for considering this issue.

First of all, God can give whatever gifts He wants, whenever He wants. Miracles were seen by Moses, but not so much by David. Manifestations of God’s power may differ from time to time... but God is still perfect and all-powerful. His placement and timing are precisely engineered. He may choose to “pause” certain gifts at certain times in history. And if He chooses to rejuvenate these gifts when it fits His agenda, He will do it...without notice or permission. Different times will be accommodated by His perfect will and choice in different ways. The difference is...well...perfect. We cannot take away from God His pre-eminence and His *a priori* authority to administer gifts purely as He decides. Gifts may indeed come and go, but God is always the same. Each of us needs to take care of his own special gift(s) and his own spiritual growth and preparation, and let God cover the details.

Secondly, I think it is important that believers everywhere embrace the holy Word of God as the final and authoritative voice of our Father to us, and place it at the center of our lives and our mission, so that we unify our purpose behind His will, and feed daily on the divine nature that we find in Scripture. Rev. 22:18 says, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.” The book is closed.

I believe the Bible is complete, and that any words, spoken or written, that go against the Word are to be disregarded, and any gift that is used as a substitute for focused study of the Bible is not to be

honored. We do not need “new information”. Gifts of prophecy, and tongues, and even special abilities to understand God’s truths, may exist today, but *these must never add to or take away from anything the scriptures say*. These must always confirm and support what the Bible teaches. If we want to know what God is all about, how to relate to Him through His Son, how to relinquish power to the Holy Spirit within us, how to get closer to God, and how to find and do His will, we can find it all written out for us in the canon of the Holy Bible. The Word of God must remain at the center of all that we are and all we do. Without it, we will not know the way.

Finish. To know God, we must look into His Word. The Word teaches us about His place within us, so we can experience His power throughout life’s journey. We will confess our sins to Him so we can draw near to Him...to a place where He can lift us up. We will pray to Him so we can cast our care on Him and give Him thanks. We will acknowledge Him to remind ourselves of His imposing size, beauty, and extent. Then, when we realize what a great God He is, we will involuntarily stop in our tracks, drop to our knees, and proclaim our thanks to Him for giving us life. We will be overwhelmed, weak with praise.

Appendix E

Restoring and Maintaining Fellowship

Terms. We have seen several terms for the same process: walking in the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, having fellowship with the Spirit, experiencing the control of the Spirit, and so on. These characterize one condition: moving and living in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are able to do this when we have been cleansed from our sins. We know very well that this cleansing is not the justification and sanctification of *salvation*, but the forgiveness and sanctification of our *daily lives*. It is being pure, so we can have free access to the Most Holy Place, where we find grace to meet all our needs. There, we acquire the influence and power of the Holy Spirit, so that God's righteousness can be produced in us.

What we Can Do in Fellowship. We want to be empowered and controlled by the Holy Spirit. But when we bring this down to a fine point, we can only explain it inductively. Being "in fellowship" means that "shop is open" to produce divine good. But even in fellowship, we have to do certain things for our condition of being "filled" to have maximum effect. Here are some things we are able to do *while we are in fellowship*, i.e., how we can take advantage of this connection:

- Pray. When we are in fellowship, we can pray "in the Spirit", but to do this, we must **pray**.
- Understand Scripture. When we are controlled by the Spirit, we can process spiritual truths into our hearts by believing them when we learn them. The Holy Spirit clarifies truth in our hearts so we can "digest" it for spiritual nourishment. But for this to happen, we must **study**.
- Exercise our gifts. When we are in fellowship, we can exercise our gifts effectively. But to do this, we must prayerfully **surrender** to God's will as to when to move, what to say, where to be, and how to act. When you are to exercise your gift, you can, for example, pray that God will give you the specific words you should use to convey God's message to listeners you are gifted to instruct. He will do this.
- Rest in God's care. We can enjoy the satisfaction of all our needs (God knows best what they are), and relax in the knowledge that everything is working together for our good, but we must continually remember and **believe God's promises**, giving thanks for everything.
- Perform service for God. The Holy Spirit works through us to produce divine good, but we must **submit** our bodies to His service, so that the resting of faith will translate as the sweat and toil of service.

The purpose of being in fellowship is not simply so we can be more powerful. It is to use the

strength God offers us to honor Him and fulfill His plan and will for our lives.

Restoring Fellowship. Restoring fellowship comes by confessing our sins. 1 Jn. 1:9 (NET) says, “But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” We confess the sins we can remember or identify, and those are forgiven, as well as all the ones we can’t remember or just don’t know yet are sins. Ps. 32:4-5 describes the process quite well, as follows:

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

When we confess, our sins are forgiven, and the guilt is removed, so there is no further cause for feeling guilty, although humility should continue, as there is no excuse for haughtiness or being “cavalier” about sin. The purpose of confession is to restore fellowship for service, and for God’s glory, not to give us an excuse to follow the temptations induced by the sinful nature.

1 Cor. 11:28-32 explains what happens when we do not confess our sins, as we see in the following:

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

This passage tells us that we are to examine ourselves before we partake of the bread and the cup (can apply to other activities, as we have seen), which means we should review our recent thoughts and behaviors to see what unconfessed sins are stored in our hearts. These are, of course, to be confessed, or “self-judged”, so that we will not be disciplined...perhaps even to the point of physical death. If we don’t confess, God’s evaluation of us will not be good, and we will be earmarked for disciplinary action. This is the way God deals with believers. Unbelievers are dealt with differently, as they fall into the category of those “condemned with the world”. Paul was teaching the Corinthians that they should be alert to confess their sins, because anything done in the “wrong” condition (out of fellowship), is *wrong*, even doing things that are commanded and that are ordinarily seen as “right”.

You see, when it comes to our function as Christians, it’s not so much “what” we do, as it is “what prompted us to do what we did”. If it is the Holy Spirit, it is good, but if it is the sinful nature, it can’t be good. Good comes only from God.

This is why Paul told the Corinthians, in 2 Cor. 7:1, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” When we are pure, burgeoning faith and fear of the Lord can carry us on to the

“perfection of holiness”, which is the spirit-filled life of a mature believer. This begins with confession, and ends with perfection. That’s the idea.

Acknowledging Sins Means Victory, Not Defeat. Some churches teach that we are victorious over sin from the day we are saved. This is true in our eternal position, but is only “potential” in our temporal lives. Sin does not have to have power in our lives, but when we are new or floundering Christians, the spiritual means for dealing with sin is not yet understood and implemented, so we are on our own, in which case *sin wins, because it is stronger than we are*. To discount the ability of the sinful nature, the world, and Satan to jostle us around like rag dolls, is to ignore our need to access all the divine tools and weapons available to help us defeat them. We must first of all know that we NEED these weapons, and then we must go through the steps to ACQUIRE them.

By acknowledging that we are weak, and that God is strong, or that we are sinful as we stand before God’s holiness, is not to cast ourselves into some perpetual state of defeat or surrender to evil. It is the way we access God’s procedure for dealing with our weakness. This consists of the confession of our sins, whereby we acquire the power of His Spirit to keep us from sinning.

Those who preach that we live in unflinching victory over sin and claim that the term “dead to sin” means “never sinning”, are preventing their followers from employing the tactics that God gives us to deal with the wretched reality of our sinful tendencies. The lie is that we can be saved and then live forever free from sin. This is, to begin with, a dependence on ourselves to live the life of Christ, which only He can live. And it causes us to believe that we need nothing more to deal with sin than to try harder...we don’t need to confess or study or pray or build our faith, and so on. Here’s the problem this causes: It prevents us from seeing the enormous and difficult TASK (of faith, not works) that we face, and allows us to assume we are ready for battle, when we are not. This is a formula for failure. Satan wants us to believe we are strong.

We will not be victorious until we acknowledge our sins. Claiming “perfection”, or assuming we don’t sin, PREVENTS victory. This is what Scripture means in the following: “When I am weak, I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).

Fellowship Allows Faith to Increase; Faith, In Turn, Sustains Fellowship. Eph. 3:16-17 tells us how we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit, so that our faith can become strong and Christ will be “at home” or “comfortably fellowshiping with us” because of that faith.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints....

Christ is “at home” in us when we are strengthened with God’s power through the Holy Spirit...in our inner being. Christ is at home in us when *faith* exists...faith is a marker for fellowship. And when we are in fellowship, God has access to all our inner parts: mind, soul, spirit, and heart. He will not penetrate our minds (etc.) uninvited, but if we are filled with the Spirit, He will be in touch with all our immaterial components, and can directly influence and CHANGE the content of

our inner selves, for as long as we are trusting in Him and choosing Him.

Love is an indicator for fellowship and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Divine love is a provision of the Holy Spirit, and will operate only when He has control. When we have His love, we have His power, and that is how we can be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” This is an outcome of fellowship initiated by confession and sustained by faith.

The Spirit Sanctifies and Cleanses Us. We have seen this already in this study, but we want to be sure we see the connection between our cleansing and our ongoing fellowship with God. 1 Thess. 5:23 says, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The sanctification, or cleansing, of the Holy Spirit makes believers “blameless”, not because there is a single one of us that goes one hour without *some* kind of sin, but because we receive forgiveness through confession.

Fellowship Prepares us For Learning the Word. James 1:21 (NET) says, “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” We get rid of filth and evil through self-determination and self-effort. Right? No! It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are cleansed, and then live in His righteousness. When we confess, we are in a posture of humility, which is when we can accept the Word and grow. Fellowship precedes meaningful study. We see this again in 1 Pet. 2:1-2, which says the following:

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation....

As believers, having “salvation”, we need to “rid ourselves” of sins of all kinds, and cry out for the nourishment of the Word, so that we can mature and become increasingly Christ-centered and Holy-Spirit-dependent. Confession, once again, precedes study. And notice the word, “save”. With any attention at all to context, we see that this is not the “save” of redemption and justification. This is being “delivered”, only this time it is not from condemnation...it is from the domination of sin, as seen in verse 1. As we mature, through confession and studying and believing, we will see increased deliverance from sin.

Living in the Light. Eph. 5:8 directs us to live in the light, saying, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth).” This has obvious reference to “living by the Spirit” of Gal. 5:16, or “walking in the light” of 1 Jn. 1, and “bearing the fruit” of the Spirit of Gal. 5:22-23. Paul had already instructed the Ephesians in 5:3 (and following) to avoid immorality and impurity. Then in verse 10 he admonishes them to “find out what pleases the Lord”. We see the sequence: 1) deal with sin, and 2) find out what pleases the Lord. When we solve the sin problem we can learn what pleases God. Until then, we will be in the dark. Verse 11-13 tells us this:

Have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light

becomes visible, for it is the light that makes everything visible.

The deeds done in darkness need to be exposed, and it is the light of the Word and the penetrating view of the Holy Spirit that does this. The Word is the “critic”, judging the content of our inner parts, as seen in Heb. 4:12; and the Holy Spirit is the One who uncovers and lays bare all the things done in hiding, as seen in Heb. 4:13-14.

As it applies to us, the Word assesses our wrongful acts and thoughts, and these are exposed by the Holy Spirit, but *we are the only ones who can bring them to light through confession, so they can be forgiven*. When wrongful deeds and thoughts are exposed to the light by confession, God can send His clean-up crew to remove them. Then the believer, who has been sleeping in the dark, can wake up and live in the light of day. Verse 14b says, “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Do you see the connection? These things are strung together like a Christmas paper-chain. Rise from the death of carnality, and live in the light of spirituality. Allow the light of Christ to illuminate you in His character. This is our charge. When we do this, we will be prepared for evil times by learning the Word, as we see in verses 15-17, and we will be filled with the Spirit, as commanded in verse 18. Having done all this, we will fulfill verse 1, which tells us to do this: “Be imitators of God.”

Faith Sustains Fellowship. It is faith in God, and not in ourselves, that keeps our relationship with the Holy Spirit intact. Rom. 15:13 says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” This whole verse is loaded with the filling and fruit of the Holy Spirit, and this is happening, “as you trust in him”, which means “as long as you trust in him”. When we confess and get into fellowship, we will stay there as long as we trust in Him. Faith, then, is the cord that ties us into fellowship and holds us there. As we mature, that cord will get stronger, and the tie will be more secure. We see this many times in Scripture, and we have studied it before.

Rom. 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” We were saved by faith in the beginning, and now we are instructed to live by that same faith. We are told to live by faith, the same way we are told to “live in the Spirit”, and to “walk in Christ”. Walking by faith is actually synonymous with walking in the Spirit.

Every step we take should be by faith...every thought, every incident, every decision, and every encounter. Every moment of our lives should be executed by faith in Jesus Christ. We walk by trusting in God and His Word...every second of every day. This kind of faith can only come from intense commitment to God through prayer and study, while continually returning to fellowship through confession. More faith means a steadier walk...the walk toward maturity.

It is important to remember that faith is blacked out by sin, i.e., we have no faith when we are out of fellowship. But even when we are in fellowship, the strength and continuity of faith depend on our maturity. When we return to fellowship, the light of faith is switched back on, and the level of

maturity will determine how bright that light is, and how long and how well it will illumine our pathway. We can still make headway with “dim” faith, but the way is tenuous and uncertain.

The growth of our faith in Christ is crucial in our lives in the Spirit. We must confess, but the *backbone* of walking in the Spirit is our faith. Paul told Timothy the following in 1 Tim. 1:18:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.

The two main pillars of walking in the Spirit are faith and a clean conscience. Confession gives us a clean conscience, and holding on to faith sustains us...keeps us walking in the Spirit. We begin fellowship by confessing; then we continue spirituality by staying focused on God. This focus is an ongoing and pervasive attitude of faith toward God, which enfolds fear of the Lord, occupation with Christ, acknowledging God, surrender, submission to God’s will, and God-consciousness. This is turning ourselves over to the God we trust, with all our problems, our aspirations, our dreams, our hopes, and our intentions. We relinquish control to Him, and keep on trusting Him to sustain us by His Spirit.

Appendix F

Ways to Study

Practical Suggestions for Making Bible Study a Regular Part of Your Life. We offer in the following list some observations and recommendations regarding a study of the Word, so that you can access all that it offers. These are largely “pragmatic” procedures that can be used to regulate and enhance your study routine. Here are my suggestions:

1. Read the Bible directly.
2. Use a study Bible to help you understand what you are reading. (I recently acquired the *Ryrie Study Bible* and like it).
3. Listen to an audio reading of the Bible.
4. Attend a church where Bible study is clearly emphasized and regularly scheduled. Refer to the previous chapter for more on choosing a pastor and a church. You are reminded to avoid churches which adopt extreme practices that obscure or downplay concentration on the truth of the Word. And then, the teaching that takes place should advance foremost the truths that acquaint you with God’s techniques for living, and the promises and provisions He makes to assist us in serving Him.
5. Use audio or video lessons that teach Bible lessons designed to edify and strengthen. More on this below.
6. Some television programs are instructive, but avoid those that see Christianity as a way to make money, or that exhibit any of the extremes that we have discussed.
7. Associate regularly with gifted Christians who study, stay in fellowship, and contribute to the edification of fellow believers. NOTE: It is not enough just to spend time with believers. Two conditions must exist for encounters with Christian brothers to be instructive: 1) You and the other believers must be in fellowship, and 2) the topic must focus on God and His truth.
8. Carefully choose and read books, articles, and materials that 1) elucidate the words of Scripture, and 2) provide information and techniques that enable you to grow and *get closer to God*.
9. There are numerous courses offered online, through correspondence, and at local seminaries. Once again, choose wisely.
10. Search the Internet for Bible topics and commentaries. Here are some tips for places to go on the Internet:
 - a. One place I use regularly to collect verses on individual topics is biblos.com. When

you (prayerfully) compile scriptures on a given topic...sort them, compare them, and analyze them...you will be able to get at core truths from the Word. In addition to “topics”, biblos.com provides scripture-search features, and commentaries. Scriptures separated by topic can also be found at bibletopics.com.

- b. A place that I have used to collect articles and multi-media studies is bible.org. I especially recommend writings by J. Hampton Keathley, III, at this site.
- c. If you are more serious and want to get deeper into the finer points of Bible doctrines, visit tgm.org, which offers concordances, lexicons, word studies, and other helpful study features.
- d. To find Bible-teaching pastors, church services, and programs, the Internet is a better resource than the television. You can find lessons in a variety of media, including “live” on the Internet. Once again, choose wisely...and prayerfully. Outside of what I have already given, I have no other specific endorsements for online services and lessons, because there are so many, but there are some good ones, if you search for them.

Don’t Forget Preparation. Whatever agenda you use for your study regimen, remember to prepare before you study, or the lesson or message you hear will be meaningless. Be sure to confess your sins, pray for wisdom, believe the truth when you “hear” it, and welcome it into your heart as you “learn” it. Then you will be ready to go “verify” it in Scripture, and “apply” it to your life.

Appendix G

The Promises

The Categories of Promises. There are many categories for separating and understanding the promises that God makes to mankind and to believers. We concentrate in this study on the promises that pertain to our daily lives and functions as God’s children. The categories that we will cite include the following:

1. Promises of protection.
2. Promises of provision.
3. Promises of blessing.
4. Promises of empowerment.

We will have a number of verses for each of these categories. These are powerful assurances. We must be reminded that many promises are contingent on conditions being met before they will be implemented, or “delivered upon”. Many verses clearly state the requirements to be satisfied before the promises they pronounce can be fulfilled, but some verses give promises without conditions being specified. But note this: Even when the condition is not given, we know well by now that the *benefits of grace* will not be accessed if the *techniques of grace* are bypassed. Our assumption is that our ability to claim God’s promises...and to virtually hold Him to His word...will *always* depend on the spiritual condition that we bring to the “claiming ceremony”.

God’s Promises are Trustworthy. 1 Ki. 8:56 says, “Praise be to the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.” This is the standard for God’s promises: Not one word fails. In discussing God’s ability to fulfill His promises, Abraham knew that “God had power to do what he had promised” (Rom. 4:21). Numbers 23:19 adds the following about God’s reliability in fulfilling His promises: “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

God’s promises are *covenants...contracts*. He is *able* to keep His promises, and He *will*...His Word is binding. He knew long before He made the promises what their outcome would be, so He made them advisedly and knowingly. They are not “slips of the tongue” or “convenient commitments in moments of passion”. No. These are planned...the words of the Eternal Constant, our God, and they will be done, exactly as He has declared.

Final Call to Faith. We know this, from Lk. 1:37: “Nothing is impossible with God.” We are asked to believe in a Being for whom there is no impossibility. It is within the realm of a no-limits scope that we need to look at God’s *ability*—and His *commitment*—to keep His promises to us. We do not need to look at our circumstances as the baseline for anticipating our future, but our eyes must be

turned toward the power and promises of God. He determines what happens, so we can have full confidence in ANY situation. If we trust what He says, He will do it.

In that vein, Eph. 3:12 says, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” In fellowship with Him, and by believing in Him...His techniques and His promises...we will move closer to Him, and *that’s where the power is!* Even a little faith will go a long way, as per Lk. 17:6, which says, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to the mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” It is the OBJECT of our belief that gives faith its power. When that object is a promise that God has made, it has all the power of creation. Promises are actually *targets* for our faith...giving us something “concrete” that we can direct our faith towards.

Next, we will see the promises within each category that we listed above. Open your heart, prepare to learn, and let these promises become your personal guarantees for God’s gracious provision. Believe them...claim them. They are for you.

Promises of God’s Love. This category is not cited with the other categories above, because it over-arches all other categories. The entire Bible is an exhibition of God’s love. He wants very much for us to know how much He loves us. Probably the biggest part of acknowledging God is opening our eyes to His love. Love is the basis for His making promises to us, and the reason His plan applies to each of us personally. Many verses and much discussion could be rendered on God’s love, since it is the foundation of all our benefits from Him, but we list only one very important one here, as follows:

- Rom. 8:38-39—“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God’s love is pervasive, seen as background or foreground for all promises, so we will see His love continually in the promises that follow.

Promises of Protection. These passages take us into the heart of God’s commitments to us. Protection from God is based on our *spiritual condition*, but—if the conditions are met—we can know that His protective arms surround us. Here are some of the promises regarding our protection:

- Ps. 91:1—“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”
- Ps. 91:9-10—“If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the Lord, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.”
- Ps. 91:14-15—“‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.’”

- Ps. 37:3-4—“Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
- Ps. 27:3-5—“Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.”
- 1 Sam. 17:47—“All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give all of you into our hands.”
- Prov. 21:31—“The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord.”
- Matt. 10:30-31a—“And even the hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid....”
- 2 Thess. 3:3—“But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”
- Ps. 23:4—“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”
- Ps. 3:6—“I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side.”
- Ps. 42:11 (KJV)—“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” (Endnote 39)
- Heb. 13:6—“So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”
- Is. 41:10—“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Promises of Provision. Here are some passages showing what God promises to *provide* in our spiritual lives, and our physical lives, as well. Watch for conditions, such as trusting, being in fellowship, learning the Word, praying, and trusting. If these are satisfied, God assures us of the following:

- Heb. 4:16—“Let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
- James 4:8—“Come near to God, and he will come near to you.”
- John 15:7—“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”
- Phil. 4:6-7—“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends

all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

- James 1:5-6a—“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt....”
- 2 Cor. 12:9a—“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”
- Phil. 4:19—“And my God shall supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”
- Rom. 8:28 (NET)—“And we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”
- 1 Pet. 3:12a—“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.”
- James 5:16b—“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”
- 1 Jn. 1:9—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”
- 1 Jn. 5:14-15—“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”
- 2 Cor. 4:16—“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”
- Matt. 6:32-33—“For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.”
- Ps. 145:13b—“The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.”
- Ps. 145:18-20—“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.”
- 1 Pet. 5:7—“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”

Promises of Blessing. God’s blessings are for our comfort and joy. They are *good* things, things that we are delighted to receive. God wants to *bless* us, and that is what he promises. Don’t forget about the conditions, but if they have been met, bring your basket, because it is going to be filled. Here are some verses on the blessings that God promises:

- Jer. 29:11-13—“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”
- James 4:10—“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”
- 1 Jn. 3:21-22—“Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.”
- Ps. 92:12-15—“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green....”
- Deut. 28:1-8—“If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.

The fruit of your womb will be blessed and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks.

Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed.

You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

The Lord will grant that the enemies that rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven.

The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you.”

Special Note: For the promises made to believers in the Old Testament, as well as to believers in the transition period between the Age of Law and the Church Age, there is a carry-over into our lives today. We are speaking of God—the same God now as then—tending the “righteous ones” among His children, regardless of the time, and He wants to give the chosen ones now the same blessings He gave to chosen ones long ago. There may be nuances of difference, but the blessings are basically the same. These blessings are for us, and we can claim them...“if we fully obey”.

Promises of Empowerment. The first part of “living in the *power* of God’s Word” involves *using techniques* to *prepare* for receiving truth, and then *applying it*. This part is active, “technical”, and preliminary (a prelude to claiming the promises). The second part of “living in the *power* of the Word” involves knowing and claiming God’s promises. This part is passive, based on simple faith. All we do with the promises is *believe* them.

Part of the “power” of the Word, then, is found in believing and following God’s techniques; the rest

is couched in believing the promises. Here are some passages that promise God's strength:

- Ps. 73:26—"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
- Ps. 46:1-3, 10a—"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."
- Phil. 1:6—"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Phil. 4:12b-13—"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength."
- 2 Cor. 4:7—"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."
- 2 Tim. 1:7—"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."
- Is. 12:2—"Lord Jehovah is my strength and my deliverance."
- Phil. 4:13—"I can do everything through him that gives me strength."

We have covered in previous studies the processes for accessing the power of the Holy Spirit. Now we are seeing *as promises* the *outcome* of the techniques that enable us to live in that power, and draw from its bounty.

Conclusion. The truth has been given. God is waiting to bless you...He has your name on numerous blessings that await your claiming them. Just wash your hands and pick them up.

Appendix H

Faith and How it is Strengthened

Living by Faith. Rom. 1:17 says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” We were saved by faith in the beginning, and now we are instructed to live by that same faith. We are told to live by faith, the same way we are told to “live in the Spirit”, and to “walk in Christ”. We are reminded of Gal. 5:16, which says, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Walking in the Spirit overpowers sin and allows God to produce His life through us. Faith has an important role to play in this process, and that is what we want to see.

2 Cor. 5:7 tells us we “live by faith, not by sight”. “Live” should actually be translated “walk”. (Endnote 40) This means every step we take should be by faith...every thought, every incident, every decision, every encounter, every moment of our lives should be executed by faith in Jesus Christ. We walk trusting in God and His Word...every second of every day.

To walk in the Spirit, we know we have to have all our sins confessed. This restores us to fellowship and puts the Spirit back in control. We have also said many times in previous studies that maturity strengthens us against sin and keeps us in fellowship longer, so that we are walking through our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. The specific quality that grows to make us more mature is our faith. Paul told Timothy the following in 1 Tim. 1:18:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience.

The two main pillars of walking in the Spirit are faith and a clean conscience. Confession gives us a clean conscience, and holding on to faith sustains us...keeping us walking in the Spirit. In *Maturity* a statement was made that codifies the condition of faith operating in our walk, saying the following: “Faith is the condition that sustains the control of the Holy Spirit. Believing God and His Word will keep us focused on Him.” (Endnote 41)

We begin fellowship by confessing; then we continue spirituality by staying focused on God and maintaining a trust in Him. This focus is an ongoing and pervasive attitude of faith toward God. This is fear of the Lord, occupation with Christ, acknowledging God, surrender, submission to God’s will, and God-consciousness, all brought to a point in a thing called faith. This is turning ourselves over to God, with all our problems, our aspirations, our dreams, our hopes, and our intentions. We relinquish control to Him, and keep on trusting Him to sustain us by His Spirit.

Offering our Bodies. Rom. 6:12-13 gives us a Scriptural frame for this concept:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer

yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

This is what we are to do: *offer*. We offer our bodies as instruments of righteousness. We become God's tools to do His work. We surrender our will to His. We relinquish control to the Holy Spirit. We trust in His power to get the job done. We give our lives up to allow His life to be produced in us. We let Him be God...in us. Then sin will not be our master, because we will be operating in the realm of grace, where God's provision sustains us. (Rom. 6:14).

Surrendering to God. In the same passage in which we are told to draw near to God (James 4), we are told this: "Submit yourselves, then, to God" (v. 7). This is surrender, or submission, or yielding, or trusting. When we surrender to God's will and show that we trust Him, we will get closer to Him, and He will enable us to do things that will surprise us and bear great fruit for Him.

So we begin to see that surrender is the key to walking in the Spirit. Walking in faith becomes the condition for continuing our walk in the Spirit. From one minute to the next, we will see through eyes that acknowledge God, pray to Him, and fear Him. When surrender grows with the realization that "I can't do it, but He can", we will be trusting Him in ways that will open up His power to us, so that we can bring glory to Him, and complete our purpose for remaining here on earth. The importance of faith in this process cannot be overestimated.

We have much to consider yet concerning faith. We want to know more about what it is, what happens when it is lacking, how it is strengthened, some of its results, how it relates to hope, and how our faith can be encouraged.

What Faith Is. Faith is believing. Faith is trust. When we speak of faith in Jesus Christ, which coincides with faith in God the Father and the Holy Spirit, we express our faith in God's Word, His character, and His power. We believe that we have been given a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and that we have His complete message for us in the form of Scripture. We receive and accept His person and His truth, and we see our belief as being so strong that it can actually be called "knowledge". We relate to God because we believe Him, and we *know* Him because we believe His Word.

The notion of faith has been blurred and distorted through the advance of false teachings. Faith is NOT emotion, ritual, reason, or incantation. These things may accompany faith at times, or even support it, but they are not the same thing as faith. Faith embraces data and facts not perceptible through the senses. The senses may be used in receiving information about things that are not perceived, but the operation of faith does not depend on the function of the senses. Heb. 11:1 states this clearly, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Faith is sure and faith is certain. Having it means that we have been totally convinced, without experiencing the object of our faith through our senses.

Faith is not a constant. It functions as a variable condition in each believer, governed by the level of wisdom acquired by the believer, and the opportunity he has had for training in God's preparation program. Faith can get stronger, or it can get weaker. We will see ways to strengthen faith; right

now we just want to establish that faith for a believer does not stay at the same level of intensity.

The Connections of Faith. In the Christian life, faith is mixed with other components of Christian growth and maturity. These include confession, study of Scripture, prayer, acknowledging God, fear of the Lord, God-consciousness, surrender to God's will, submission of the body, waiting on the Lord, and being still. (All these concepts are discussed in *Studies on Getting Closer to God*). For a believer, faith is summed up as focus on God with a spirit of trust. Faith in God trumps experience as a source of truth and reality, and is the most important condition in our Christian walk. Gal. 5:6 says that "the only thing that counts is faith, expressing itself in love". This will be seen as *living in faith*...or operating in the power of the Spirit, as evidenced by His fruit.

Faith is also connected with gifts. In 1 Cor. 12:9, faith itself is a gift. Some see the gift of special faith as a temporary gift, provided to kick-start the early church. But obviously God can give this gift if He chooses to do so, at any time that He chooses. Faith is at least a gift that has, at some point, been given to specific believers. Certainly, some believers have stronger faith than others, based on their maturity, whether their faith is considered a "gift" or not.

Faith is a condition for certain gifts, as we see in Rom. 12:3, which says the following:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

This verse indicates that we are to think of our giftedness with careful discernment and from the perspective of humility and the faith we have received. We receive this faith as we learn God's Word and feed on His divine nature, and as we go through the training God has designed for us. Faith is, itself, a source for humility, because when we see the reality of God through faith, we can only bow in an humble spirit. *Humility*, then, becomes an expression of the *faith* that prompts our *humility*, another case of the interdependence of spiritual operations. They feed off each other.

In a previous study (*Maturity*), the following was stated regarding the connection between prayer and faith:

Anytime we utter a word in prayer, we are expressing faith in God. When we invoke His promises in our prayers, we are expressing faith in His Word. And when we trust Him and His Word, things happen.

Prayer expresses faith, and faith prompts prayer. More inter-relatedness.

There is also a sense in which "faith" can refer to *truth*. The term "faith" is used repeatedly as "the faith", meaning "the body of beliefs embraced by Christians". That would be the Word of God, which embodies what we believe. This sharpens our understanding of an application of faith that might be overlooked. Here are a number of examples of "faith" used as the truth of God's Word:

- Acts 6:7. Luke describes the conversion of many people in Jerusalem, including priests, who "became obedient to the faith". We can only be obedient to a *requirement*, or a prescription in Scripture.

- 1 Tim. 3:9. “They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.” The truths of the faith are those contained in the Bible.
- Jude 1:3b. “I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.” The faith given to the saints was the truth of God’s Word.
- 1 Pet. 5:9. “Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing....” Resist within the scope of your knowledge of the truth.
- Phil. 1:27b. “I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.” Faith of the gospel is the truth of the gospel.
- Eph. 4:13b. “Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God....” We want to reach agreement in our beliefs and knowledge.
- Gal. 1:23. Paul was “preaching the faith he once tried to destroy”. Paul was preaching the gospel and the truth of the Word.
- Col. 2:7. “Rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught.” Paul wanted them to be built up in Jesus by becoming stronger in the knowledge of God.
- Tit. 1:13. “Rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith.” This means sound in the doctrines of the Word.
- 1 Tim. 2:7. “...a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles”. Paul was a teacher of the Word to the Gentiles.
- Other passages where the word “faith” is talking about the truth of God’s Word: 1 Cor. 16:13, Gal. 3:23, 2 Tim. 3:8, 1 Tim. 6:21, Col. 1:23, Rev. 14:12, Acts 16:5, 1 Tim. 4:1, Heb. 4:14-15, 1 Tim. 4:6, 1 Tim. 6:10.

It is interesting that a main object of faith (belief) is faith (the truth). We are told to believe God’s Word and His promises, thus having, essentially, “faith” in “the faith”.

Faith ultimately has many nuances. It can be a puny, ineffective, tentative, “half-way” believing, or it can be a robust, potent, and unwavering faith. We can develop stronger faith, if we *study* and *believe* God’s Word to keep us on His pathway to greater faith.

When Faith is Lacking. When faith is weak, or absent, God will not be able to teach us, bless us, motivate us, strengthen us, or guide us. We will have effectively cut off the divine supply for all our needs, especially those of a spiritual nature. When God looks at us He expects to see faith in full operation. In Matt. 6:30 Jesus tells His disciples, “If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” He wants them not to worry about God’s provision, but to have faith that God

will take care of them.

In Heb. 3:12, we are warned against a lack or loss of faith, with this admonition: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” We will see more about this condition when we examine “faith rest”, but for now we must understand that the Word of God speaks strongly and directly against unbelief. When faith is weak, the inevitable outcome is that sin will occur, and the sinful nature will take over, at which time nothing that is done will please God. So how can we avoid this and strengthen our faith? How can a 90-pound weakling take the spotlight at muscle-beach?

Faith is Strengthened by Testing and Training. The terms testing and training lead to a consideration of “suffering” in the Christian life. Suffering does not come to us for its own sake. Every experience God brings to us has a purpose. The main ways we have viewed suffering in previous studies is that God is providing guiding experiences to us, not just so we can “learn from the experience”, but so that—through the experience that He brings to us—we will be prompted to confess our sins and to return to the study of His Word. But there is a third reason why God brings suffering to us, and that is to provide “tests” or “trials” to refine us and to build our patience and faith.

So suffering is brought to us to 1) press us to confess, 2) prompt us to study, or 3) stimulate our growth by testing. This would mean, then—mathematically speaking—that two-thirds of our suffering is due to conditions we control. We confess by our own will, and we study when we want to. So we can ostensibly reduce our suffering by two-thirds if we consistently confess our sins and faithfully study the Bible. Any suffering that comes while we are consistently taking care of these two requirements will likely be designed only to test us, to spur our growth as maturing believers. This kind of suffering leads directly forward, whereas the other kinds (those regarding confession and study) just get us back on track so we can start moving again.

James 1:2-4 pointed out the relatively *joyful* underpinning for suffering of the “testing” variety, saying this:

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

These verses tell us that trials build patience (the perspective of faith), so that we can grow until we lack absolutely nothing. The prospect for that kind of advancement can only please us, and make us welcome the trials. It is a relief, when all our known sins are confessed and we have been consistent in our receiving instruction in the Word, to know that the suffering and trials that come our way are for the refinement of our faith. On the other hand, when we have not been confessing or studying, we pretty well know that the suffering falls into the disciplinary category, which can’t make us too happy.

1 Pet. 1:6-7 adds to our understanding of this process, saying the following:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in

all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Once again, when suffering is for growth, we rejoice, because we know this training will take us to a place of greater faith and additional divine production. When faith is proven, tested by fire as happens with gold, it is refined. When faith is refined, it gets purer.

We see this once more in Rom. 5:3-4, which gives us this:

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

Perseverance is patience, a signal that indicates the presence of faith. Hope is faith for the future. So the purpose of suffering, and the cause for our jubilation over it, is that our faith will grow because of it. With this growth comes power, not ours, but the power of God. When we suffer we are forced to trust God instead of ourselves, and the more we trust Him, the more we are exposed to His holiness and righteousness and love, and the more we take on His nature.

Even when suffering comes due to discipline, we still need to recognize that we will benefit if we respond to it as an opportunity to change and grow. Ps. 119:70b-71 says, "...I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." If we do not respond properly, however, disciplinary measures may increase, as we see in Lev. 26:18-21, which says the following:

If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crop, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve.

We Will Suffer. Regardless of the reason, when we experience physical, psychological, or spiritual discomfort, we know that it is given to us so we can be developed and promoted. 1 Pet. 4:12 states, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." This suffering has a purpose. One thing we can count on is that *we will suffer* (perhaps not a very good selling point for evangelists, who often want to paint the Christian life as an endless array of prosperity and well-being).

In Acts 9:16, Paul was told that he would suffer. Jesus said to Ananias, who was to report to Paul, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." And he did. 2 Cor. 11:24-32 gives us a report on Paul's suffering. He went through the following:

- In prison frequently
- Exposed to death again and again

- Forty-lashes-minus-one received five different times
- Beaten with rods three times
- Stoned and left for dead
- Three times shipwrecked
- Spent a day and night in the open sea
- Always in danger
- Labored and toiled without sleep
- Went hungry and thirsty
- Cold
- Naked
- All the while pressured under the responsibility of all the churches

But did Paul mature? Yes. Was He productive? Yes. Did he bring honor to God? Yes. Is his commitment still benefiting Christians? Yes. Can we do this, as well? Yes. Will we get through all this without suffering? No. God's training is effective, but it may not be easy.

We are destined for suffering. 1 Thess. 3:3 says, "...so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them." There seems to be no way around it, but when it comes, we must maintain our trust in God. 1 Pet. 4:19 explains that we must surrender to God's will when suffering appears. This verse says, "So, then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." We must remain conscious of Him and trust that he is working on our behalf...for our good (Rom. 8:28). We will get what we *need*, not necessarily what we want.

Faith is Strengthened by Intake of God's Word. We learn from Scripture that faith can be weak, or it can be strong, or it may be somewhere in between. The point we need to re-establish is that faith is not a constant in our Christian lives. Faith is a variable, with fluctuations based on the operation of spiritual principles specified in God's Word. We must follow God's prescriptions for growth if we expect our faith to get stronger. Our beginning premise for this section, then, is that faith CAN grow.

There are many examples of the dynamic advancement of faith given in Scripture. One of these appears in Rom. 4, which I ask you to take time to read. In Rom. 4, Paul describes Abraham's belief in God's promise that he would father children at the advanced age of one hundred. You can see how credulity might be strained upon hearing this pronouncement, but Abraham believed God. The entire chapter of Rom. 4 is a lesson on faith, and the way in which Abraham trusted God. But the

thing we want to see in this passage is that Abraham's faith *grew*. This is seen in verse 20, which says, "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God." Whatever the level of Abraham's faith going into this test, that level changed to one that was "stronger", because he was maintaining his belief that what God promises, God delivers. Our application: By believing in God as we endure the tests, our faith is strengthened.

So, faith is strengthened by trials and tests, and growth is facilitated by suffering, whether it comes as discipline or to give us a spiritual work-out for growth purposes. But we want to look now at another aspect of increasing faith, or that which occurs by feeding on the Word. Consistency in learning Scripture by studying it and believing it will cause us to get progressively stronger until we reach maturity. If we become lax in our studying, however, we will become weaker and weaker, until we are completely ineffective as believers. A lack of study leads to a loss of faith, because we fail to be occupied with Christ, and that is when expressions of faith diminish, such as prayer, fear of the Lord, acknowledgement of God, and God-consciousness. When faith weakens, our focus shifts to things that are not productive, and we fall into 1) sin, or 2) legalism, both of which are destructive.

An example of the results of weak or diminishing faith in our lives is seen in Hos. 4:1-3, which says the following:

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; their beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying."

Verse 6a follows with a statement that gets to the heart of the matter: "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge." Lack of knowledge is related to the loss of these: faith, love, and acknowledgement of God (Hos. 4:1). The outcome is not a good one; we will fall into sin, and divine discipline will be administered. But when we grow by learning the Word, we can avoid all that. 2 Thess. 1:3 says, "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing." And what prompted this growth? Well, "persecutions and trials for starters" (2 Thess. 1:4), but also their "holding to the teachings we [Paul] passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or letter" (2 Thess. 2:15).

To keep the Thessalonians on top, Paul sent Timothy to "strengthen and encourage" the Thessalonians in their faith (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul knew that the teaching of Scripture would strengthen these believers. In Col. 1:28 he further demonstrated this belief, saying, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." Paul was indicating that when believers mature, they are perfected, or made complete. By learning the Bible (our source for wisdom), we become complete.

In another instance, Paul told the Colossians that a leader named Epaphras was "always wrestling in

prayer” for them, praying that they would “stand firm in the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Col. 4:12). Paul wanted them to know God’s will, which is acquired through studying and believing Scripture, so they would become mature and their faith would be stronger (fully assured). Until we know God’s will, we need to keep studying. There is no more-direct way to learn about God and what He wants to produce in our lives. In Acts 20:27 Paul said this: “For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.” He equated his teaching of the Word with the proclamation of God’s will. Learn God’s Word and you will know His will.

The Bible is given so that we can grow. God has given us all we need to know. But—alas—too few believers seek the teaching of God’s Word, and too few churches provide it. What is needed is a topical study of the Word, wherein all verses pertaining to a subject in the Word are pulled together to see what the Bible declares about it. This gives us an understanding of the categories of knowledge found in Scripture. Another form of study that should be included in an examination of the Bible, is one including “exegetical” analysis. This is a verse-by-verse study of the books in the Bible, so that the concepts understood from topical studies can be explored in more detail in the words of individual chapters and verses. Comprehensive Bible teaching should be available to believers in a congregation several times a week so they can have maximum opportunity to feed on the Word and grow.

The idea of acquiring understanding through Scripture was reinforced by Paul in his farewell address to the Ephesians, cited in Acts 20:32, which says the following: “And now I entrust you to God and to the message of his grace. This message is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Endnote 42) Believers are built up by the Word of God, which, in Paul’s day, led the Ephesians to maturity, even after Paul was gone.

Commands to Grow. It is so important that we grow in faith, that it is commanded repeatedly in the Bible. We are also reminded frequently of the procedure for growth, as we see in Rom. 10:17: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Faith grows from hearing the Word. We are told to hear...and grow...in many other scriptures, as we see in the following:

- 1 Pet. 2:2—Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- 2 Pet. 3:18—But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- Eph. 4:12-14—...to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

- Jude 1:20—But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.
- Jer. 9:23-24—This is what the Lord says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight declares the Lord.

Many other commands to grow in faith and to study God's Word are given in Scripture, and we will see these as we proceed. But two things are already clear: 1) we must grow in our faith, and 2) the most important catalyst for growth is studying the Word of God.

Being Prepared to Learn. One thing we should know at the outset is that we can *ask* for understanding of the Scripture. This is what we see in James 1:5-6, which tells us this: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks he must believe and not doubt..." This is comforting. You can ask God for increased understanding and He will *give it to you*. Does this say, "Those of you with high IQ's or strong educational backgrounds will qualify for wisdom"? No. This says "ask", and *if you believe*, you will receive wisdom from God. Spiritual truths are spiritually perceived, and the Holy Spirit will teach you God's truth and God's way, regardless of your ability, as long as you ask for it, believing.

The Bible is also clear that we must deal with sin in our lives before study will be meaningful and edifying. James 1:21 says, "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you." This tells us the gospel message leads to salvation, of course, but another application can be derived from this verse, which is that the Word planted in us will deliver us from lives of hopelessness, surrender to sin, and confusion, and give us ways to get closer to God to witness the working of His power in our lives. Before we can get the Word planted in us, however, we must deal with sin.

Peter repeats James in 1 Pet. 2:1-2, telling us, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation..." When sin is dealt with, then we can learn and grow.

We have seen repeatedly in previous studies that the first line of defense against sin is confession. As James said above in chapter 1, verse 21, sin is "prevalent". This is because we are all sinners, believers included, and those who smugly assume that they aren't simply do not have a clue about God's standards. We all sin repeatedly, and confession of our sins is essential for every believer. When we have confessed, we will be receptive to Bible teaching, and we will be equipped to believe and apply the truths we acquire. Then, as we mature, we will be able to resist sin further and keep ourselves in shape to benefit fully from the teaching of God's Word.

Faith and Learning...Learning and Faith. The key difference between a mature believer and

one who is still an infant is the level of faith exhibited by each. Stronger faith increases receptivity to Scripture, and greater learning increases faith. Baby Christians need to get into this growth cycle. It is called “building up”, like bricks and mortar...the truths are the bricks that are stacked into place, and faith is the mortar that holds them there. Truths are “built up” on faith, which means that faith provides something for truths to stick to. By studying and believing God’s Word, the truths we learn become part of us and transform us into effective Christians. This, in turn, makes us all the more teachable as disciples of Christ. Faith is the bedrock for all learning.

So, what kind of faith are we talking about? Faith that endures all conditions. Paul demonstrated faith in an incident described in Acts 27:23-25. Paul recounts the following:

Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, “Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you: So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.

Paul believed that God would rescue him and his fellow passengers from harm in a shipwreck that he anticipated. He believed things would happen just as God told Him. That is exactly what we are being asked to do...to believe that things work exactly as God has described them for us in His Word. The point is that we can believe God’s Word!

Paul cites the truth and efficacy of God’s Word again in 1 Thess. 2:13, which says the following:

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

These believers received the Word of God, believed it, and this made the Word go to work in them. God’s Word performs work in us by the power of the Holy Spirit, when we spend time learning it...and when we believe it...because that which is believed can be applied, and application releases the power of God into our lives.

The Word is Central. What we’re driving at is that the Word of God must be central in our walk as believers. No other criterion for a faithful walk exists. Paul told Timothy the following:

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

What they *heard* was to be *kept* by faith, *guarded* with the help of the Holy Spirit. Paul reiterated this point in 2 Tim. 3:16-17, which says this:

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This verse is loaded. It speaks of the holy nature of the Word, stating that it comes from God Himself. It is “useful” or PRACTICAL for the believer, giving him complete training instructions for his conduct and attitude. And it provides every piece of equipment he will ever need to access

the grace of God and perform all the tasks designated in God's plan for his life. The Bible is our equipment room, giving us the tools we need to *allow God* to tend our growth. When we absorb the Word and believe it, we grow, and God oversees the process to make sure our maturity leads to fruitfulness.

One final example of Paul's making a case for growing by learning is seen in 1 Tim. 1:18b-19, which tells us this:

Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith.

By following the instructions in Scripture, we will be fortified to fight because we hold on to faith (believing God, believing in the work of Christ on the cross, and believing God's Word). And we will continue to have a good conscience because all known sins will be confessed and we will be walking in fellowship with God. Notice this: Work (fighting) will get done when we know and trust God's Word, and when all sins are confessed.

If we fail to study and believe Scripture, and do not walk in faith, we will not be able to get close to God or experience the abundant grace He wants to give us. As a first priority, we must believe the truths from Scripture that we read or hear. Heb. 4:2b says, "...but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." This verse is citing the message of the Word as the specific message to be believed. This message can be for unbelievers, but an application is being made here for believers. In the remainder of Chapter 4 in Hebrews, the value of "believing" is presented to believers, where we are asked as Christians to believe the Word for daily living. When we hear the Word, we must *believe it* for it to be of *value* to us. Otherwise, it will be of no more value to us than the reading of the phone book. Faith comes by "hearing" the teachings of the Bible, and that which is heard infuses faith...IF what is heard is accepted as truth.

Appendix I

The Filling of the Spirit

Living in the Spirit and Walking in the Spirit. We began earlier a discussion about the difference between “living in the Spirit” and “walking in the Spirit”. Gal. 5:25 sets up a continuation of this discussion: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” The *Interlinear Translation* and the NET Bible translate the NIV’s “keep in step with”, as “walk by”. Since we “live” in the Spirit, we should also “walk by” the Spirit. Here is the difference between “living” and “walking”:

1. “Live in (or by) the Spirit” refers to the indwelling of the Spirit, and our being “in Christ”, while He is in us. Once we accept Christ, we are permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit; therefore we “live” in (or by) Him, or have eternal life through Him. We get our spiritual life from Him. This is our eternal *position*.
2. “Walk by the Spirit” is what we do when we are 1) filled with the Spirit, and are 2) walking by faith in the Spirit. We are walking under the power of the Holy Spirit. This is our temporal *condition*, when we are in fellowship.

Since we *live* by the Spirit, let us also *walk* by the Spirit.

Filling of the Spirit vs. Walking in the Spirit. Here is the difference between these two:

1. “Filling of the Spirit” is the instantaneous occurrence of restoration of fellowship through the honest confession of our sins. We move from control of the flesh to the control of the Spirit, when this happens.
2. “Walking in the Spirit” is the condition of being under the influence of the Spirit...in an ongoing state of “being filled by the Spirit”...whereby sin is controlled and the fruit of the Spirit is produced. Our walk is sustained by faith; the consistency of our walk depends on the level of our faith.

We confess our sins to get them forgiven and restore the influence of the Spirit in our lives. Then we retain that influence by trusting in the resurrection power of Christ, the provision of the Father, and the enablement of the Holy Spirit. In other words, our walk in the Spirit is sustained by *faith*. And please note: Babies “crawl”; mature believers “walk”. This is more than a single step forward... walking is putting one foot in front of the other, and *moving forward*. Super believers like Paul can actually “run”, as in “running the good race”.

Faith is the key component in this walk. The more mature we are, the stronger our faith will be, and the longer we will walk in the Spirit before sin halts our progress. Behind faith are all the techniques we have studied for getting closer to God. We have built a long list of these, and have developed a shorthand protocol to encapsulate them. The shorthand terms for all the techniques we

have studied that build and sustain faith are these: confession of sins, prayer, study of Scripture, and—basically—enduring God’s training program for building our faith.

What it Means to be Filled or Full. Eph. 5:18 instructs us, as follows: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” The term “filled” has to do with the power of something that is in us...to direct us or control us. It is not just filling ourselves up, like drinking a lot of water, but it is the ability of the thing that fills us...to influence us. By saying, “Do not get drunk on wine”, the command is for us *not to be controlled by wine*. This is an example of something that fills us and controls us.

There can be other things that control us: greed, lust, envy, hatred, anger, pride...and drugs/alcohol. If any of these, or a myriad of other things, control us, and cause us to sin, we will not be controlled by the Spirit. We will be giving the wheel to that scurrilous character: the flesh. Paul is saying, “Avoid the control of the flesh!” On the other hand, we can be filled with the Spirit, if we qualify (meaning sin is taken care of), at which time the Holy Spirit will control us.

The issue is not getting the Spirit *into* us, but putting what is *already inside of us* in charge. Otherwise, the power of the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit, and cause the love of God to flow through us, *will be neutralized*. If sin takes place, it is certain that the flesh will lead the way, and our decisions, desires, and plans will be driven by tendencies to sin or practice some form of legalism. When we are “filled” continually, which means that we are “walking by the Spirit”, we will fulfill Gal. 5:16-17 (NET), which says the following:

But I say, Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another; lest whatever you may will, these things you do.

When we are walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, the sinful nature will be under control. But if we sin, the sinful nature is right back in charge, however hard we may try to prevent it. The thing we have to admit is this: We will sin. Sin prevents the control of the Spirit. The only way for the Spirit to control us is for our sin to be removed, and this is done by confession. If you plucked this paragraph out and asked, “Which of our books did this come from?” you would be right to answer, “Every single one of them.” This concept has been repeated many times, because it is at the center of all the resources God provides for us to live the Christian life with meaning and purpose.

Why the Filling of the Spirit is Important. It is vital that we find a way to acquire and sustain the filling of the Spirit. The Spirit gives us the power to do the things that bring glory to God and earn rewards for us in heaven. The Spirit produces love in us, and this translates into an alertness for opportunities to share the gospel, and motivates us to build each other up (contribute to each other’s maturity).

When the Spirit fills us and directs us, we produce “divine good”, as opposed to “fleshly good”, and the character of Christ is put on display. In Gal. 4:19 Paul describes the process of developing that divine character within us, saying, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you....” Paul was agonizing and doting like a new mother over

the growth of the Galatians, because he knew that—if they grew and matured—the character of Christ would be formed and shown to the world. The character of Christ is exactly the same thing as the fruit of the Spirit. It begins on the inside through purity and prayer and knowledge and faith, and comes to the outside as love and joy and peace...honest caring for others, and willingness to sacrifice to bring the fruit of spiritual gifts to bear.

For us to achieve the kind maturity that Paul wanted for the Galatians, we will have to rely on the controlling and teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. We are perfected by the Spirit, and not by the flesh. Gal. 5:5-6 describes it this way:

But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight—the only thing that matters is faith working through love.

The righteousness we expect to see produced (“for which we hope”) comes from waiting and trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit. This passage should be compared with Heb. 5:11-6:3, which says that we grow by feeding on the Word of God. The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, encased in the Book given as our guide, will bring us to maturity. The key indicator for this maturity is seen in verse 14 in this passage (Heb. 5), which says, “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good and evil.” By learning and applying Scripture, coupled with God’s training program, a believer learns to see what is good and what is evil. Then the “good” can be chosen. This is why sin becomes less of a problem for the mature believer...because 1) he knows what to avoid, and 2) he knows what to confess. With sin reduced and controlled, spiritual production can soar...in the power of the Spirit.

Or we can do it on our own, which is the most common choice. Gal. 1:3 says, “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” We will see this again when we study the Law vs. the Spirit.

So we want to be filled with the Spirit to produce the character of Christ, to see the fruit of the Spirit borne in our lives, and to exhibit the righteousness of God in our thoughts and behavior. Gal. 2:20 links this filling with the life of Christ. This verse says, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” The Christian life is designed so that the only real “living” we do is when His life is lived through us. When His life is suppressed (by the “quenching” of the fire of the Holy Spirit), we are “dead”, controlled by the flesh, and living in some form of sin or legalism. But when we are restored by the Spirit, we come alive, body and soul, and good things can happen. Righteousness is achieved by the Holy Spirit when we have confessed and are walking by faith in Him. The life of Christ...the fruit of the Spirit...is the result of our maturity and faith, a product of the Holy Spirit.

The Fruit of the Spirit. Many passages delineate the things produced by the Spirit through the prepared and willing believer. None is quite so compact as Gal. 5:22-23, which says the following: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” We could spend a book on each one of these

qualities, because they clearly demonstrate the kinds of thoughts and behaviors that line up with God's standards. These also remind us of our failings and weaknesses, and convince us that we cannot do what only the Spirit can do, and we are much better off to let Him do it. We will revisit the fruit of the Spirit later in this series of studies.

Trying to Boil it All Down...the Spirit and the Flesh. Immature believers can be filled with the Spirit, but their faith is too weak to hold them there. They can be “king on the mountain” for a second, but they will be quickly dislodged by forces more powerful than they are. This pattern is repeated over and over, until they begin to mature through prayerful study and by enduring God's training program. If they continue, they will spend more and more time walking by the Spirit. That's the objective.

We have learned quite well that we will be led by the flesh or by the Spirit. We can't be controlled by both at the same time. This seems odd, because God is so much stronger than our flesh, but remember that God has given us *choice*, so that the hinge-pin for our walk is not God's power and sovereignty, but our *choosing* to use the techniques He has given us. Get this: No spiritual assets operate when we are out of fellowship. Step one for any spiritual event or act is CONFESSION! Ignore this and you will go nowhere. This country is full of believers going nowhere spiritually, because they have not used 1 Jn. 1:9, and are living in either sin...or legalism. Both are opposed to Christ.

We saw that *faith* is the means for sustaining a walk in the Spirit, once fellowship is restored, and this faith grows with study and training. But weak faith is easily overshadowed by the flesh, and will not sustain us and keep us in fellowship. We are *justified* by grace through faith at salvation, and we are *sanctified* in life by God's mercy through confession, but we will only be *sustained* in our walk in the Spirit by an ongoing faith. Conclusion: When we are purified, then we can *walk in the Spirit...if our faith is strong*.

Have you noticed that Paul deals in dichotomies...either/or conditions...over and over? We are saved or lost, in fellowship or out, controlled by the Spirit or the flesh, pure or depraved. Many conditions in the Christian life are *absolute*, meaning that you do or you don't...you are or you aren't.

It is interesting how many things that are clearly black or white have been placed onto a gray-scale continuum by short-sighted scholars or pastors, with very few concepts rendered with definition and clarity. Certainly, there are some things that exist in levels or degrees, such as maturity, faith, love, etc. But many of the *techniques* that produce these variable states are themselves *completely polar*. We will have much more to say about this when we discuss Law and Grace (or the Law and the Spirit).

We say that to say this: Faith is a *variable*. It is “strong” to some degree or “weak” to some degree. The thing we must understand is that faith needs nourishment. If it is not nourished, it will not grow, and will eventually collapse in a heap of doubt and fear. Faith will either grow or it will decline. To develop the faith it takes to walk in the Spirit, we have to PUSH forward...taking in and believing the Word, praying, and going through tests and trials. Then we will be doing what Paul

did, as he expressed in Phil. 3:12b, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me,” and in Phil. 3:14, “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” It is time, now more than ever in this nation and this world, for us to “press on”...in the Spirit.

Walking in the Spirit: Sequence and Consequence

Here is a general algorithm for walking in the Spirit:

1. A believer sins, putting the sinful nature in charge.
2. The sinful nature produces sin, legalism, and/or self-dependence in the life of the believer.
3. Divine discipline kicks in and the soul is in anguish, often without knowing why. This goes on until sins are confessed.
4. Upon confession, the control of the Holy Spirit is restored, but the sinful nature is outraged at the loss of his control over the believer.
5. The sinful nature teams up with Satan and the world to plot the overthrow of the Spirit’s control and return the believer to sin (and/or legalism). The believer can be drawn into sin, in which case the power of the Spirit is neutralized. This entire process takes about a nanosecond, but the effects may last a long time.
6. The believer confesses sins again at some point, hopefully sooner rather than later, and the Spirit moves back into authority in the heart of the believer.
7. While the believer is filled with the Spirit, he is able to grow spiritually, a process accelerated by the intake of Scripture and the endurance of tests brought on, or allowed, by God.
8. Learning and believing Scripture while in fellowship builds the believer’s faith, which sustains a walk in the Spirit for longer and longer periods of time.
9. The believer’s maturity continues to build by confessing, praying, studying, trusting, and enduring God’s training. This is also aided by edification from other believers.
10. The Holy Spirit produces righteousness through the believer, which reflects the character of Christ...and demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit.
11. Rewards are accumulated in heaven for the believer for acts done under the control of the Spirit.
12. The life of the believer glorifies Christ, satisfies the Holy Spirit, and honors the Father.

This is the path we are intended to walk. This is the “walk in the Spirit”.

Added Footnote: John Walvoord provided a thorough and thoughtful study on the filling of the Spirit, and he is credited with many of the following insights. (Endnote 43) In his article, “The Filling of the Spirit”, Walvoord translated Eph. 5:18, as follows: “Keep being filled with the Spirit.”

This tells us that—if we are no longer “keeping” the filling, we will no longer be “filled”. Filling implies the control, or direct influence, of the Spirit, which can come and go. Peter was filled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4), and then again as he stood before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8). Paul and Barnabas were filled a number of times, as seen in Acts 9:17; 11:24; and 13:8-52.

Contrast the “filling of the Spirit” in Eph. 5:18 with two conditions: 1) the “quenching” of the Spirit in 1 Thess. 5:19, and 2) the “grieving” of the Spirit in Eph. 4:30. Filling is the opposite of quenching and grieving. So, what is it that quenches or grieves the Spirit? Look at the sins surrounding the command not to grieve the Spirit, as they are laid out in Ephesians 4 and 5. SIN grieves the Spirit! Also, contrast the condition of living in sin, like those shown in these two chapters, with that of “living in the light” in Eph. 5:8.

When we live in sin, we are alienated from the Spirit; on the other hand, cleanliness allows us to have close fellowship with Him. If sin is dominant, something has to change for us to get back into cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Only then will the Spirit be able to produce His fruit through us. (Eph. 5:9-10). But what are the specific mechanics for “returning” after we sin? This is the missing connection, which we must find.

We will sin, for sure, as per 1 John 1:10, 12. The question then becomes, “How can our sin record be cleared?” 1 John 1:9 gives the most succinct statement regarding the cleansing of believers’ sins, saying this: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” All we have to do is genuinely repent of the sins we have committed. Name them to God...He will forgive them, and we will be reinstated into fellowship and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Note the contrast between life in the Spirit and a life of sin:

- Life in the Spirit: “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” (Gal. 5:16) Only the Holy Spirit can overpower the sinful nature.
- Life of sin: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious; sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” (Gal. 5:19-21) If these sins go unconfessed, the Spirit will be held at bay.

When we are filled with the Spirit, we will see the “fruit of the Spirit” of Gal. 5:22-23. When we are in sin, we will produce the works of the sinful nature. If we find ourselves in sin (and we will), we must scramble to get our sins confessed to God the Father, so that fellowship and the filling of the Spirit can be restored. Then we will be poised to combat sin through growing faith. (Endnote 43 repeated)

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11. *Marks of Maturity*, p. 35.
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21. *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness*, pp. 37-38.
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24. *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness*, p. 43.
25. *The Deeper Christian Life*, p. 1.
26. *The Deeper Christian Life*, p. 19.
27. *The Deeper Christian Life*, p. 10.
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29. *The Deeper Christian Life*, p. 9.
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31. *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, p. 930.
32. "80. Humility in the Exercise of our Gifts", an article from the series, *Romans*, by Steven J. Cole. This article is available under its title at www.bible.org.
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37. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 922.
38. *The Interlinear Bible*, p. 534.
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AUTHOR’S NOTE: Paul said, “I am nothing.” Jesus said, “You are nothing.” It is not false modesty for me to say, “I am nothing.” I have it on good authority. Yet God is everything, and He has shared His truth with us in His Word. To the degree that the writings in this book accurately reflect that truth, I commend them to seeking believers everywhere. Where my nothingness has over-ridden God’s truth because of my ignorance or pride, I admit my weakness and failure, and warn you to be cautious. I am neither qualified for nor deserving of the privilege of explaining God’s truths, so I offer this treatise only with great humility and a sense of undeserved honor. If you do not find the truth here, keep searching. I am confident that God will reward your quest for His wisdom...and His fullness.

My name is William “Dick” Gibbs, and I am a retired educator living in Dallas, Texas.

Footnote: My greatest—almost singular—hope is that you see reflected in my words the greatness of God’s power and the beauty of His love; and that you understand how helpless we are to achieve what He expects—without His enablement. Only God can produce divine good; our job is to find out how to have Him do this...through us.

Yours in Christ,
W. D. Gibbs

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