

*Step by Step toward
Surrender:
Getting the Fullness
Of God*

William Gibbs

Step by Step toward Surrender: Getting the Fullness of God

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AUTHOR'S ADDRESS:

P.O. Box 165688

Irving, TX 75016

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This is a collection of articles published on the website, www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com.

Dedicated to believers everywhere who are
genuinely seeking for God.

Step by Step: Getting Closer to God

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Preface

The articles which comprise this book were written without an intended connection. After they were written and posted on my website under “Articles”, I observed a strong connection among them. They are presented here in the same sequence in which they were written, and the expanding flow of truth from one to the next is evident. I believe these articles illuminate some of the most profound truths God has given us in His Word for understanding ways to relate to Him, serve Him, and glorify Him. Though the final objective of this “book” was not apparent to me until the last chapter, it is clear that everything that is written here points toward the ultimate goal: complete surrender to our God.

The formatting for each article, as originally written and structured, has been retained, so the reader may observe distinctions in presentation style from one article to the next. Each is organized differently from the others. The need for variation is owing to the varying length of each article, ranging from two pages to sixty-five pages.

As this material is perused, the reader must maintain an open mind to concepts not commonly iterated in churches and Christian organizations today, but which are—in my view—absolutely essential to our fulfilling our purpose for being here on this earth. Absorb and grow. That is my prayer for the reader. Watch for ways to get closer to God, and if any view given in this writing shows promise for promoting growth, embrace it and practice it.

God’s blessings.

William “Dick” Gibbs

Website: <http://www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com>.

Gifted Service and Love

We are all part of a team. As team members, each of us plays a part. The sum total of all believers makes up the whole team, and it is in working with each other, and each one doing his or her part, that God gets His work done on earth. The contribution of each team member comes from the respective gifts that the Holy Spirit awards to each believer. Everything that is accomplished by believers comes through the medium of each one's gift. This is the conduit for the operation of God's love and power in the life of each Christian. Production arising from each believer's gift, therefore, is the objective of his or her spiritual growth. The operation of our gifts is the means for glorifying God, producing fruit, and fulfilling God's purpose for each one of us.

To "walk in the Spirit" is to exercise our gifts by the Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit provides each gift, and He now offers the energy and motivation to make it work. To operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, we must, of course, be in fellowship by staying clean through the confession of our sins, be in the process of maturing by studying His Word and enduring His training, and be exercising our trust in God and His Word so that we are maintaining a close relationship with Him. When these are done, we will be prepared to exercise our gifts in His strength, and our gifts will fulfill their purpose.

Eph. 4:15-16 gives us the correct frame for the operation of our gifts. This passage says this:

“...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.”

Several ideas stand out in this verse. These include, for example, the necessity for us to select and operate in an environment where “truth” is taught and shared. Each of us contributes to the teaching of the Word in his or her own unique ways. Also included is the notion of maturing into a stronger relationship with Christ as a result of the mutual sharing of our gifts. Another obvious idea advanced in this passage is that the SOURCE of our growth and joint production comes from God; it is “from Him”.

What may be less obvious is what turns out to be the *main point* we want to glean from Ephesians 4:15-16, which is that our gifts operate in LOVE, and the greatest expression of love as required in Scripture is seen in the operation of our gifts. Implicit in this is the idea that our gifts will convey with them a *spirit* of love. Without love, our gifts will not operate; conversely, without the operation of our gifts, love will not have a pre-designed avenue for expression. Thus the statement is given: “builds itself up in love, as [to the degree that] each part does its work.” The exercise of our gifts is an expression of love, but love implies the power of the Holy Spirit; so if the Holy Spirit is not producing the prerequisite condition of love, gifts will not operate effectively. When gifts operate properly, love is fulfilled, and the gifts serve to “build up” other believers. This is our highest purpose. When we exercise our gifts faithfully, we will, as it were, “lay down our life” for others, which is the greatest expression of love.

To confirm that our gifts are to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, look at 1 Pet. 4:11, which says, “If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” God’s work must be done God’s way, which means that He will do it. And when the Holy Spirit is at work, all believers benefit, as per Eph. 4:11-12, which tells us that specific gifts were given to “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”.

The outcome is clear, as we see in verse 13 of Eph. 4: We collaborate (co-labor) “...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.” We come together, contribute to each other’s growth, and become an unstoppable collective force performing its work in the power of the Almighty God. But without love, which means *without walking by means of the Spirit* and *without following the path to maturity*, growth will not occur, and gifts will not be operating properly in the body of Christ. The result will be a church full of baby Christians.

There are many gifts. The first step in learning what your gift is involves attending to your own growth. Then you can progress upward through the ranks of spiritual stature so you can know what your gift is. Only then will you be able to attend to the growth of others; only then will you truly “love” and “serve”.

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.

Christianity is not a one-size-fits-all arrangement. Each of us is unique, and each of us has been assigned a gift (or gifts) commensurate with God’s plan, to operate according to His will. We can’t even “love” the same way, even though the trend today is to standardize love so that it looks the same for everyone. It is a hard concept to get...that each of us loves and expresses love in a way that is distinct from that of others. All the main components of (for example) 1 Cor. 13 are there, of course, consisting mostly of consideration of others, but each of us has areas of focus in which our love is concentrated and targeted toward specific kinds of needs. Differentiated love goes along with differentiated gifts. This distinct love motivates our gifts to operate in a certain way, directed toward specific objectives. Without this love, the operation of our gifts will be lackluster and flat. With this love, the exercise of our gifts brings activities that may be strenuous, but that seem effortless and enjoyable, because of the operation of love’s motivation.

Want to know your gift? Look at your love. When you are *in fellowship*, and *spiritual love is operational*, look at what you are drawn to. This is where you will find your gift, along with your motivation and

avenue for service.

For more on gifts, such as what the gifts are and how to prepare for them, read the chapter titled, “Gifts”, in my book, *Bible Basics on Maturity*, available at this website for free download or purchase.

Stop Trying

The amount of effort required to live the Christian life is a variable affected by one's view of what the Christian life is. If you think that being a "Christian" is a matter of following a set of mores and rules, then you will gauge your effectiveness on the basis of your compliance with and conformity to specific standards. If, on the other hand, you see the Christian life as a relationship with the divine Creator, then you will assess your spiritual standing on the basis of how close you are to Him. It is my contention that the second view is the correct one: The Christian life is an ongoing association with God, in which we will either be "drawing near"...or "pulling back".

We will talk a little about the concept of "drawing near" in this study (article), but that will mostly be left for later studies. We want to understand what "pulling back" is, but that, too, will need further consideration later on. What is most disconcerting, and begging our attention in this study, is the degree to which Christians so readily embrace the notion that "righteous living" is "following the rules". We will make the case that following the rules is actually "unrighteous living". This sounds backwards, but we will show that exertion of effort in rule-keeping is "bad". This will take some time, so bear with us as we work through this seemingly-bizarre concept.

Being more specific, it is my argument that "keeping the law" (rule-keeping) is counterproductive and even harmful. The law is a system of standards that "judges" or "critically evaluates" each act or thought. Any violation of the law is a sin, and when sin occurs, the law "judges" that sin. Rom. 2:12b says that "all who sin under the law will be judged by the law". When we sin, we are judged. Fortunately for us, our sins have been judged on the cross, so the prospect is available for us to bypass the judgment exacted by the law. This is done at salvation by faith in Christ. Then it is done *within the Christian life* by the confession of our sins to God the Father.

Intuitively, it seems that, once we become "believers", we could just naturally follow the law and live righteously? But that is not so. Many scriptures tell us that we are incapable of keeping the law. Jesus confronted some of the greatest law-keepers of all time and told them, "Not one of you keeps the law" (John 7:19). If they couldn't keep it, how can we? It is impossible for human beings to keep the law perfectly. James 2:10 informs us that breaking only one law makes us law-breakers, even if we keep all the rest of them to the letter. Paul said he was virtually "faultless" as a Jew, saying, "...as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil. 3:6). Yet he considered all of his legal achievements to be of no value, because he saw something much more valuable, as we see here:

...and be found in him [Christ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. (Phil. 3:9)

Paul aspired to the righteousness that comes from God, and understood that this is not going to

transpire by keeping the law. Trying to keep the law puts us “under it”, as does sin. So what does it mean...to be “under the law”, or “under the law’s judgment”. Gal. 4:21 says, “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?” The Galatians apparently had a predilection for being “under the law”, even though it placed them under “judgment”. Why would the Galatians want to be “under” so much negative evaluation? It is because they valued KEEPING the law, or living by its dictates; they were convinced that they should do it...and could do it. Summarizing: Sin puts us under the law. Then there is a second condition which puts us there, which is a practice called “legalism”, or TRYING TO LIVE BY THE LAW’S STANDARDS.

There are, then, two conditions that place us under the law: one is sin; the other is legalism. Both of these represent a breakdown in our faith, in that sin expresses faith in the world for pleasure and meaning; whereas legalism shows faith in self to produce goodness, purity, and righteousness. The irony is that legalism is just as bad as “sin”, and maybe even worse. Paul went after the Corinthians because of their tendency to sin, but his most scathing exhortation was leveled against the Galatians because they wanted to live by the law, rather than by grace. Paul equated living under the law with slavery (Gal. 4:7). It is my view that “legalism”, or trying to keep the law, is actually a kind of sin, but whatever its label, it puts us under the law’s judgment.

The law and its judgment applies to those who are “under the law”. Rom. 3:19-20 says this:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

No righteousness can be developed merely by doing what the law says we *should* do. Those who are “under the law” are those who have not confessed their most recent sins, and are therefore “pulling back” from God...they are “out of fellowship” with Him. This is a hard concept: TRYING to keep the law places us under the judgment of the law. But, as we just saw, “no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law”, which means we remain “unrighteousness” when we TRY to be righteous. What a riddle! We will unravel this from Scripture.

Gal. 2:15-16 gives the following:

We who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners” know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

The obvious application of this verse is that keeping the law will not save us, or remove us from the condemnation we are in before we believe in Christ. But there is a second application of this principle which we will make here, and verify as we proceed. It is this: Keeping the law not only will not “save” us, or justify us for all eternity; it will also not justify us—or bring forgiveness—for the sins we commit after we are saved. Law-keeping compounds or increases our lack of forgiveness, because

mercy and justification comes only through grace...not through perfunctory compliance.

Legal strictness and astringency does nothing for our spiritual life. Heb. 7:19a says, "...the law made nothing perfect" and then adds, "and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God." Keeping the law will not advance us toward maturity, nor will it help us get closer to God. This is done another way. When we *seek* to be justified (or cleansed), so that we can become "righteous" in the eyes of God, we will *confront and deal with* our own inability to live up to God's standards. When we acknowledge that we can't meet God's requirements, we will confess our inadequacy and failure, and that is where we will find justification. When we admit our own sin, we will be justified...forgiven. (1 Jn. 1:9).

When we are "cleansed", our faith is activated. And as we mature, faith will grow and we will confess more consistently as we go along. This will keep us close to God, where we can draw on His strength. This process is one of grace, accessed by faith; trying hard plays no part in it. Gal. 2:17-21 presents the entire scope of law/self-trust vs. grace/faith, saying this:

If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

We need to analyze this passage. In verse 17, we see that Christ does not condone or promote sin, but He is the one we are looking to for "justification" of our sin. This is where grace comes in: Christ has already done the work to enable our justification. He forgives us when we come to Him "seeking to be justified". Verse 18 uses the term "rebuild" to describe what we do when we attempt to live by the law. This term implies affirmation, which shows a kind of validation of the law. What we are actually doing is establishing the judgment of the law against us. If we seek justification through grace, we will find it, but if we try to comply with the law's proscriptions, we will only prove our own guilt. The more I try to be *guiltless* and *pure*, the more *guilty* I am. Ironical, isn't it? The more I TRY to be good, the worse I am before God. We not only CAN'T keep the law; we SHOULD'N'T EVEN TRY.

Verses 19-21 tell us that righteousness does not come through the law, but through the life of Christ. This life becomes ours at salvation, and then that life is lived out through us when we are "justified" through confession. Cleansing qualifies us for the enablement of the Holy Spirit. The term "through the law" in v. 19 means "by the satisfaction of the law through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ"...He paid the penalty for sin. Because of the Savior's sacrifice, Paul said that he himself had "died to the law". This means he no longer owed the law any allegiance. By "dying to the law", Paul was able to "live for God". This "living for God" in verse 19 is seen as "Christ living in me" in verse 20. The life we get at salvation becomes the life we live when Christ (by His Spirit) is living through us. But this is not a life under the law! Verse 21 lets us know that "righteousness", either at salvation or during the Christian life, comes through grace, and not by trying to "be good" or "keep the rules". If we could be "righteous" through

our own efforts, there would have been no need for Christ to die on the cross, and we would not need the “life of Christ” living through us.

The way NOT to attain righteousness is to TRY to attain it. Rom. 9: 30-32 makes this very clear, saying:

When then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone” [Jesus Christ].

The Jews missed it, because they depended on works. It was EASIER for them to *work* than for them to *believe*. This is reminiscent of various Christian groups and many world religions which rely on ACTIVITY to express and honor their brand of worship. It is easier to DO than it is to BELIEVE THE TRUTH! By going the easy way, the real pathway to righteousness is rejected. Rom. 10:3 says, “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.” They wanted to DO salvation and Christian living; not RECEIVE it. The next verse (v. 4) makes it clear that Christ is the only way to righteousness, and that this righteousness can only be accessed by faith. “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Once again, this applies to the Christian life, just as much as it does to the experience of salvation.

We’re not through. Rom. 4:13-15a adds this:

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath.

We receive righteousness through faith only. Once we become believers, faith will only operate when we are “cleansed” through confession (Ps. 51:2), and this faith will be in greater evidence as we mature. Faith will NOT work for those who are counting on the law for righteousness. Following the passage just quoted from Rom. 4, verse 16 adds this: The “promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace...” This tells us that we should STOP TRYING and START BELIEVING!

We were *saved* by believing, and we *live* by believing. We can BELIEVE, or we can TRY. God honors the first and rejects the second, because the first—i.e., believing—recognizes the work of His Son, with whom He is very pleased. Gal. 3:1-5 sums this up very well in the following:

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?

For any who think that law-keeping is a consideration only when it comes to salvation, this passage clears it up: Law-keeping is just as useless, and as deleterious, to Christian *living* as it is to *salvation*. This passage is precise in its application of anti-legalism to the Christian experience: BELIEVERS MUST NOT ATTEMPT TO FOLLOW THE LAW OR TRY TO KEEP RULES in order to be spiritual and attain worthy goals. We received the Spirit by believing, and now that we have the Spirit, “trying” is counterproductive. God works in and through us because we believe in Him, not because we try to be pure. Purity comes through grace and forgiveness, not through performance. That’s what it says. But we are tied to the “habit” of thinking that God will only bless us if we are “good”. Incidentally, if we stay pure through confession, and grow through prayerful study and endurance of God’s training, WE WILL PERFORM, but it will not be us...it will be the Holy Spirit performing through us. Until we get this concept, we will be spinning our wheels!!

(For a good comparison of conditions “under the law”, as contrasted with those “under grace”, see the chart on page 70 of *Walking in the Spirit*, available at this website under “Free Book Downloads” on the “Home Page”.)

Things are so bad when we are attempting to follow the law that those who do so are considered to be under a “curse”. Gal. 3:10a says, “All who rely on observing the law are under a curse”, because those who depend on the law must keep it “perfectly” (as per the 2nd half of verse 10); else they will be cursed. This is because the “law is not based on faith” (Gal. 3:12), and faith is the only way that righteousness can be acquired or achieved (Gal. 3:11). So trying to keep the law brings judgment against us. By trying to be good, we are being very bad.

When we come to know God and get closer to Him...and have some understanding about grace...we are responsible for continuing on the path of grace, and not returning to the practice of law-keeping. Gal. 4:9 frames it this way: “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?”

The “weak and miserable principles” are the tenets of the law. By trying not to break any rule, a believer can be enslaved by the law, which means that the sinful nature will take over, the control of the Holy Spirit will be truncated, and either sin or legalism will put him or her into chains. TRYING to be good is a form of slavery! Gal. 5:4 goes so far as to say that trying to be good actually alienates us from Christ. This verse says, “You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” Contrast this with the next verse (v. 5), which says, “But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.” We “hope” for, or look forward to, absolute righteousness in eternity, but we also “hope” for, or expect, righteousness to be produced within the realm of time “through the Spirit”. To have “been alienated” means to be “out of fellowship”. This does NOT mean loss of salvation, but it does mean that the flow of God’s power into our hearts and lives is momentarily cut off, pending restoration of fellowship.

Gal. 5:6 adds this: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Nothing we ever initiate in the name of

good will *ever* have any value with God. Only FAITH is recognized by God. If we want to be good and do well, we must build our faith. We have seen that justification comes through faith. This is confirmed in Rom. 3:27-28, which says this:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

Rom. 3:21-22a echoes this proclamation, saying, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to this the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith...” This is divine righteousness, which can be produced only by the Holy Spirit, and which will occur only when faith is present. Rom. 3:31 corroborates this view, saying, “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather we uphold the law.” The irony is that when we do not “try”, but instead simply “believe” (God’s Word and God’s promises), we lay claim to God’s righteousness in our lives. This divine righteousness will come THROUGH US, making it seem as though it comes FROM US, and will be seen in the exercise of the gifts each of us has been given to strengthen others.

There is another law to which we are obligated, but this law has power behind it. This is the “law of Christ”. In 1 Cor. 9:21b Paul said, “I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law.” Paul was not free from God’s law, because his sinful nature kept prompting him to scurry back under the law, where all kinds of rules can be broken (as well as practiced). But he knew another law was at work...Christ’s law...and that is the law of freedom, wherein we, like Paul, can stay clean and grow through repentance (confession), study, prayer, trust, and experiential training. This is the law of grace and mercy and forgiveness, and the way to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is where we want to live...under Christ’s law of love...not under the law of judgment.

In order to avoid the law of sin and legalism, we must LEARN the law of grace. We must “find out what pleases the Lord” (Eph. 5:10), and “understand what the Lord’s will is” (Eph. 5:17). Otherwise, we will be like the audience of the writer of Hebrews, who were “slow to learn” (Heb. 5:11). They were reluctant to seek the truth and absorb the Word. This is because they did not want it...remember that anyone who wants it will get it. So we must not neglect any effort to understand it. As Hos. 4:6 says in the following:

...my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.

This passage, obviously meant for the Jews, has an application for us: We must learn the principles and techniques given in the Word if we are going to function in God’s system. This system is one of grace; law-keeping has been eliminated. But we must *learn* the new system to know how it works. Our role under the new system is to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. Gal. 5:16 says, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” We are to be filled with

the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and allow Him to energize us for the production of His fruit (Gal. 5:22). But nothing we do is about our ability or strength...it's all about His. Anything we TRY to do will not bring credit and favor to us...it will bring only judgment. So stop trying!

This World is Not my Home

THIS WORLD IS A STRANGE PLACE. We live in the world, but we are not at home here. This analogy is a little worn, but it gives us a starting point for understanding what the world is, and our place in it. We will show why the world is like it is, and why it works against God and against those who follow Him. We live in enemy territory, and we must be alert at all times for spiritual sniping and ambushes along the way. Spies are lurking behind every curtain and every bush, with full intention to harm us, demoralize us, and have us abandon our mission. We are targets for everything from subterfuge to outright assault, and we cannot hide. This is where we live, and we must learn what the dangers are, and how to survive them.

But this is a big subject. This writing on “the world” is supposed to be a “blog”, which—I think—implies a short, pithy zinger with the aim of hitting a single point and then moving on. This particular writing, however, looks more like a topical study or an article than a blog, so if your eyes get weary reading from an electronic screen, I suggest you download and print this. There is no way to truncate this topic and do it any kind of justice. Soldier on.

William Wordsworth described our condition in the world very well in his well-known poem, “The World Is Too Much With Us”. The first four lines of his poem go like this:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and Spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

The deeper meaning of this poem is for scholars to plumb, but on the surface we see certain notions that are worth noting. Here is what we see in this verse:

The world is imposing and powerful, overwhelming us as we live our lives out each day, and as we exert our energies for drives and goals that we understand very little, and from which we gain little. We strive to control and possess, but then what do we have? Nothing. There is nothing we can claim that is ours. Still, we surrender our hearts to the forces of the world, even though the only benefit we get is evil and ugliness.

SATAN RUNS THE WORLD. The world is not what it seems. It seems auspicious and promising, but it is actually destructive and disappointing. The reason for this is that the world is not the kingdom of God, at least not yet. For the present, the world belongs to the enemy, and that means Satan. Satan runs the world, as allowed by God, and it is his to administer and control. This makes life in the world precarious for believers who want to grow in grace and knowledge.

Some may object to the notion that the world belongs to Satan, but Scripture makes it clear that Satan owns the world. For starters, look at the temptation of Christ at the beginning of His earthly ministry, when Satan offered Him kingdoms on earth. Matt. 4:8 frames it this way: “Again, the devil took him to

a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'." Jesus, of course, countered with Scripture, thus blocking Satan's temptation, but the point we want to see currently is that Satan offered kingdoms to Him. And Jesus did not respond by saying, "The kingdoms of the world are not yours to offer. These belong to God." This is because God has temporarily relinquished these kingdoms to Satan for him to control...within limits. He has limited control of these kingdoms, yes, but they are his to dispose of pretty much as he pleases. He offered Jesus the world, because he CAN.

When Luke described the temptation of Christ, he added this quote from Satan: "I will give you [Christ] all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to." And he was correct, and fully within his limits to say this. He had the power to place kingdoms into the human hands of Jesus. To fully understand the reason for God's giving Satan this power, read "The War Against God", a chapter from my latest book, *God's Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*. This chapter, beginning on page 55, describes what Satan is allowed to do on earth during human history, and why he is permitted to do it.

WE NEED PROTECTION FROM SATAN AND THE WORLD. The world is virtually a living organism, and its soul is the devil. His presence and influence permeate the world, because it is his kingdom of darkness. 1 John 5:19 says, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." This condition prompted Jesus to pray, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." It is because the world is Satan's that we have to have protection from him while we are here. Christ's kingdom, on the other hand, is not in the world, in a physical sense, although His kingdom is "within us" (Luke 17:21). In John 18:36, Jesus is quoted as saying, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place." The world consists of kingdoms controlled by Satan.

We need protection in this world, because it is a hostile region. Most believers, without even knowing it, repeatedly surrender to the world. They operate from the world's viewpoint, because they have not been trained to recognize it and counter it. 1 John 4:5 says, "They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them." We understand clearly that unbelievers are "of the world", and function exclusively in the viewpoint of the world. The surprising thing is that so many *believers* are right there with them. The greatest danger in associating with people in the world is that we will adopt their ideas, and with so few spiritual believers in the world, the dominant thought among Christians will easily become "worldly" in its perspective and outreach. Deception and evil will reach a critical mass, flooding Christendom with a tsunami of Satanic illusions.

WE MUST SEPARATE FROM THE IDEAS OF THE WORLD. This is why we must "separate" from the ideas and practices of the world. 2 Cor. 6:14-17 confirms this, as follows:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What

agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore, Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”

We must not integrate with the philosophies of the world, as they will undermine—and eventually destroy—our faith. God will hang on to us, but our backs will be turned to Him, if the world has its way by convincing us to espouse its viewpoint. The world is a sham, a facade. It is not the “real world”...the true world exists in an eternal realm and is ruled by God. 1 John 2:17 says, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” The world and its values encompass things that are temporary and fleeting, whereas God and His values incorporate the lasting and eternal. As believers, we should embrace eternal values, not temporal ones. And when we embrace eternal values, we will distinguish ourselves from the world.

WE DO NOT BELONG TO THE WORLD. We do not properly “belong” to the world, and therefore the world does not love us. John 15:19 says, “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.” In our eternal position, we are “chosen out of the world”, but in our bodies, we are still “in the world”, and we must deal with the world’s disdain. John 15:18, preceding the passage just quoted, says, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.” The world will hate us because they “do not know the one who sent” Jesus Christ (John 15:21b).

We are not of this world, so the world hates us, as we see again in John 17:14: “I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.” A principle exists that the more we get into the word, the more we are hated. The more we get close to God and live by His Word, the more Satan will turn the fire up under the world’s hatred for us. 2 Tim. 3:12 offers corroboration for this view, saying, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” This is why we must “continue in what you have learned” (2 Tim. 3:14). We learn in order to prepare, and we must prepare because we are targets.

Even family and friends can go after us, as they experience an unexplainable antipathy toward us. Being serious about your faith and digging into the deeper truths of God’s Word will have the effect of alienating family and friends, some of whom are believers, unless they are with you in your search for truth. This is painful, and part of the “persecution” we must endure, but the more we understand the world and our place in it, the more this condition makes sense to us. Luke 6:22-23 tells us that we should be “glad” that the world hates us, because we are set apart. Here is specifically 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. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

It is not pleasant to be hated and exorcised and insulted and rejected, and especially to be thought of as

“evil” or “stupid” or “crazy” or “weird”. And those closest to us can hurt us the most, but that is what we will get from the world, if we decide to follow God and His way of truth. We will be opposed by the devil and the world, and all the armies they bring against us.

WE ARE NOT FRIENDS OF THE WORLD. Because we are “set apart” from the world, we should “live apart” from the world. This does not mean we cannot associate with people in the world, because that would mean we could not live in the world at all, which is an absurdity (1 Cor. 5:10). We live in the world and must engage it, but *not with our hearts*, and this is where we get misled. We can be here without adopting the views of those around us. We can operate in the world without the stain of the world’s pervasive evil and lies. But such acuity and resistance comes only with great spirituality and maturity, so we can’t count on reaching this point by tomorrow morning. I suggest you read the chapter, “Our Spiritual Walk”, beginning on page 153 of *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*.

James 4:4 says, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Notice that there is choice involved in becoming friends of the world. Or perhaps this is better viewed as a process of becoming friends with God, and over time distancing ourselves from the world. This means we start out in the world and then choose to move toward God and away from the world. It begins with a single choice, followed by many choices to follow. The single choice is to accept the gift of salvation that God offers, which is done by believing in His Son. Then we must choose repeatedly, day after day, to seek more of God in our lives by growing and by accessing His power for living. By choosing to get closer to God, we will be concomitantly choosing to reject friendship with the world. This choice has a price, as we described in *God’s Training Program for Believers* (see pages 211-250), but what we get is well worth any cost.

WORLDLY PEOPLE CAN PROSPER. While we are living in the world, we will observe that “good things happen to bad people”. (We have seen in previous studies that “bad things happen to good people”.) The wicked may prosper in the world, even though their ultimate outcome will not be good. Eccl. 8:11-13 describe this as follows:

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.

Good things may come to evil people (some of these are believers), but judgment awaits them at some point, in the form of eternal condemnation for unbelievers and divine discipline for believers. When we see people who are not living for God enjoying the privileges of prosperity, this can engender confusion, especially for true God-seekers. Ps. 73:2-28 describes what the psalmist saw as the condition of wicked people. He said they have no struggles, they are free from burdens, they are not plagued by human ills, and they drink waters in abundance. They are arrogant and unconcerned, and

their lives seem easy and prosperous....carefree and often wealthy. Yet *growing* believers seem to be punished or tested at every turn. There is justice in the final outcome, however, for both unbelievers and “carnal” believers, and there is timely relief and comfort for spiritual believers. The key distinction between the outcome for spiritual believers and others is found, not in where they are, but in where they are headed. And this does not mean they will have to wait for “payday someday”, but that blessing can come to them while they are living on the earth.

In Ps. 37:1, David said, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” When the tendency to observe and marvel at the prosperity of evil people manifests, we look to David, who proposed the correct treatment for this temptation: “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. 37:2). The provision of what we want comes with growth and walking in God’s power...i.e., maturity and spirituality. Incidentally, our “wants” will change as we mature. What we receive as we mature is far greater than anything a wicked person could ever obtain...even if what we get cannot be measured in worldly or monetary terms. This is why we must “wait patiently” on the Lord (Ps. 37:7), for which we will eventually get “exaltation” (Ps. 37:34), and at that time, we will see the wicked “cut off” (also v. 34).

IT IS OUR NATURE TO LOVE THE WORLD. As we stated, we live in the world, but we should not adopt the world’s values. 1 John 2:15 admonishes, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Verse 16 adds this: “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.” Love for the world or anything in it is forbidden. But our sinful nature LOVES the world, and since this nature controls us most of the time, love for the world is persistent. That does not mean it cannot be overcome, as we shall see.

Notice the three connectors between the world and the sinful nature in verse 16: craving, lust, and pride. These are described as “everything in the world”, so this must include the exhaustive list of categories indicating all that the world has to offer. Craving involves wanting to enhance our personal environment with trappings and possessions. Lust is the longing for experiences that bring sensual pleasure to our bodies and positive stimulation to our emotions. Pride is faith in “self” (more on this later), which involves either the belief that I am the real master of my fate and destiny, or that I alone am capable of generating the character that God requires. These qualities are found in the world, and they are lies designed to throw nets around us and keep us under the world’s control. Strangely, much of the time we surrender and go willingly with our captor.

Because our sinful nature operates so freely in the world, we have to move away from the practices of the world. When we embrace the world’s values, we move toward the world. When we embrace God’s Word, we move away from the world and toward God. We will not find God or true goodness in the world, because the world does not accept God. John 17:25 confirms this, saying, “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you....” Jesus revealed in this prayer that the world is

clueless about the reality and centrality of God. And because the world does not know God, it is free to establish its own system for the conduct of mankind.

THE WORLD REJECTS GOD. 1 Cor. 1:21 carries further the idea that the world does not know God, and that it further blinds itself by creating its own explanations as to how things exist and work. This verse says, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” The world is satisfied with its own analysis of reality, truth, goodness, and beauty. And it soundly rejects the “foolishness” (tongue-in-cheek) of the gospel. Verse 20 discloses that *real* foolishness is seen in the world’s wisdom. Try telling this to people in the world; they have no ear for truth. If they did, they would believe in Christ and join us.

John quoted Jesus in the 14th chapter of his gospel, verse 17a, saying, “...the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him.” Citizens of the world refuse to accept the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, because they cannot see Him, and therefore cannot “know” Him. John 1:10 repeats this concept, as follows: “He [Jesus Christ] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” The world has no eyes for God, including many believers who sustain the world’s viewpoint. Believers with the “world view” are part of the world.

RESISTING OR ADOPTING THE WORLD VIEW. The result of living by the world’s viewpoint (we will see this topic in more detail later in this study) is that unbelievers and carnal believers will follow the ways of the world, which will keep unbelievers frozen in their unbelief, and will bring believers down to the operational level of unbelievers. We will get more specific about the “ways” of the world as we proceed, but what we want to get at this point is that following the standards, routines, and principles of the world will have the effect of dragging believers down.

It is not impossible to resist the world’s influence...just very difficult. Maturity makes it easier. Eph. 2:1-2 says this:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Paul is crediting the Ephesians with a loyalty and attachment to divine principles for living, and is suggesting that they had reached a sufficient level of maturity to avoid the “ways of this world”, which they had once followed. The practices and standards of the world are hard to resist, because they are designed by the greatest genius ever created...Satan. And notice that Satan is the “ruler of the air”, meaning that anything existing in the atmosphere of the earth is ruled by him, and he is actively engaged...or “at work”...without sleep or a lunch break. His primary method of “working”, or pulling people into “worldly” practices, is making worldly activities or modes of thinking attractive, often irresistible.

Because the world is attractive, the tendency for those of us who live in it (that would be all of us) is to become “entangled” in the world’s viewpoint and methods. 2 Pet. 2:20 uses this very

word...entangled...as we see here:

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than at the beginning.

The “worse off” part has to do with divine discipline for unconfessed sin, but that is not our focus here. What we want to highlight is the word “entangled”. The world appeals to the senses; and it feeds the mind with false ideas, passing them off as syllogistic reasoning, or the right to have fun, or the need to get ahead in life...fine-sounding pursuits and justifiable engagements, all...but all throwing ropes around the hearts of world occupants. This is where the chains of the world come to bind us: in our souls. The result of this is that even believers fall for addictions of all kinds, many of them not even seen as such. These are the believers (including most of them) who blindly plod ahead in a robotic pattern of complicity, exhibiting what has been sold as “desirable” behavior...and the closer it is to some worldly “norm”, the better it is, from the world’s perspective. Anything in the world that excites or titillates or motivates can become an addiction, and everyone has at least one. These are also known as “areas of weakness”, which the world is happy to exploit. The world will *entangle* you, and apart from God you will be helpless to prevent it.

The world can certainly cause believers to stumble. We hardly see it coming, even though it comes every day. The objective of the world is to enslave us. Matt. 18:7a says, “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin!” The world is “woeful”, or condemned, because of the “things” it dangles to entice people to turn their backs on God. The world exudes a powerful gravity that constantly pulls and draws and drags us into sin (and, as we saw, into legalism). We can’t be smug for one second, and think that just because we are believers, we “have it made”. Satan’s world is designed to take advantage of any let-down of our guard, and to drag us into a pattern of behavior that corresponds with our weaknesses. The world looks at our needs and promises to fulfill them, and when we accept this, which we do without even thinking, we are selling out to the cosmic system.

2 Tim. 3:2-4b describes the state of people who have surrendered to the world:

People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to the 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....

THE WORLD IS HARD TO RESIST. These are conditions describing people in the world in the “last days”, which is NOW...the age of grace and the Holy Spirit, but also the age of the greatest Satanic campaign in history (so far), and a time when Satan’s world is overpowering and compelling. One example of a condition in these days is that people seek pleasure, rather than God. And the world delivers what is sought, because it has the products that pleasure-seekers want. These things come from the world, and 1 John 2:16, a verse we saw earlier, tells us what they include: “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.”

The things of the world are harmful and wrong. John 16:8 tells us that the Holy Spirit shows the world that it is wrong. This verse says, “When he comes, he [the Holy Spirit] will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” The world is guilty...wrong. And because it is wrong...and aggressive...it is destructive. It urges us to join in with the rest of the world, and does so in ways that we are not naturally equipped to resist. In fact, we have a natural tendency to go along with the world, because we have a sinful NATURE! James 1:14 proves this, saying, “...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” The first part of the next verse (v. 15) adds, “Then after the desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin...” So we join the world in its “guilt”, and become “wrong” right along with it. This is what the world will do to us...and what we do “in the world”.

When we think of “worldliness”, we may think of bar-hopping or cut-throat greed or blatant sexual promiscuity, but the world is actually much more subtle than that. We do not have to be decadent or corrupt to be participating in the world. All we have to do is USE it. When we use the world and all that is in it, we tend to *rely* on it. It is easy to become “engrossed” in the world when we rely on it at ground-level. In 1 Cor. 7:31, Paul said we should “use” the things of the world, but not be “engrossed” by them, as we see in the following: “...those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For the world in its present form is passing away.” The larger point that Paul is making is that we should not be attached to things in the world, including *anything* in the world. This is achieved by living as though the attachment did not exist. For example, those who “buy something” (1 Cor. 7:30) should know that it is not theirs forever, and they should be ready to pre-relinquish what they have acquired. This is true of all the things in the world that we use...we can be “owned” by them, or we can detach from them.

Summarizing this point: The tendency is for us to be “engrossed” by the things we use. When we use the things of the world, the world ATTACHES us to them. We must learn to avoid this attachment. “Things” can include jobs, money, friends, family, recreation, possessions, recognition, pleasure, approbation, knowledge, and electronic devices. Anything that we value and use can become an attachment, and any attachment can become an idol, or a distraction from God. This is why, when we “use” things in the world, we tend to become “engrossed”, or *controlled*, by these things. Nothing in the world is truly safe and innocent, and everything in the world is designed to bring us down.

WE BELONG TO CHRIST. We face a serious choice. We can belong to Christ or we can belong to the world. John 8:23 shows this dichotomy, as follows: “But he continued, ‘You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world’.” We will choose whether we want to belong to Christ, or to the world. Unbelievers make this choice by believing in Christ (see v. 24). Believers make this choice by confessing their sins, praying, studying God’s Word, and enduring God’s training. When believers choose Christ in their *lives*, having already chosen Him for their *eternity*, they will commit to processes that lead to maturity and a walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, as God has prescribed in His Word. Failure to attend to maturity and spirituality is tantamount to a default surrender to the world.

Rightfully, and in their eternal position, believers do not belong to the world. John 17:16 shows Jesus praying for the believers that He was leaving behind in the world, saying, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.” We must remember that, in our *eternal position* before God, we have the righteousness of Christ forever, which is our hedge against condemnation. This means that we belong to God and not the world. On the other hand, in our *temporal condition*, we belong either to Christ or to the world, meaning that we are either IN or OUT OF fellowship.

PRIDE AND THE WORLD. One of the things that keeps our eyes on the things of the world, and off God, is our pride. As we stated earlier, pride is faith in “self”. This bridges over to a kind faith in the world and its resources, which then emerges as a belief in ourselves, an assumption that we can depend on ourselves (in the world) for the things we need and want. We see ourselves as capable of plotting our own course, having the ability to garner the resources needed for the “good life”. Even if we doubt ourselves, we seek to change and refine ourselves in ways that will enable us to rise up and surmount all deficiencies and limitations. But pride is bad. It is number one in the list of things that God detests, as per Prov. 6:16-17a, which says, “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes...” “Haughty eyes” is one way of saying, “a heart full of pride”. Prov. 16:5 adds, “The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.” God has no regard for pride.

Pride brings destruction, as per Deut. 8:10-20, which states clearly that we become complacent when our needs have been met, and we forget God when problems are light and few. It is easy, when we have achieved comfort or success, to survey what we have done, or what we have accumulated, and to see ourselves as the primary resource for our accomplishments. Verses 13-14a in Deut. 8 says, “...and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God...” Almost invariably, we assume that what we have gained is the product of our own skillful hands, and did not come from God. Here’s the reality: Anytime we see good things in our lives, and ascribe our prowess and efforts as their producer, we are exercising pride. It is our *nature* to be proud, yet this sin will destroy us.

Pride is the most common of all sins promoted by Satan and the world. Since the world belongs to Satan, it makes sense that his own number one infraction...arrogance...would also be the sin he is most anxious to induce in humans, and he is able to use the world to do it. He persuades people to look to themselves for the development of their own happiness, meaning, success, satisfaction, security, and significance. There is no holy ground when it comes to Satan’s use or promotion of pride. It happens when we study the word, which works like this: If we do not understand the Word, it is because we did not believe the truth we heard (we like our ideas better), and Satan is standing by to snatch it away (Matt. 13:18).

Pride can also be in evidence, as we saw in Deuteronomy above, when we are blessed...since arrogance swells easily when good things come to us or happen around us. 1 Tim. 6:17 cautions against allowing prosperity to become a source for self-satisfaction and gloating. This verse says the following:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in

wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

When God blesses us, we must recognize that He is the one Who has brought good things...they are not the result of our being cute or clever or talented. Blessings come because of God's grace and God's plan, and the second we start to identify boons and benefits as the fruits of our own labor, is the time when we will begin to lose what we have gained.

Pride may exalt us in the world, but not in the kingdom of righteousness. 1 Cor. 1:30 says this about the source of righteousness:

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

APART FROM GOD WE HAVE...AND ARE...NOTHING. Jesus Christ is the only reason we are cared for, both spiritually and in the world...and we are given full access to what He offers to help us live right. He is the one we acknowledge and honor for our being sustained in this life. We build ourselves up in the world with friends, possessions, positions, and so on, but what we have has no lasting value. We will say more about how short and meaningless our lives are apart from God, but for now we establish this immutable reality: WE OWN NOTHING! 1 Tim. 6:7 reports, “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” And we can be content with what we are given for our use here, as we see in 1 Tim. 6:8, which says, “But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”

We are nothing more than feeble, helpless men and women. Ps. 9:20 says, “Strike them with terror, O Lord; let the nations know they are but men.” We are mere men, and men are nothing! Hab. 2:6b states it well: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” There is an answer to this question, but no part of God's recognition of man is based on the qualities of man himself. There is nothing about us that makes us worthy of God's attention...it is all based on God's plan, framed by God's grace. Ps. 39:6 says, “Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.” Are we starting to get the picture that our pride is misplaced, and that we are nothing? That is the true assessment of man...nothing.

SUCCESS IN THE WORLD. There are two categories of races and contests in which man can be engaged: one is produced and staged by the world, and the other takes place in the spiritual realm. Eccl. 9:11a tells us that *spiritual* contests are not won in the same way as they are in the world. This verse gives us the following: “The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned...” The world's contests require quickness, strength, money, personality, brains, skill, and even “luck”. God's contests require faith. 2 Tim. 4:7 says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Keeping faith strong is the key to winning the spiritual race. As we have suggested in this writing and in all previous

writings, this race is won by staying clean (through confession), praying, studying, trusting, and persevering through all aspects of God's training program. These don't work "in the world", but they will advance us spiritually.

A lot of corruption in the world seems to revolve around money. Heb. 13:5^a commands, "Keep yourselves free from the love of money and be content with what you have..." Prov. 23:4-5 adds the following:

Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.

The world talks a lot about goal-setting and keeping your eyes on the prize and becoming "winners". Unbelievers and carnal believers buy this and join the clamor for fame and fortune, without realizing how empty this pursuit can be. We are talking about FOCUS here...preoccupation. We are considering what we think about all day long. It is perfectly legitimate to conduct honest business affairs and to acquire funds to operate and enjoy life. It is NOT acceptable for believers to be consumed with money—and its possessions and privileges—and thus to leave God behind. This is the draw of the world, the place where the world gets us into trouble...even whole churches. There is an inexorable seduction surrounding money and all it buys, and worldly Christians succumb to its undertow willingly and blindly. One-up-man-ship is so rampant we have come to see Madison Avenue solicitations as absolute truth, and Wall Street as our temple. Once again, there is legitimacy in participation in these arenas...until our perspective becomes distorted, and our line-of-sight shifts away from God...to the world. To be mesmerized by money is—in effect—to be bowing in adoration before Satan. When money captures you, you become a slave to Satan and the world.

Acquiring large sums of money can be a trial for believers...a time of testing. Very few believers are able to get money and maintain spiritual commitment. Most see money as an automatically-good thing, and this naivety can work to their undoing, as it is almost impossible not to over-rate its worth and benefit. 1 Tim. 6:9-10 says this:

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.

Don't ignore this warning. If you are a believer and your focus is on getting rich, then you are headed for disappointment and disillusionment...even if for a time it seems that money has solved all your problems. This is the trap...preoccupation with riches can cause many more problems than it solves, plunging many believers into "ruin and destruction", even though they seem to be successful. This is what the Bible says. Believe it.

GOD EXALTS THE HUMBLE; RICHES MEAN NOTHING. Contrary to the world view, God chooses inconsequential people and things to bring down evil and the machinations of the cosmic system. 1 Cor. 1:26-29 clarifies this for us in the following:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Notice the descriptors used in this passage for the world system and its values: “human standards”, “influential”, “noble birth”, and “wise” (worldly wisdom). These are labels for things valued in the world...this set belongs to the world and not to God. His values are different, and it is His values that we want to understand and embrace. This is where the maturing believer is headed: toward a conception of what is real, what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. Man’s view will lead us into idealism, realism, experimentalism, existentialism, and a myriad of other philosophies; God’s view will lead us into truth. And his truth values spiritual and eternal realities, not worldly riches and holdings.

James 2:5-7 gives the right perspective, saying this:

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

This warning is against those, including many church parishioners, sometimes entire churches, who extol riches and honor rich people, and virtually ignore the invisible heroes who are quietly advancing the cause of Christ. It is the “scum of the earth” that God will lift up, meaning those whose values favor Him, rather than the world. James 4:5 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” 1 Cor. 4:13 adds, “...when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” To the world, we are garbage. There is no way around this. If we are living in God’s system, rather than the world’s, we will be seen in the world as worthless. But if we stand before God as what we really are...nothing...He will lift us up at the right time. This “lifting” may not include the world’s riches (although it may), but we will enjoy lives that are “rich in faith”, the beautiful outcome of which cannot be imagined. We will find the “life that is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:19).

As for those who embrace the world’s system, including believers, Prov. 24:19 tells us that they will be disappointed. This verse says, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.” This is the greatest danger for believers, and a typical deception coming from Satan’s world: that there is happiness in wealth, and that those with money and privilege have found “the good life”. Because of this misconception, it is important for growing believers to look away from what the world avails, and look more closely at what God offers.

PEACE IN THE WORLD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. John 14:27 gives a quote from Jesus, who said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” “Peace”, as we have described thoroughly in previous studies, is a sign of fellowship with God, which involves our being cleansed by having all our sins confessed. When a believer is in fellowship with God, he or she is fully “reconciled” with God, which is the actual meaning of the word “peace”. This is what Christ left...communion with our heavenly Father. This, we are reminded, has a dual application, in that we are *saved* (forever), but also that we *have the communion of fellowship* (intermittently, in time). As believers, our goal is to remain in fellowship, because that is where we can live in harmony with the Holy Spirit, so He can empower us for true (divine) good in the world. The world cannot offer this. With the world, what you see is what you get. Oddly, it’s what we *don’t* see that is truly valuable to us.

GOD IS POWERFUL AND HE CONTROLS OUTCOMES. All things that occur have been factored into God’s plan, but this does not mean that everything that happens is what God wants. We have free will and God works around our choices. He also works around this reality: The world is Satan’s, wherein he has great (but not absolute) power to control what happens within its systems. God masterfully works around this, according to His purposes. Where God’s ultimate and sovereign power comes in is in His PROVIDING OUTCOMES. Outcomes comprise God’s plan. He works all things, good or bad, toward specific objectives and results, both temporally and eternally.

God supersedes and surpasses all other realities, because He MADE it all, and HE DETERMINES THE OUTCOME for everything. This takes a BIG God, which is something we tend to ignore. Most believers acknowledge God’s existence, and see Him as an incidental convenience to be referenced on an as-needed basis. The God Who plans ALL deserves ALL our attention.

Ps. 86:10, along with many other verses throughout the Bible, tells us that God is not small, or some minor force. He is great! This verse says, “For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.” Job 26:14 shows the degree to which our view of God is understated. This verse declares, “And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?” God is big!

WHAT GOD OFFERS IS GOOD. In distinguishing our view of God from our view of the world, we see also that what God gives is good, and what the world offers is bad (or turns out that way). Our best care below...comes from above. For more on this, we turn to Job, as we continue to explore the evidence that what God gives is good, and that what the world offers is not. The outcome for what we get from the world is seen in Job 27:13-23, which we will quote in its entirety to get its full effect, as follows:

Here is the fate God allots to the wicked, the heritage a ruthless man receives from the Almighty: However many his children, their fate is the sword; his offspring will never have enough to eat. The plague will bury those who survive him, and their widows will not weep for them. Though he heaps up silver like dust and clothes like piles of clay, what he lays up the righteous will wear, and the innocent will divide his silver. The house he builds is like a moth’s

cocoon, like a hut made by a watchman. He lies down wealthy, but will do so no more; when he opens his eyes, all is gone. Terrors overtake him like a flood; a tempest snatches him away in the night. The east wind carries him off, and he is gone; it sweeps him out of his place. It hurls itself against him without mercy as he flees headlong from its power. It claps its hands in derision and hisses him out of his place.

Pretty convincing. The “wicked” include all who embrace and engage the cosmic system, but the outcomes seen in this passage seem to apply mostly to *believers* who draw life from the world, rather than God; they are under the judgment of divine discipline. When they choose the world, they accept the consequences it brings. But all ANY BELIEVER needs is WHAT GOD GIVES. Acts 17:24-25 says this:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and 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.

Everything good comes from God. This is confirmed in James 1:16-17a, which says, “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...” The really good stuff comes only from God. And it goes to those who “love God”, as per James 1:12. Believers who “love God” are those who are in fellowship, who walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, and whose faith is growing. These are the ones who get “life and breath and everything else”.

JESUS OVERCOMES THE WORLD. The good news is that Jesus has overcome the world. In John 16:33, Jesus is reported as saying, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Take heart, but don’t celebrate just yet. Christ is encouraging us with the announcement that He has triumphed over the world, but He is also telling us that, as long as we are still in the world, we will have *trouble*. We have trouble because of Satan and the world, and also because our training requires that we endure hardship. Perseverance in suffering will strengthen us, and enable us to demonstrate God’s goodness to men and to angels. (For more on this, see *God’s Training Program*, the chapter titled, “The War Against God”.)

We access God’s goodness and His rich provisions by using the methods He gives us for accessing His grace and power. Instead of frantically vying for more goods and services offered by the world, we search for God’s superior gifts. We want to LIVE in the victory that is already won. This victory is, first of all, for believers only. 1 John 5:5 says, “Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” By believing that Jesus is the Son of God, we become born again and saved. This qualifies us then to receive—through growth and following God’s ways for living—the resources for dealing with the world.

Jesus said, as shown in John 12:46, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.” When we, as believers, “stay in darkness”, or operate “out of fellowship”, we will not be where Christ intended, and we will not participate in the victory that He has won. Our

victory over the world begins with salvation, and then continues by our staying in fellowship through the confession of our sins. This is followed, as we have said many times, by prayer, Bible study, and so on. We must be clear as to our main point: Victory over the world NOW, in life, is not automatic. We have to access grace resources and follow grace methods to claim this victory.

THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD VS THE HOLY SPIRIT. There is a “spirit” in the world, consisting of the spiritual powers of Satan, greeted and welcomed by the nature of human beings. This “spirit”, allied with sinful natures, is in opposition to the Holy Spirit, Who indwells all believers. “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us” (1 Cor. 2:12). A lot of truth is given here. This verse tells us that we have received the Holy Spirit, Who helps us know the truth about our Provider, and informs us that God is the giver of all good things, beginning with salvation and then continuing beyond. We have not received the spirit of the world...it does not indwell us...but the world and its spiritual underwriter Satan do not go away, just because the Holy Spirit comes to reside within us. They remain all around us. We have to live in the world, as we said before, and we will do this successfully to the degree that the indwelling Spirit controls us, enabling us to counter the spirit of the world. And the Holy Spirit will control us only when we have been cleansed and are “walking in the Spirit”, which is—in essence—“walking by faith”. And we will walk by faith increasingly as we grow. See how this works? It’s all part of God’s plan.

DEALING WITH THE WORLD. When we are “righteous” or cleansed, as per 1 John 1:9, then God will deliver us from the ravages of the world and Satan. A good example for this is given in 2 Pet. 2:5, which says, “...if he [God] did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah...” A second example is seen in 2 Pet. 2:6-8, where Lot, a “righteous man” (v. 7), was “rescued” (also v. 7), when Sodom and Gomorrah were “burned to ashes” (v. 6). The *principle for deliverance of the righteous* is seen throughout Scripture, exemplified in 1 Pet. 2:9, which sums up the reason Noah and Lot were spared. This verse says, “...if this is so [that God rescued Noah and Lot], then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials...” The clear suggestion is that a righteous man will be rescued from disaster...based on God’s will and directed toward the best outcome for such a man. Remember this: A righteous man is one who is clean before his God.

So *righteousness* is one way to avert troubles from the world and Satan. Another way is to acquire *wisdom* (often referred to as knowledge) from the Word. 2 Pet. 1:3-4 says this:

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

This passage is telling us that the way to escape the nefarious influence of the world, and avoid the suffering it brings, is through knowledge of God. When we know about Him and focus our attention on Him, the power of the world over our consciousness is reduced, and its influence is diminished. Escape comes through knowledge.

Knowledge suggests maturity. Until we are well underway toward growth, we will not be able to resist the world. Gal. 4:3 tells us, “So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world.” An application of this verse is that “baby Christians” are unable to resist the world. Philosophies, practices, cultures, traditions, and customs bombard unprepared individuals, demanding conformity and complicity. “You must be normal, you freak!” So the world uses everything at its disposal to impose its views on believers, because they are potential resisters of the world’s point of view.

The only way to avoid being swept off our feet by the forces of the world is to have our hearts prepared...our minds renewed. Rom. 12:2a says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” By learning Scripture, we can understand the techniques and methods that God makes available to enable us to withstand the lure of the world and the attacks of the devil. We will know then how to fulfill Col. 3:2, which says, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” And we will satisfy the requirements of Col. 3:15-17, which gives us the following:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This passage calls on us to do these things:

Stay in fellowship. “Let the peace of Christ [reconciliation with Christ] rule in your hearts.”

Give thanks to God. “...be thankful.”

Learn the Word and gain wisdom. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

Exercise our gifts through fellowship and growth. “...teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...”

Walk in the Spirit of Christ. “...do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

When we learn the Word in fellowship, and grow through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the word will “dwell in us richly” and we can accumulate spiritual resources that fortify us against the world. Learning the Word, then, is central, since we cannot do what we don’t know HOW to do! The world is standing by to prevent this, as we see in Luke 8:14, which says, “The seed [teaching of truth] that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches, and pleasures, and they do not mature.” Preoccupation with the world and its accoutrements prevents truth from processing into our hearts. This confines what we learn to the level of “head knowledge”, preventing it from processing into our hearts as “understanding” and “wisdom”. When we study the Word, we must believe it and cherish it for it to be digested and become part of our spiritual make-up, to move us toward maturity.

The Word is taught to people with hearts that yearn for it, and to those whose sins are “cleansed” through confession. Eccl. 2:26 says, “To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness...” God is pleased with believers who are walking in the Spirit and maturing. These are the ones who are getting greater understanding of God’s methods and are doing things God’s way. These are the ones to whom Jesus was saying, “Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him” (Luke 8: 18). We must listen, and listen carefully, so that we can learn *more*, which opens the way to learning *much more*. This is what the world wants to prevent.

As we grow, faith increases, and the victory that is ours for all eternity is realized in our earthly lives. 1 John 5:4 tells us, “...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.” The application, of course, is that only the saved will participate in the ultimate victory over Satan and the world. But there is another application that must not be missed. The book of 1st John deals with fellowship as the way to erase past sins, and as the way to strengthen oneself against future sins. (For a full discussion on the application of 1st John regarding the walk of believers, see *Bible Basics on Living by God’s Standards, Pathway to Righteousness*, “Fellowship in John’s First Epistle”, beginning on page 59). Believers who are “born of God” are not only those who are “born again” at salvation, but those who are “spiritually alive” through the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. Only believers who are *alive* can share in the victory. In other words, the only way to beat the world is to play on God’s team, because that is the one that is winning. This involves more than just being saved; we must also be serious about our spiritual *condition* and *walk*. If we aren’t, we will remain “losers”, even though we are ultimately “winners” in eternity.

BEING DEAD TO THE WORLD. In Gal. 6:14, we see another truth with a dual application. This one tells us that we are dead to the world, and the world to us. Paul said, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” There are two ways to look at this, as follows: First of all, someday the world and all believers will be dead to each other. The extended outlook for the world is its demise, while the long-range projection for believers is that we will eventually be disconnected from the world and its influence for all eternity..

But there’s another plausible application, considered to be currently active, which is this: Both the cosmic system, and believers within it, are very much operative and thriving, constantly alive to each other. But being “dead” to the world is still possible, even while we are living within it. What we believe is that we can be dead to the world and the world to us, *in time*, IF we are operating in God’s arena, rather than the world’s. If we are serving the world and our flesh, then the world is alive to us, and we are very much alive to the world. But if we are being empowered by the Holy Spirit, the world is effectively “dead” to us.

It boils down, once again, to “position” and “condition”. Since we have “died” to the world and its evil in our eternal *position*, we must also “die” to it in our temporal *condition*. Our condition is what we are experiencing now, while we are alive on earth. This is the “Christian life”, which encapsulates

everything we do in time. And—as we are learning so well...keeping our condition pure is our first objective.

When we follow the principles of the world, including trying to keep all the rules of the “law”, we will fail. Col. 2:20 asks this question: “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...” In context, Paul is equating the rules of the world with the law, and is asking the Colossians why they are submitting to it. Whether we are seeking evil through sin, or through legalism, it all leads to slavery which binds us to the world. Reminder: When we are alive to the world, through sin or legalism, we are serving Satan and the world, and are standing as enemies against God.

THE WORLD AMOUNTS TO NOTHING, AS ILLUSTRATED BY SOLOMON. One of the best illustrations in Scripture for the undermining influence of the world, and the weakness of human nature, is found in the life of Solomon. Solomon, author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and certain Psalms, acclaimed as the wisest man that ever lived, was an absolute failure. He spent the bulk of his life serving the world, and participated in every aspect of the world’s success and pleasure. He is the perfect example of how a born-again believer *can* participate in every evil and wrong activity and fully adopt and live by the viewpoint of the world. (For an extended discussion on the life of Solomon, see *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*, “The World”, pp. 103-106.)

Eccl. 2:10-11 summarizes Solomon’s life in the world, as follows:

I denied myself nothing myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

By the time we finish our discussion of Solomon’s life, you will see the parts of his life that contributed to his conclusion that life is “meaningless, a chasing after the wind”. Solomon accessed and acquired and experienced everything the world had to offer, yet concluded, over and over, that it is all “meaningless”. In Eccl. 1:2, Solomon introduces his story by describing experiences in the world as being completely devoid of meaning. “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless’.” Nothing in the world has meaning, according to Solomon. And his story makes this crystal clear.

A quote from *God’s Training Program for Believers* gives us a good idea as to what happened in Solomon’s life, as we see in the following:

Solomon had wisdom, pleasure, wealth, sex, exceptional achievement, romantic love, friendships, possessions, looks, education, power, fame, and intellectual stimulation. But he spent 35 to 40 years out of fellowship, during which time he relied on assets in Satan’s world to satisfy himself. These things, however, brought him no joy, and he came to see it all as meaningless...or “vanity”. Ecclesiastes is an account of Solomon’s failure to achieve happiness in the cosmic system. He drew from the world all that it offers, but did not receive and

experience what the world promised. He relied on the world for provision and forgot all about God and His superior provision, because his faith was directed toward a meaningless world. (*God's Training Program for Believers*, p. 103)

All of Solomon's efforts represented "chasing after the wind", and proved that there is nothing to be gained "under the sun", as we saw in Eccl. 2:11. It is pointless to chase after the wind, and everything under the sun (as opposed to "above the sun", or within God's domain) is meaningless. Solomon found no meaning in the world until he had exhausted its resources for providing meaning, happiness, and peace. It was only then that he realized that the world can offer nothing good, and that everything truly worthwhile comes from God. Solomon's response at the conclusion of his experience in the world is startling, as we see in Eccl. 2:17: "So I hated my life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." The ways of the world lead ultimately to grief and misery, and the end result is "hating one's own life", as Solomon did. This outcome can be contrasted with that of Paul in Phil. 4:11b, where he said, "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." Solomon was relying on the world; Paul was relying on God.

Solomon discovered the *hard way* that life on earth is short, and that most of the things that excite us, titillate us, draw us, fascinate us, and motivate us are fleeting and insignificant. We will all be dead soon, and memories of our lives will fade to nothing after a generation or so. All that we thought was so important during our lifetime will have no meaning, and all that we have acquired will be lost or decayed. Life in the world amounts to nothing. Zero. Emptiness. The meaningful life is the one attached to God...every day in every way. While we are here, anything in the world can become jaded over time through custom and familiarity. There is no permanence in anything in life, even the people in it, except for God. There is nothing that gives our lives significance apart from an ongoing relationship and fellowship with our Creator.

Solomon conducted eight experiments, each of which was done to find meaning and substance in the world, and all of which failed. Here are the experiments which he set up that were intended to fulfill his dreams, drives, and aspirations:

Anthropocentric academic speculation. This high-sounding phrase simply describes a man-centered focus and study. This attempt to rationalize man's existence and worth sees the natural man as the center of the universe. Participating in academic education and acquiring human wisdom are seen as the way to achieve meaning and significance. Solomon concluded that these are vain pursuits.

Partying. This includes drinking, taking mood-altering drugs, seeking sensual pleasure, and doing virtually whatever you can think of. Solomon found out how endless, exhausting, and unsatisfying such practices can be.

Being overly-focused on the family. Focus on the family has a nice ring, and is usually appropriate, but when concentration on the family and its legacy reaches extremes, it easily be-

comes an idol that supplants God. This turned out to be a disappointing experiment for Solomon.

Becoming over-organized and time-oriented. Over-scheduling and obsession with time is empty apart from its connection with the eternal Father.

Being preoccupied with money and success and achievement. Solomon now has our attention. He believed that money made his world go around, until his life spun out of control and he found out that acquiring great wealth apart from God's plan leads to a dead-end, and eventually a precipitous drop. He also discovered that his brilliant achievements did not bring peace to his troubled heart.

Building power and a reputation. Fame and absolute authority are appealing, but these almost always lead to disillusionment and even bitterness. Solomon was highly acclaimed as the wisest man in the world, and had thousands of slaves to command, yet he was miserable. All the accolades from all the sycophants in the world could not fill the hole in his soul.

Seeking sex. Once again, Solomon captures our notice. This one is a trap that draws us in and then throws its nets around us. Sexual lust is never satisfied and will inevitably lead to an insatiable search for the ultimate, final experience. But this will not come, and Solomon learned that the pursuit of sexual satisfaction through man's own devices can only usher in shattered illusions and emptiness.

Being a hero. We are all the heroes in our own stories, and this can become a drive that motivates us to seek recognition through our own achievements. This causes us to focus on ourselves as the source for all greatness and nobility, but this drive cannot be sustained and will eventually fade, leading to frustration and foolishness. (These experiments are described in Robert McClaughlin's *Ecclesiastes* series.)

It was only after all of Solomon's experiments, spanning decades, that he found purpose in life, and that is when he did his writing. He could not find his purpose in the world, and had to reach the point that he saw life in the world as empty and meaningless, and life with God as full and purposeful. For us to properly assess this conclusion, we must have the right perspective, and measure "empty" and "full" by God's standards. Life in the world is very difficult for true seekers, yet it can be great beyond description for those who endure. And it will lead to the life we are promised beyond this life that is perfect and eternal. We seek a full life today, and we wait for a fulfilled life tomorrow that is "out of this world".

Getting the Fullness of God

INTRODUCTION. The final step on the ladder to spiritual maturity is getting the fullness of God. There is nothing greater than God's fullness, so getting it must be the ultimate experience a human being can have on earth (after salvation). Like most things in the Christian life, there are conditions that must be met for this fullness to be obtained, and these need to be examined. We want to learn what is required to receive this extraordinary blessing. The exact content and nature of the fullness of God will be reserved for a future study, but for now we want to understand the means for acquiring it. Whatever it is, it has to be grand.

All of the techniques and methods we have examined in the past play a significant part in this process, to which we will add some things that we have recently extrapolated from Scripture. We give the "old" concepts first, and then we will explore the new things which have been added. Both the old and the new are essential. Our objective is to understand what it takes to get the fullness of God.

Some of the studies which will come into play as part of the pathway to God's fullness includes the following: the ineffectiveness of law-keeping to save us or make us right; the importance of faith for salvation and the Christian walk; how believers can deal with sin; the roles of mercy, grace, and love in our salvation and growth; the place of Christ and the Holy Spirit in our living the Christian life; and the existence and place of God's unfailing love. Using these as foundations for understanding and causing our spiritual refinement, we will see what God has designed to enable us to get His fullness. Our goal is to get the "whole measure of all the fullness of God".

THE FUTILITY OF EFFORTS TO KEEP THE LAW. Believers are people, too, which means that self-awareness, self-care, and some measure of self-trust is inevitable, even among the children of God. Customarily, we see ourselves as responsible for the direction and outcomes of our own lives, and assume that anything good that happens will need to come from our own efforts. This assumption is not entirely misplaced, except that it omits the most important component in our lives and ignores the ultimate power and reason for our existence: God. When our efforts are self-generated and self-propelled, they will have no significance on the divine, infinite scale of God. Yet we cannot shake the sense that WE can do it, and we even embrace the idea that we SHOULD do it. Thus it is that we operate within an illusion that we can please God with our achievements, and that His blessings will flow if we just follow legal guidelines and adhere to what we understand as godly standards. This is our biggest error.

We have written about the futility of our efforts to keep the "law" in virtually all of our writings, and have clearly delineated the folly of a finite being trying to perform acts aimed at impressing an infinite God. The odd thing is that the very actions we think are pleasing God have just the opposite effect. They cause God to be *displeased* with us, and He has stated this clearly in His Word. Perhaps the most poignant statement of God's attitude toward "rule-keeping" is found in Gal. 3:1-5, which we quote

here entirely:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

Circumcision is a sign of commitment to the law. Committing to the law is all or none. If you are in, you are all in. There is no such thing as split commitment between law-keeping and other systems for godly living. At any given moment, we cannot be somewhat legalistic and somewhat spiritual. These are mutually exclusive. So if we are going to keep the law just “a little”, we have to keep it all. And if we are going to walk in the Spirit, WE CANNOT CLING TO ANY ASPECT OF “GOOD BEHAVING” AS A PART OF OUR SPIRITUAL CONNECTION AND OPERATION!! Put simply, human effort is disqualified and discarded as having any spiritual value whatsoever in God’s system of grace. This is why we are told to “stop trying” (see the earlier article by that name).

We look at life from the inside out, and what we see...all we see...is the world right there in front of us. And since all we see is the world, how can we not see ourselves in it and not think that we alone are the ones who must make good things happen, believing that the world will cooperate and reward us? Applied to the Christian life, we are influenced to assume that good things come from us, and therefore we seek to establish our own righteousness. Rom. 10:3-4 says this:

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. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This verse reflects the tendency we have to see ourselves as the manufacturers of good. But our best is as “filthy rags”. We need God’s righteousness. The righteousness of Jesus Christ comes at salvation when we initially believe in Him. Other righteousness comes after that time whenever we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit and He is producing His righteousness within us. But the point we are making presently from this verse is that we must not try to establish our own righteousness by attempting to keep the law. Even our best efforts will not enable us to fulfill the law, as per John 7:19a, where Jesus told the law-keepers of His day, “Yet not one of you keeps the law.” James explained how hard it is to keep the law in James 2:8-10, where he said the following:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Even keeping the new “Law of Love” which Christ brought is impossible, because human beings cannot produce divine love. This means we can’t rely on the law as a system for making us righteous.

Adherence to any set of “rules” will not contribute to our salvation or to our Christian lives. Gal. 2:15-16 says this:

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Eph. 2:8-9 adds, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Law-keeping cannot save us, and it cannot enable us to live righteously. It can make nothing perfect, according to Heb. 7:18-19a, which says, “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect).” The law has no power to give us the eternal perfection we receive at salvation, and makes no contribution to our growth and maturity afterwards.

The law also creates a kind of slavery for believers. Gal. 4:9 puts it like this:

But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles [the law]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again.

We are enslaved by attempting to keep the law. We are buried by its avalanche, and will live “under” it. Gal. 4:21 challenged the Galatians with this question: “Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?” To be under the law is to be obligated to all it requires, and no one can do this. Yet being “under the law” means that the legal system of law-keeping is the way we have chosen to live our Christian lives. And we never give up, because we think that if we try long enough and hard enough, we can be successful, and then God will be pleased with us. The lesson we want to learn is that it is the *grace system*, and not the *system of law-keeping*, that gives us what we need and pleases God. Paul, a former Pharisee, said in Phil. 3:6 that he had achieved a kind of “faultlessness” in the area of law-keeping, saying, “...as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.” Then in verse 9, he contrasts his own human righteousness with true righteousness, or the righteousness of Jesus Christ: “...and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”

So under the law, we get slavery; under grace, we get the righteousness that comes from God. The law is used to make us aware of our weaknesses and failures. This has the effect of causing us to see our need for salvation before we believe in Christ, and then prompts us after we are saved to continually confess our sins. Rom. 3:19-20 makes it clear that righteousness will never be achieved through law-keeping, as follows:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become

conscious of sin.

When we break the law, we sin, but the key to not sinning is not accomplished through efforts to keep the law. Rom. 2:12b says, "...and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law." We see that being "under the law" will result in judgment, rather than the achievement of righteousness. Rom. 4:13-15a confirms this, saying the following:

It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath.

LAW CONTRASTED WITH FAITH. When we see conformity to a system of do's and do-not's as the way to achieve righteousness, we choose the law to save us or to make us right before God, and our faith is directed toward the very thing that will cause us to be judged. This will bring condemnation to unbelievers and discipline to believers. Law and faith are exclusive sets; there is no overlap whatsoever. If you are practicing rule-keeping, you are "under the law"; if you are exercising faith, you are out from under the law and under "grace", or God's system of righteousness. Gal. 5:4-5 addresses believers who are trying to live their lives under the law, saying this:

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from [or "failed"] grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

God does not bless us for keeping the law, even though we perpetually think that if we keep the rules by "not sinning", we will get God's best. This is backwards. God's blessings do not come because we keep rules, but because we access his grace techniques and assets by faith. Nothing good ever comes from trying to keep the law. We see this once more in Rom. 3:21-22, which concludes this:

But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Notice that righteousness comes AWAY FROM THE LAW. There is no righteousness anywhere near the law. When we depend on the law for "goodness", we negate faith. But when we exercise faith, we give the law its place, which is to show our weakness and our need for God's strength and righteousness.

Ironically, by rejecting the law as a system of righteousness, we "uphold it". In Rom. 3:31, after a lengthy advisory about the dangers and pitfalls and uselessness of law-keeping, Paul asks an ironic question: "Do we then nullify the law by this faith?" He then answers: "Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." When we operate in the grace/fait system, the law is "upheld". This means that it fulfills its purpose, which is to serve as a mirror to our inadequacy. Do you see what this is saying? By choosing faith as our means for pleasing God, we fulfill the law, or uphold it. On the other hand, trying to meet the requirements of the law, or "trying hard", will have the effect of placing us under the law as its slaves, and we will perpetually fail to meet its standards.

Law-keeping is attractive, because it gives us something concrete that we can “do”, but this is not the way to the full life that God has in mind for us. This will come only through faith, as we shall see.

Rom. 3:27-28 gives an apt contrast between faith and law-keeping as the way to acquire and exhibit righteousness. This passage says the following:

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

A clear contrast can be seen, then, between “believing” and “following the rules” for justification and cleanliness. Rom. 9:30-32^a adds this:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.

Neither salvation nor the Christian life involves “doing”. They involve “receiving”. We receive salvation through faith, and then we live the Christian life by faith. Faith enables us to receive what we cannot acquire by what we do.

Further contrast between faith and law-keeping is seen in Gal. 3:10-12, which says this:

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith.” The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them”..

The believer who lives by rules must live by them perfectly for them to be of value. This has not happened in all of human history, excluding Jesus Christ, of course. We are saved by faith, and we must live by faith. Gal. 2:17-21 gives affirmation to this truth, saying this:

But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

The Christian life is not rule-keeping. It is the life of Christ! He lives *through* us; otherwise, the life we are living is not His, even though His Spirit indwells us. Believers can live and think independently of God, seek their own pathways in the world, and trust in the law, the world, and themselves for fullness in life. But the complete life, the life that is “real life”, will not be found, apart from the saving life of Christ operating through them. If we could do it on our own, Christ would not have died. He died because we CANNOT do it without Him. The key to His living through us is faith, and this faith is

strengthened by using God's grace techniques and assets, which we have seen many times before, and which we will certainly see again and again.

CRUCIAL TECHNIQUE: DEALING WITH SIN. God does not condone sin, and will punish it in some way and to some degree, as long as it remains on the sin record of a believer. It is important to understand that sin must be cleared from our record for us to have fellowship with God and enjoy the benefits of His presence within us. The stain of sin on our ledger negates our peaceful walk with the Father, and truncates His power within us. We always remain His children, but we are not in His "good graces" when sin goes untended in our lives.

When we sin, we can anticipate God's discipline. The purpose of discipline is to drive us back to grace, where we will find mercy and forgiveness in God's grace. And when sin is great, grace stretches to match the kind and size of the sin, if we exercise our privilege of confessing them for forgiveness. So is this a ticket to sin freely without repercussion? Of course not! Paul said, in Rom. 6:1-2: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" The purpose of "increased grace" is to show that no sin is too great for God to forgive, if we follow His method for availing divine mercy.

John indicated that his purpose for writing the first epistle of John was so that his audience would no longer sin. 1 John 2:1a says, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will no sin." But then he turns around in the second half of this verse and says, "But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." He had just said in 1 John 1:8 and 10 that we ALL sin, without exception, so the phrase, "if anybody does sin", as seen in 2:1b, must mean, "if anybody sins, and we all will". And what happens when we do? Jesus Christ intercedes for us, and He has never lost a case yet, because He appeals to the Father with His finished work on the cross.

We will sin! John knew it. God knows it. And every believer *should* know it. We will never achieve sinless perfection. Knowing that we will sin leaves us with a need to address the sins we commit, which takes us to 1 John 1. This chapter talks about accessing God's cleansing of our sins through confession, which restores fellowship with God. Verse 9 tells us that confession will expunge and remove the sins we commit, and completely clear our sin record. Then and only then will we be in communion with the indwelling Holy Spirit, and have His control and energy restored within our hearts. And only at that time will we have the benefit of increased strength to manage and reduce the practice of sin in our lives. This, as we have said many times, is the product of the control of the Spirit, complemented by a steady progression toward maturity.

Jer. 2:32b, with Jer. 2:35, tell us it is not good to say we have not sinned, which is a refusal to acknowledge our sins in honest confession. This passage says, "Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number....you say, 'I am innocent; he is not angry with me.' But I will pass judgment on you because you say, 'I have not sinned'." God will discipline the kind of pride that will not admit sin. What is it that God wants from us? Self-generated good deeds? No. He wants us to realize our inability to manage sin by ourselves, and He wants us to acknowledge His grace in forgiving our wrongdoings. He wants us to see that our imperfections are not as great or important as His love and forgiveness.

Ironically, by *admitting our sins*, we are strengthened against sin by being *restored to fellowship* with God.

To confess our sins, we must recognize them. Fortunately, as we move toward maturity, we have a better discernment of good and evil. Heb. 5:14 says, “But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.” Evil is often disguised as good, and can be hard to see, especially given the daunting urges of the sinful nature, which is blind to evil and its effects. But growth and maturity enlighten us, so that we can see evil for what it is. And when we SEE evil within and without ourselves, we will be able to confess it and maintain our fellowship with God.

Discipline is designed to prompt us to see our mistakes and confess them, so that we can return to service to the Lord fully empowered by His Spirit to perform the work of His Kingdom of Light. But discipline is not our greatest motivator for confession; it is love. Rom. 2:4 says, “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” God’s love and mercy and kindness lead us...urge us...to confess our sins. And when we confess, forgiveness comes. Ps. 51:1-4 confirms the involvement of confession in forgiveness, saying the following:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

1 Cor. 11:31-32 conveys the same concept, saying this:

But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we [believers] are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

Our being cleansed and no longer “judged” is not a matter of “stopping” the sin, so much as it is acknowledging it, and seeing it as God sees it. Over time, sin will subside, when we use God’s method for dealing with it, and we will increasingly fulfill John’s goal, which is that we “not sin”.

When our focus is on God, sin will be reduced. If our focus is on “not sinning”, some changes might occur, but they will be spotty and inconsistent, and will probably just become more subtle, but no less deadly. The ultimate outcome of self-effort in trying to battle sin will be an eventual *increase* in sin, and when this happens, spiritual production will be minimized, or halted altogether.

When we sin, what should we do? Agonize at length, vow never to do the “thing” again, do penance, hide? No! We are to CONFESS our known sins to God with the assurance that He will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). And then we should RESUME OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES WITH CONFIDENCE AND COMMITMENT TO GROWTH AND A CLOSER WALK WITH GOD! Move on! When God forgives, we should accept this by faith and keep on going. We don’t have time to pine away in guilt over our failings...just confess and get up and go. 1 Sam.12:20 encapsulates this very well, saying, “‘Do not be afraid,’ Samuel replied. ‘You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.’” To hang on to guilt and remorse AFTER

we have confessed is to discount the grace and power of God. It is fine to be ashamed before we have confessed, but to do so afterward is a repudiation of grace and a hindrance to our service. The amount of time we should spend before returning to service after we confess...is NONE!

When Samuel indicated that we should not “turn away from the Lord”, but “serve”, he implied that something can happen when we do evil that can prevent us from entirely “walking away” from God. That something bridges the gap between “doing evil” and being qualified to “serve”. That something is forgiveness, and from what we see repeatedly in Scripture, this comes to believers only through confession in some form. I believe the base condition seen in confession is humility, a sort of perpetual awareness of God’s greatness and bigness. This allows us to confess openly, and keeps us from “turning away”, even when we sin, because the attitude of confession is constantly present. The result is constant cleansing.

With constant cleansing comes the unbroken control and power of the Holy Spirit, without which no good can be accomplished. When the condition of our “being” reflects a connection with God, our “doing” will follow, because the Holy Spirit will be performing His work through us. Grace will correct our “being” when we operate in humility and faith. Only then will what we are “doing” have any impact. Correct *being*, then, precedes correct *doing*. Walking in the Spirit comes before the production of divine righteousness.

As we learn to walk in humility, and confess as often as we pray (non-stop), we will grow into greater maturity, and spirituality will become a constant in our lives. With greater growth and fellowship, even our choices will be shaped by the Word and the indwelling Spirit. God is the focal point of all growth and spiritual connection, and our attention to ourselves should be limited to an attitude of humility and an abiding thirst for Him. When we seek God because we know we have no life without Him, the rest will follow. When our eyes are on Him, we draw on His strength. When our eyes are on ourselves and our own needs and abilities, sin will easily dominate. To deal with sin, we do not look at the sin, for any longer that it takes to confess it; we look always toward the One who has the power to forgive it. (See Rom. 3:20, compared with 1 John 1:9.)

Gal. 5:16-17 (NET) says the following:

But I say, live by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.

When we confess our sins continually, and build our faith through study, prayer, and God’s training, we will be able to “live by the Spirit”, or “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25, NET). This is our singular goal: to walk by the power of the Holy Spirit, so His divine good can be produced in and through us. When we mature to the point that we can do this, sin will have no place or power in our lives. When we can walk in the infinite power of God, the character of the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ will be formed within us, and God will be glorified. Gal. 4:19 says, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...” When this happens, His character will displace ours,

and we will shine with His light.

THE UNDERPINNING FOR RECEIVING GOD’S FULLNESS: GOD’S MERCY, GRACE, AND LOVE. We could go on and on about all the features of God’s divine essence, but we are currently reviewing principles that will help us understand how to receive the fullness of God, so we will look primarily at God’s mercy, grace, and love, since these divine qualities contribute most to the process of God dispensing His fullness to us.

GOD’S MERCY. God’s mercy is rich and full, as are His love and grace. We will look at each of these individually, and see how they contribute to our becoming eligible for the fullness of God. Without these qualities, we would not have a relationship with God, let alone be qualified for His fullness. Eph. 2:4-10 describes the operation of God’s mercy, in conjunction with the other qualities of God that we will note: grace and love. Here is what this passage says:

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

As a result of the qualities of God, and His perfect plan, we are able to have a relationship with Him by a simple act of believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He rose from the dead. God shows mercy and forgives us when we believe (salvation) or confess (Christian living), not because we deserve it, but because of His mercy—generated by love, enacted by grace.

God’s mercy is extolled throughout Scripture. For example, we see His mercy cited in the Psalms. Ps. 106:1 says, “Praise Jehovah! Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever” (*A Literal Translation of the Bible*). Ps. 103:17 says, “But the mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting, even to everlasting, on those who fear Him...” (*A Literal Translation of the Bible*). James 5:11b adds, “The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

The word “mercy” is often translated “love” in Scripture, but we distinguish mercy from love, because we want to see the nuances of difference between them. God’s love is the underpinning for everything, and mercy is an extension of that love. The function of mercy is to spawn forgiveness. This is what we see in Acts 2:38-39, which says this:

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

We have discussed in previous studies several topics embedded in this passage, and will not use space to review them here, except to say that “repent” is changing one’s mind about the gospel; “be baptized”

means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, which places us into union with Christ; the “gift of the Holy Spirit” is His coming to dwell within all believers; and the “calling” is the process of God recognizing those who have a desire to have a relationship with Him, with the result that He gets the gospel message to them. The main point we want to glean from this passage is that the primary event at salvation is the “forgiveness of sins”. The work of Jesus Christ is completed, so He is now sitting at the right hand of His Father, while the Holy Spirit is completing the work of God’s plan on earth. All of it is a labor of love, and the product of mercy. And forgiveness is the outcome.

Rev. 1:5b (NET) gives the right perspective of the work now completed, which has enabled our salvation, saying, “To the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his own blood.” The labor is one of love, the outcome is forgiveness, and the product is freedom...or deliverance from condemnation. Matt. 26:28 fleshes this out further, declaring, “This is the blood of my covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (See also Heb. 9:22 and 1 John 2:12.) Mercy brings forgiveness, which makes us the beneficiaries of eternal life. This forgiveness is completed through the blood of Christ, a benefit we did not work for.

When forgiveness is completed, it is absolute. There are no residual stains that remain after forgiveness is enacted. The removal of sins, once conditions are met, is unequivocal and eternal. This applies to forgiveness through salvation, and the forgiveness we receive when we confess our sins as believers. God will not remember our sins after they are forgiven. Jer. 31:34b says, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” Heb. 10:17b echoes this declaration, saying, “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And Rom. 4:7-8 adds, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.” There is no cleansing like God’s, and it comes to every penitent believer.

Forgiveness is crucial. We cannot count on being “good”...we will sin, even when we are generating “human good works”. This means we must count on being “forgiven”. Ironically, it is through our acknowledgement of our “not-goodness” that this forgiveness comes (1 John 1:9). God alone forgives (Ps. 85:2), and He alone causes “goodness”. He will never hold our failings against us, but WE MUST SEEK FORGIVENESS for His mercy to operate and bring this about.

God’s infinite mercy has us covered, regardless of the duration or intensity of a carnal state of either depravity or self-righteousness (both are equally bad). And He doesn’t groan when we come to Him for forgiveness, saying something like, “Oh, it’s you again. I’m beginning to think you are hopeless. But alright, I’ll overlook your mistakes this time, but my patience is running thin.” This is the typical view people have of God. But the thing we will learn is that God’s patience, mercy, grace, and love are tireless and endless, as long as we COME TO HIM for forgiveness. In fact, God LOVES to show us mercy. Micah 7:18-19 says the following about God’s mercy and forgiveness:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot.

Instead of perpetual anger, God shows consistent mercy, but what is more: God LOVES to show mercy. I believe this is because He is satisfied with His plan for mankind, and is greatly pleased (I might even use the term “proud”) of His Son’s completed work. So He delights in showing mercy to those who come to Him for forgiveness. Forgiveness features and highlights the work of Jesus Christ, because it is the primary effect of His sacrificial work.

Paul himself was a good example of the operation of God’s mercy. This is what we see in 1 Tim. 1:15-16, which gives us the following:

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

Paul was the “worst” of sinners, yet he found forgiveness. God shows mercy to the worst of us, so that the patience of Christ will be shown to those who believe in Him. “Eternal life” begins when we are saved, the first phase of which will be lived out here on earth. During this initial period of our eternal lives, we will be looking for God’s continued mercy, because we continue to sin, even though we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and are children of God. Because we sin, we need forgiveness, which is why God has supplied believers with confession as the means to receive it.

GRACE. Our job is not to keep the law, as expressed in both the Old and New Testaments, but to participate in the completed work of Jesus Christ, so that the *law* can be fulfilled by *grace* methods. As we learn how to operate in grace, we must be aware of how deficient we are to meet any of God’s standards, many of which are expressed in the old law. This awareness helps us see and cite our sins to the Father, which amounts to confession. There are some who seem unaware of the sins they commit; they glide gleefully along with no concern that they are stained by their own sin. But as we refine our understanding of God’s character and methods, we will see more clearly the enormity of our errors, and the greatness of His grace.

God’s standards are pure and exact, and as we grow and see what sin is and where it comes from, we will refine our sin-filtering process to detect sin’s presence more readily. This will make us conscious of the stringency of God’s requirements and our own inability to meet them. We will be left with the distinct realization that more is required of grace than we have understood...grace must forgive and overcome the sins we continually commit.

Grace in the Christian life is accessed through humility. Humility is our response to a view of God as perfect, and ourselves as imperfect. It is a clear view of our inadequacy to meet God’s standards by ourselves. Humility is an accurate assessment of our abilities, which bake down as unmitigated insufficiency. Humility reflects to God our own admission that we are inadequate to please Him in and of ourselves. This is the attitude that God looks for, first of all because it is appropriate, but also because it venerates His superiority. Humility is the core of confession, and the essence of God’s condition for our forgiveness. Humility brings forgiveness. Forgiveness brings purity. And purity

results in performance. James 4:4-10 describes this process very well, as follows:

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.' Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

With humility, we are in an attitude of surrender and confession to God. He looks at the heart and sees when we are sincere and contrite...when we acknowledge our helplessness to Him. He does not need our strength, ability, or beauty...and shallow words mean nothing to Him. He sees our motives. God needs us to see Him for what He is, and to recognize what worms we are by comparison. Yet He loves us, and when we acknowledge Him, He will purify us and lift us up. That is the grace of God at work.

There will be no greatness coming from us that does not come first from Him. The whole notion of how great we are, just because we are His children, is totally misleading. We are what we are ONLY by His grace (1 Cor. 15:10), and we can quit with all the bravado and breast-beating over what mighty warriors we are, and how Satan and the world and sin don't stand a chance against us. This is exactly the attitude Satan wants us to have, because we are easy take-downs when we stand and fight with anything we have or are...apart from God's grace and power.

Once we have reached a point of humility, we are ready to move forward in the grace system...through faith. Our participation in grace begins with "purity", or being "cleansed", as we have said. Then it is sustained by faith. Rom. 4:16a tells us, "Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace." Faith is the key to accessing grace. Rom. 4:4-5 contrasts faith with other systems for accessing God's favor, such as "works". This passage says this:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

This tells us we should stop trying and start believing. When we do this, we can expect "greater grace" to operate. Cleanliness restores fellowship; faith keeps it going. These work in tandem to keep us plugged in to the power of the Holy Spirit, who will then provide instruction and impetus for growth. The Spirit will then strengthen us against sin. Grace alone can do this; not determination, resolve, or self-effort.

We are invited to come to the place where fellowship with God is readily available...which is at His throne of grace. Heb. 4:16 tells us what we will find there, saying, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Notice the sequence: Come to God, receive mercy and forgiveness, and walk away with the help of

God's grace, which will MEET OUR NEEDS. This "boldness" is not self-confidence, but confidence in God's mercy and grace, assured that He will forgive us and restore us. And this is where grace is found: at the throne.

Several principles can be given concerning grace, as seen in the following:

We are saved by grace. Eph. 2:8a—"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith..."

Grace is the basis for production. 1 Cor. 3:10—"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it."

Grace generates service. Rom. 15:15-16a—"I have written you quite boldly on some points, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles..."

Grace leads to proper conduct. 2 Cor. 1:12—"Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted 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."

Grace works through God's power. Eph. 3:7—"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power."

We are what we are by God's grace. 1 Cor. 15:10a—"But by the grace of God I am what I am..."

God's grace is sufficient, but we are not. 2 Cor. 12:9—"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in [your] weakness'."

God's power is aimed directly at us, and grace tempers it to make it operable in our lives. Grace gives benevolence to God's power, because His strength is overshadowed by His love. Grace has designed an entire system of operations in which we must function in order to claim its benefits. This system is about relinquishing our will and our agenda to God, so He can do through us what we cannot do alone.

LOVE. We are aware of God's righteousness and justice, and yet we see a different side of Him in His love, especially His love for us. God's standards for His created beings will never change or diminish, yet we do not meet them, so how can God refrain from addressing us exclusively from the side of His character that reflects righteousness and justice? How can He love us, since we fall so far short of what He requires? The resolution between the polar states in God's character has been studied and stated completely, and we know the story: God planned for resolution to take place through the cross. God satisfied His justice by letting His Son pay the penalty for our sins, and He placated His perfect righteousness by imparting to each believer the righteousness of His Son. When He looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ. This opens up God's love, to make it the prevailing protocol for His dealings with His children. He loves all of mankind, but He does not "adopt" those who reject Him and His plan. Those who believe have *special* love from God.

We are adopted...children of God...recipients of His fatherly love. This places us in a special position

of privilege which enables us to associate directly with the Spirit of God, and draw directly on all the assets He makes available. Because God has provided a way for us to relate to Him, we have His unfailing love in our lives. Ps. 33:22 says, “May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.” Ps. 33:18 parrots this, saying, “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love.” There are twenty-six verses in Ps. 136, and every one of them ends with the phrase, “His love endures forever.” We are recipients of God’s boundless, unchanging, unflinching love. As unfitting as it seems, we have great value in the eyes of the infinite Creator of this universe. (There are reasons that God notices such infinitesimally small creatures on this tiny speck of a planet called “Earth”, but that is a topic for discussions offered elsewhere, especially those offered in the book, *God’s Training Program for Believers: Preparation for Living*. See especially the chapter titled, “The War Against God”.)

God loves us. And every doctrine or truth that we study and understand is based on this reality. When we understand God’s love, we have in hand the most important truth in all of Scripture. All of His plan and His dealings with us emanate from this love. Ps. 103:8 says, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” Ex. 34:6-7a adds this:

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Here’s the plan of God: He love us, so He has found a way to forgive our “wickedness, rebellion and sin”. And because His love includes “faithfulness”, or a kind of immutability, nothing will ever separate His children from His love. Rom. 8:38-39 spells out the kinds of things that *cannot* remove God’s love from us, as follows:

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.

We are surrounded and kept safe and secure forever by God’s love. He has devised a way for our failings not to disrupt or block the flow of His love toward us, by providing forgiveness for our sins. Ps. 103:9-12 states it this way:

He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.

We get a mere glimpse of the immensity of God’s love for us. The closest we can come is the love that a father has for his children. There is nothing like it, yet we can multiply this love by infinity; that’s how great God’s love is. Notice that God’s love is focused on His children, but also notice that some of His children receive extra-special favor; these are the ones who “fear God”. Fear is awe, respect, reverence,

acknowledgement, and trust. When a believer matures to the point that these qualities occupy His attitude toward God, then a special love will be operating to sustain and bless that believer. Fear of the Lord, then, is desirable, and we want to highlight it briefly. We see this fear in many passages, a few of which are included here:

Prov. 3:7-8—Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.

Job 28:28—And he said to man, “The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”

Ps. 34:7—The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

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.

Prov. 16:6—Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil.

Ex. 20:20—Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

Prov. 3:6—In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

We participate in God’s love for Christians by “fearing” Him, or by trusting Him intently. The love we get from ongoing faith in God will not be experienced in any other way; it comes only from God. 1 John 4:7 tells us that “love comes from God”, which—according to Rom. 5:5—is “poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit”. In fact, love is said to be a “fruit” of the Spirit, as per Gal. 5:22a, which says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” Fruit is something that grows and is produced, so this is the love that is “in us” and that is then generated “from us”. But the love is “from God”, and is always His...we can never duplicate it or imitate it. Only God can love with “God’s love”.

God’s love is unfailing and unchanging toward us, and we participate in and exhibit this love only when we have achieved spirituality and maturity. It is not a matter of self-will or self-effort. It comes from God alone. 2 Thess. 3:5 says, “May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance [faithfulness].” We love effectively and correctly only to the degree that God is producing His love through us. 1 Thess. 3:12 says, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.” Who does the increasing? Us? No. Only God.

By staying in fellowship through confession, walking in the Spirit by faith, praying continually, and growing through study and training, we can experience and operate within God’s love. 1 John 2:5a says, “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him.” When we follow the prescriptions of God’s Word, use His techniques, and access His grace assets, we will see God’s love “made complete” in us. This does not happen by itself, just because we are saved; we must receive it—God’s way—for it to take effect. 1 Pet. 1:22-23 tells us this: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the

heart.” Both the method and the outcome are cited in this verse: “purify yourselves” by God’s methods and sincere love will be forthcoming. The method for purification, which must be “obeyed” is confession. After confession, “sincere love” can occur.

Those who love, then, have all sins confessed, and are abiding continually in a state of fellowship with God. 1 John 4:16 frames it this way: “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us [because we are in fellowship]. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” The term “living” here is not eternal life, but temporal living in fellowship with God. When we are in fellowship, we are “living”, or “abiding” in Him, and that is when we are “living in love”. 2 John 1:3 tells us that Jesus Christ is “with us in truth and love”. Verse 6 tells us to “walk in love”, which is added to “walk in the truth”, “walk by faith”, and “walk in the Spirit”, commands which we have seen in previous studies. We are now told to “walk in love”. This is obviously an advanced stage of maturity, or the ultimate in meeting God’s requirements. Walking in love takes place on the highest walking path of all.

Our general relationship with fellow believers should always be characterized by kindness, benevolence, compassion, and consideration. When we interact with each other, our attitude should be one of humility and graciousness. But there are specific ways in which we are to interact which comprise, I believe, our purpose for coming together and functioning as a team or as a “body”. These have to do with the operation of our gifts. The main conduit for love, and the greatest evidence for love’s presence, is seen in the “exchange of gifts” among believers. When believers mature and walk in the Spirit, and extend themselves to other believers through the operation of their gifts, God’s work gets done...correctly and in a timely manner.

1 Cor. 14:1a says, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts...” Love is linked to the development and utilization of our gifts. Exercising our gifts in the service and edification of others is the highest expression of God’s love through us. He gives us specific gifts to edify each other, and we exhibit His love when we use these gifts to help and support and prepare each other. Eph. 4:11-16 describes this process very well, giving us the following:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, 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 people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love [edifying each other], we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of 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. (Emphasis mine)

The motivation for the operation of our gifts is love. The objective is greater maturity, so all members of the church can function with maximum efficiency in the operation of their gifts, thus strengthening the whole body and yielding the greatest results possible in support of the Kingdom of Light. By

“growing up into Him”, we will be “built up in love” and “each part will do its work”. We will be “equipped for works of service”. This is how it is supposed to work. This is how the job gets done. Wake-up call: If you are not functioning in behalf of others through your gift(s), you are not showing mature love.

But notice again: the “gift”, its motivation and operation and outcome, all come from God. And notice what will come when the church machine operates efficiently and maturity is optimized: We will “attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. This is the greatest manifestation of God’s love and the highest fulfillment of His will for us: the receipt of his “fullness”. Through the inter-operation of all our gifts, we can mature to the point that we can get this “fullness”.

We have looked for love in the right place. We know now that it comes from God, and that it has a specific operational component in the operation of our gifts. We have learned that the outcome of love goes beyond provision and privilege...extending to the acquisition of the very “fullness” of our Creator. We will have more to say about this fullness shortly.

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN GRACE OPERATIONS. The Holy Spirit is the key to all grace operations. The grace is His, since the Holy Spirit is none other than God. He provides the power for the unfolding of the Father’s plan. With the function of the Holy Spirit, we have the prospect of having the “life of Christ” lived out through us, and we have the freedom and impetus to behave and think correctly. All cleanliness and holiness comes to us through the Holy Spirit of Christ, and nothing we will ever accomplish will be done without His direction and energy. With the filling and control of the Holy Spirit, we have the strength to resist sin (coming at us from the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature), and we have the capacity to allow God to fulfill His will through us.

A quick side-note on the “filling of the Spirit”. Eph. 5:18 commands us to be “filled” with the Spirit rather than alcohol, the implication being that whatever fills us, controls us. To be filled, we must be cleansed, since the first chapter of John tells us that when we walk in darkness (sin), we have no fellowship with God. And the only way for believers to be cleansed is by the confession of their sins. It then follows that cleansing leads to fellowship, which leads to the filling of the Spirit, which we sustain according to the strength of our faith, and which we will enjoy until our next sin. As we mature, sin lessens, and fellowship will be sustained, so that we can grow more, and walk more-consistently in the strength of the Spirit. The filling of the Spirit is the pathway to maturity, and that is how we become a significant tool for God to use in the implementation of His plan on earth.

The question may arise as to how we can sin when we are filled and “controlled” by the Spirit. The answer is simple. We never, for as long as we are on the earth, lose our free will. We will always have the ability to choose evil over good. The control of the Spirit stops at the line of our freedom of choice, and when we choose evil, the control of the Spirit terminates until we confess. When we confess, we are restored, and the Spirit resumes control...and the beat goes on.

When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, He provides spiritual energy for operating in God’s grace system. Gal. 5:16-25 makes this clear, saying the following:

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh 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. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with [walk by] the Spirit.

We will live by the Spirit...or by the flesh...at any given time. When we are controlled by the Spirit, He can produce His fruit in us. When we are not, our sinful nature will produce sin or self-righteousness.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit, because without it, we can never experience the “fullness of God”. Eph. 3:16-18a tells us about this power, saying this:

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 Lord’s holy people...

This power is the missing ingredient in most Christian lives, and in most churches. Without this power, we will be helpless against sin, and will not be able to do God’s will. Only with the Holy Spirit teaching us, moving us, and strengthening us will we be able to learn truth, do what is right, and find out what pleases God. Eph. 5:10 tells us to “find out what pleases the Lord”. Verse 17 tells us to “not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” Part of reaching the pinnacle of maturity is coming to understand the will of God in all its aspects, and then we will know exactly how to please Him. In the meantime, we can pray, with David, “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.” Want to know God’s will? Ask to be taught. At some point, you will know it. And by the time you know God’s will, you will also have learned how to harness and live in the power of the Holy Spirit; He can then enable you to fulfill the will that you are increasingly understanding.

REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES THAT PREPARE US FOR FULLNESS. To prepare to receive the “fullness of God”, we must reach maturity through purity, study, training, and the operation of gifts from others around us. These all blend to become one package, composed of all the grace assets, techniques, promises, and operations that God makes available to us. We have been trained through these grace assets and techniques. They have brought us to this point. Now, to ensure that we have these clearly established in our hearts, we will conduct a brief overview of them, after which we will see the "new" principle, and present the final step in receiving God's best...His fullness. We will see at last the open path to God Himself...all of Him.

We want everything God offers. We want His forgiveness, His provision, His strength, His guidance, His blessings, and His peace. But the thing we need the most is His love. After we have done it all: confessed regularly, studied faithfully, prayed continually, trained rigorously, and trusted extensively, we will reach the summit of the Christian life, which is to love deeply. This is not a gushing, doting kind of love, but a genuine and abiding caring for the spiritual condition of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we love as God loves, we will certainly attend to believers' spiritual needs, but we will also attend to and pray for other types of needs, as God directs, including the physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being of Christians in our periphery. But our *greatest* concern will be for the *growth* and *spiritual walk* of fellow-believers...and the greatest contribution we can make to their status and progress will be through the exercise of our gifts.

We have discussed gifts in some detail. For a quick reference, see the article, "Gifted Service and Love". The exercise of our gifts is the most direct and fruitful way that we can love those who share our union with Christ. We know that our gifts...those special qualities and abilities in each of us which God graciously designed and distributed so we can strengthen each other...operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, without which no meaningful service can be performed. When we mature sufficiently that our gifts are functioning in God's strength, the fruit of the Spirit will be seen in the edification and advancing maturity of those it helps.

One final word on gifts: Gifts facilitate our study and our walk in the Spirit, as we have discussed. Eph. 4:12-13 says this about gifts: They achieve the following...which brings us to the brink of "fullness":

...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.

Notice here that the attainment of maturity involves assimilating the knowledge of the Son. When we are loaded up with understanding of Scripture, and fully comprehend the operation of God's love and grace toward the human race, we will be qualified by His Spirit for "works of service", and we will be nearing completion of our preparation to receive the fullness of God, seen here as the "fullness of Christ".

Col. 1:9-11^a explains that the receiving of wisdom and understanding enables us to grow and to access the supernatural power that we need in order to take the final step into God's fullness. This passage says this:

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; 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...

Assimilation of truth helps us mature, and maturity engages spirituality. We must remind ourselves

continually of our need for the power of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to proceed toward the ultimate level of spiritual growth and experience, and we must be clear that we will never see the fullness of God without a maximum assimilation of this power.

The qualities needed to get “fullness” are coming together, and include these: maturity that reaches a sufficient level that God’s love is in evidence; spirituality that bears the fruit of the Spirit; and a complete understanding of God’s mercy, grace, and love...including full knowledge of how these *operate* in the lives of believers. It’s all beginning to crystallize.

HOW TO BE FILLED TO THE MEASURE OF ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD. Col. 2:9 says this: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...” This tells us that, whatever the “fullness of God” is, it lived in Jesus Christ. He Himself did not retain His deity on earth, so the “fullness of the Deity” had to be in the form of the Holy Spirit. We are in union with Him, and can have the same resources He had to maintain God-consciousness and holiness. Verse 10, following the verse just quoted, says, “...and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” Fullness is available.

Fullness in Christ is offered and we want it, which is why we are exploring ways to get it. We have seen these assets: cooperative interaction of our gifts, faithful study of the Word, and the function and power of the Holy Spirit. These provide the means to lead us to maturity, and prepare us to receive God’s fullness.

Eph. 3:14-21 provides a full discussion of the process for getting the fullness of God. We quote here this entire passage. Read this carefully:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 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, 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. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Paul’s first prayer in this passage is that we will have the strength of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (inner being), so that “Christ may dwell in our hearts”. When Christ is “dwelling” in our hearts, this means that He is comfortable, fully at-home, and completely in-charge within our hearts. He, by His Spirit, controls us, which means we are walking by means of His Spirit. The first prayer in this passage concludes the “maturity/spirituality” aspect of our preparation to receive God’s fullness. Only one more thing is needed.

Paul’s second prayer ushers in the “one more thing” that we need in order to get the “fullness” of God. The one thing is this: to have the power to “grasp”, or take possession of, the *full scope of the love of*

Christ. Paul expounds on this, saying that we must “know” this love, which means we must have *absolute knowledge* of it. By the time we truly understand God’s love, including His mercy and grace, and have absolute knowledge of how it operates in our lives, we will have reached a level of maturity that will qualify us to be “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Then God can express His love toward us in exceptional ways, far beyond what we can measure or ask for or imagine. There is no limit to what God can give us IN THIS LIFE, when we reach the point that we fully *understand* and *receive* His love, and arrive at the point where His power completely controls and directs us.

So here it is: To get God’s fullness, we must move beyond mere comprehension of, or even agreement with, concepts in the Word, even those that cite the workings and provisions of grace. We must move up to ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE of grace and love, which means being *saturated* with God’s view point and His methods and His power. We must become *pre-occupied* with God and His ways, and *immerse* ourselves into complete SURRENDER to the requirements of His will and the ways of His love. Then we can become “rooted and established in love”, and be completely “filled” with God Himself. And then we will know what the “fullness of God” really is. When we reach the level of maturity that we are completely sold out to the grace of God, we will be filled with all the fullness of God. But not before.

SEQUENCE FOR BEING FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD. This is a difficult study, because it is breaking new ground. And we must revisit this topic again before we rest. But for now, to encapsulate the process for fullness, we offer a sequential listing of the steps leading up to receiving it. None of these can be omitted, and the time required for each step is variable. Being filled with God’s fullness involves the following:

Confess all known sins for forgiveness and the filling of the Spirit.

Pray for wisdom, as well as for the entire complement of things we have learned to pray about.

Study the Bible meaningfully for spiritual nourishment and growth.

Endure God’s training for refinement and maturity.

Seek the interchange of gifts among mature believers for maximum mutual support and growth.

Walk in the Spirit by faith for steady empowerment and spiritual production.

Immerse yourself with singular concentration into an absolute understanding of God’s surpassing love, with focus on grace operations.

Stand by to be filled with the whole measure of the fullness of God.

We believe that the attainment of the fullness of God is the time when God’s immeasurable benefits and blessings surge forward in ways that cannot be envisioned. It is a time when Satan finally “flees from us”, and a time when we experience the complete peace and joy that God makes available. This is

the true “rest” which God offers, and the great deliverance He promises. And this can be done while we are still alive in these present bodies. This will not happen at the beginning of our Christian lives, nor can we expect it before we reach advanced maturity; but if we follow God’s plan for growth, we will see His fullness before we are through.

Our understanding of the “fullness of God” will be fleshed out in upcoming studies, particularly the one on “Surrender”.

The Faith Perspective

INTRODUCTION. We have written a book on faith, titled, *Bible Basics on Walking by Faith*. The concepts presented in *Walking by Faith* are Bible-based and—we believe—sound. We want to review some of the truths discussed in that book, but we want to go beyond these and see some new truths that have come to light as a result of recent studies. Look for new applications, even in the portion of this writing that is devoted to refreshment of teachings that were offered previously. This study will dig deeper into the process for exercising our faith under all conditions, and will show why it is so important to enrich and enlarge our faith as believers.

WHAT IS FAITH? In the context of the Christian life, faith is being persuaded that God has the power to do what He says He will do. This is what we see in Rom. 4:20-21, which speaks of Abraham's faith, saying the following:

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

We apply this verse to our lives when we first believe that Christ died for our sins. And then we apply it when we believe that God will forgive the sins we commit after we become Christians (when we confess them), and that He will provide all we need to live the life of Christ. Faith is believing that God exists, and that the message of the gospel for salvation...AND the pronouncements of God's ways for meaningful living...are true. We believe that He IS, and that we have a stake in His existence, because we have become His children through faith in Christ.

Faith is a lot of things, as we have seen in previous studies. It is fear of the Lord, occupation with Christ, acknowledgement of God, trust, resting in God's promises, God-consciousness, submission to God's will, waiting on the Lord, thankfulness, patience in trials, perseverance in tests, endurance in suffering, and being still before the Lord. It is *belief*, for starters, but it is also *trust*. Trust implies that we can relax, because we believe the truth that the One who promises will deliver what He has declared. We can turn ourselves over to God, with all our problems, our aspirations, our dreams, our hopes, and our intentions. We can relinquish control to Him, because we believe He loves us and will act in our best interests, even when we don't SEE this in our immediate experience.

When faith has grown, it becomes "fear", which is not "fright", but is awe and reverence...extreme respect...for the Lord. Fear is *strong faith*. To reach the level of faith known as fear is to discover the rich blessings of God's provisions, which—as we have learned very well—is much more than money or possessions. Ps. 31:19 says, "How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men." Ps. 34:9 adds, "Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing."

And then there is a level of faith beyond fear, known as the “fullness of God”, which is based on an ABSOLUTE understanding of the LOVE of God. This is the penultimate spiritual experience, and leads to the best form of life available to human beings. This is the time when the gates of grace fly open, as they did for Job...a time when our lives foreshadow the richness and glory of heaven. Very few believers achieve this level of growth, but it is open to all.

LEARNING ABOUT TRUST. Is. 26:4 admonishes, “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.” It is God that we are to trust. And this is not just a suggestion; it is a *command*! Not to trust is a sin. Heb. 3:12 instructs us, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Sin is not always unbelief, but unbelief is always present when we sin, and unbelief itself IS sin. When we do not trust, we are sinning.

God wants, more than anything else, for us to trust Him. This is the greatest honor we can show Him, and the hardest thing we can achieve as we live out our lives in a hostile and alien world. And we are not the first. The disciples themselves had trouble learning trust. This is what we see in Mark 4:35-41, which we quote here in its entirety:

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

This is how the Lord must feel with us, at times: “Do you still have no faith?” Those of us who are studying and praying and learning and maturing are still confronted with events, temptations, distractions, deceptions, and tests that challenge us and bring us to this question: Where is my faith? Why can’t we just do what Peter called for when he gave the command: “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”? (1 Pet. 5:7) We will learn this at some point, but the road to this understanding is long and rocky, and may require a number of intense storms before we really get it.

Faith is directed toward God, and not toward events or outcomes. So many times, we see the message, “believe and receive”, and immediately conjure up images of success, or a new relationship, or a specific acquisition, and we focus on the “gift” and not the “giver”. This is a colossal mistake. We can have no confidence that God will deliver the specific thing or condition that WE want. What HE wants is for us to understand that our confidence is to be in Him and His plan for us, and that the playing out of His will has the greatest prospect for success *according to HIS thinking*, not according to our own dim-witted and selfish imagination. We come to Him in faith because we want more of Him and His provision, not the world and its vain fortune. We want only God!

When we come to God, it is because we believe He IS God, and that coming to Him will make a

difference in our lives. Heb. 11:6 frames this idea very well, saying, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” The kind of faith that PLEASES God, is faith that REALLY believes that God is there, AND that HE REWARDS SEEKERS! When we come to God, we do so believing, not only that He is real, but that He will enrich our lives in the truest sense...BECAUSE WE WANT MORE OF HIM! The rewards do not come from seeking the rewards themselves; they come from seeking HIM.

It is common for us to think of our lives in terms of the circumstances that surround us. Often, our awareness of God’s presence in our lives is hampered by our comparing what we see and possess with what we imagine is possible...i.e., what we WANT...not what God wants us to have. His final objective is to advance us toward greater spirituality and maturity. But we tend to get buried, either in what we see that we want and do not have, or by an onslaught of “trying” events. Often, we are frustrated, disappointed, or frantic. This is frequently our attitude: one of unbelief and non-trust. But we must not be discouraged when our faith is flagging, because—if we consistently follow God’s pathway to growth—our faith will get stronger at some point...and we will KNOW IT when it happens!

Is. 8:12-14a exhorts us to direct our “fear” toward the Almighty, as follows:

Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary...

It is easy to believe in the things we see, and to discount the things we don’t. This is why there is such a great need for a renewed and transformed mode of thinking, to bring us into the divine view-point regarding life and purpose. Is. 8:16-17 follows up the passage just quoted, saying, “I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him.” Waiting and trusting...this is what we are to learn.

Prov. 3:5 calls for us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your understanding..” When we can learn to trust God with all our hearts, and quit thinking that all the answers are in the world, or *within us*, as Plato believed, then we can turn to the clear directions of Scripture for reliable substance...and sustenance. When we are uncertain about the content and flow of our lives, we can be sure of one thing: Our faith needs to grow.

God has given us all we need to reach a full and constant faith. 2 Pet. 1:2-4 sums it up well, saying:

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Notice the repetition of the word “knowledge”. This knowledge comes through intensive study. We have studied “studying” in all our previous writings and have thoroughly documented the need for us to know God’s ways for living as they are presented in His Word. We know that we grow by learning. And

that when we “know” who God really is, we will be able to “participate in His divine nature”. When we live in His nature and power, we will live in a *spiritual* realm, more than in the world, thus avoiding all the snares and traps set for us by the world. When we have this perspective, we will know that it is God who provides for us and sustains us, and we will know that our times belong to Him. Ps. 31:14-15 assures us of this, saying, “But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.” Seasons, events, relationships, promotions, and even death are in God’s hands. This is why we must study, so that we will learn to trust Him. When we know Him, we will know that we can trust Him.

Is. 46:46 gives us this: “I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” God is the One who sustains; there is no other. This is what we are to believe. There is no participation in God’s sustaining grace except through faith. 1 John 5:4b says, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” There is no victory apart from faith in the ONE who brings it. Victory rests with the Lord, as per Prov. 21:31, which says, “The horse is made ready for battle, but victory rests with the Lord.” And when we trust this, He will carry us, as we see in Deut. 1:29-31:

Then I said to you, “Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place”.

To actuate the effects of God’s instructions and promises, we must BELIEVE them. There is power in the techniques and promises which God offers, but these are useless to us if we do not, first of all, *learn* them, and secondly, if we do not *believe* them. We must exercise faith within two aspects of our curriculum, the first being the *techniques*, and the second being the *promises*. The techniques include confession of sins, prayer, study of the Word, enduring God’s training, and exchanging mutual edification through the gifts of fellow believers. The promises are those things which God assures us He will provide. God is faithful, but almost all provisions have *conditions* which must be met for them to be released. Techniques precede promises.

When we have faith, we will have confidence that we can approach God, as per Eph. 3:12, which says, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with confidence.” When we have faith, we will be assured that God loves and cares for us, and that He will give us what we need to live for Him. He will *help* us, as we see in 2 Chron. 14:11-12, as follows:

Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, ‘Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. Lord, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you.’ The Lord struck down the Cushites before Asa and Judah. The Cushites fled...

He will *help* us when we *rely* on Him. The condition for help, is faith. Without faith, there will be no help, but with faith, *anything* is possible (Luke 1:37).

Everything is possible with God, because He has the POWER to do whatever He wants. Eph. 1:18-19 expresses it this way:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength...

By being “enlightened”, or taught, we can know the kind of faith to which we are “called”, and the abundant resources which are available to us through the immense power of the One in whom we believe. Through our faith, we activate the power within us, which becomes the “working of his mighty strength”. That is the work that counts...His work. When God is at work, competence is evident. 2 Cor. 3:5 shows the source of competence for Christian living: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.” God fulfills every good purpose by HIS POWER. 2 Thess. 1:11 repeats this concept:

“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.”

God “fulfills every good purpose” Himself; our part is to have “faith” in Him...to trust Him. Everything left with God will turn out good. He knows what He’s doing, and everything He does is for our benefit and growth.

Faith is drawn to the power. We believe and trust when we see that the force we rely on is infinite; but not only that, it is benevolent. God WANTS to help us. We just have to *understand* what it is He wants, and learn how we access what He wants us to have. Col. 1:9-11 describes this power that we can trust, and tells us how we acquire it, as follows:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

God wants us to trust Him, and He knows that we cannot trust in something we do not know about. We must KNOW ABOUT HIM, so we can know how much we can TRUST HIM. This is why we study and grow. When we finally get this, and move up through “fear”, followed by “fullness”, we will be able to “live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way”. And great “fruit” will be borne by and for Him.

God has the power to fulfill what He promises, and we can believe what He says. Num. 23:19 confirms this, saying the following: “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 will not

withhold any good thing from a believer who has learned to trust in Him. His word is good; when He says it, He stands behind it. We can count on it.

INCREASING FAITH. *Saving* faith does not alter, grow, or change in any way. It is a one-time, once-for-all expression of belief in the saving grace and work of Jesus Christ...that He is risen, and that He finished the work of paying for our rebellion and sin. We believe in Him, and thereby we are eternally saved. Thus begins the Christian life. Ah, but there's the rub. We are helpless *infants* at that point, even though there are those standing around who cheer us on, who say we now have the "victory", and who encourage us to "go get 'em"! But neither they nor we recognize that—at the beginning—we are useless. This is the time to grow and mature and prepare for big-boy living...not time to get out in the world, or the "church", or to start trying to be productive. We are not ready to do anything but eat and grow. We start from scratch, and all we can do at this stage is LEARN.

Initial faith—the faith that activates saving grace—is effective at the time we are saved. But faith has another dimension, which arises *after* we are saved. This is *operational* faith, which we carry into our lives as God's children. Our focus in this writing is on operational faith, since our (my personal) gift and passion is to help believers grow. We must never be discouraged. Operational faith can increase; you *can* change the way you respond to life...by degrees and over time. It is our objective to build up as much faith as we can in the time we are given. Growing this faith is largely based on understanding of God's truths, especially those that tell us how great God is, how He expects us to live, and how He provides for our lives.

It is conclusive: After we are saved we are to live and grow. And the mark of maturity is strong faith. Col. 2:6-7 says this very thing:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

After we are born again, we are to then to LIVE in Christ, or live by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is facilitated by being strengthened in the "faith", which in this case means the body of truth that God has given us for living. We are to have our understanding increased, so that we can LIVE in Christ. We are *in union with Him* as a result of saving faith, and then we *conduct our lives in Him* by coming to KNOW Him, which causes us to become "rooted and built up" in Him. Then we will overflow with "thankfulness", which connotes fear, trust, acknowledgement, humility, and God consciousness.

Repeating an earlier point, because it is important, we are built up by "hearing" the Word, and believing it, as Rom. 10:17 declares: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." We are to enter an intensive study of the Word of God, immediately upon being saved. We must go through "basic training", and then move on to more complex truths for living. Heb. 6:1a says, "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity..." This begins a life-long process of study-review-study which will move us toward a greater faith, and equip us to fight the battle which has been drawn before us. In 1 Tim. 1:18-19, Paul advised the young pastor:

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.

When we absorb truth, we will become equipped to “fight the good fight” by continuing to believe God’s Word in the face of gale-force winds that blow against it. We can then “hold on to our faith” and operate with a clean conscience. Here we see the two sturdy pillars of our belief system: 1) faith based on assimilation of the truth, and 2) a clean conscience, based on the confession of our sins. These AVERT THE SHIPWRECK of our faith.

Continuing in the vein of “shipwrecks”, we are learning that, with constant faith and continual confession, we can stay afloat in the storms of life. Paul had been in shipwrecks himself, as we see in Acts 27:22-26, which gives an account of one. When the ship started to go down, Paul declared the following to those on board:

But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong 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. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.

Regardless of the reason, when your ship starts to go down is the time to trust. This is the time of challenge, when believing God and His Word is crucial. Paul KNEW God and His truths, so he was prepared for this challenge. And he trusted God before, during, and after the destruction of the ship and his being dumped into a stormy sea. That is the kind of faith we want, because part of the increase of our faith involves challenges like the shipwreck of Paul. Our ship may go down, the body may sink, and the world may swamp us, but our FAITH does not have to shipwreck.

We learn and build our faith through understanding of God’s Word, and then we refine our grasp of His truths through the endurance of storms in life. We LEARN through tests and trials, by seeing God’s hand at work in all kinds of circumstances. 1 Pet. 1:6-7 frames this for us, 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.

Hardship increases faith. This is why James 1:2-4 says that trials develop “perseverance” (faith), as follows:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

To bring our faith to the level of “not lacking anything” will require the training that God provides to strengthen our faith. There is no shortcut to this kind of growth, and those that sign up for God’s training are in for a “bumpy night”. There is no other way to “finish the work”.

The perspective of suffering to increase our faith is that of the long view. We are not focused on the world and our time in it, so much as we are the eternal place of an infinite God and our future with Him. 2 Cor. 4:17-18 confirms this notion, saying this:

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, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The suffering we are doing now to build and strengthen our faith is nothing compared to the “glory” of God’s eternal state. So suffering has an immediate benefit, in that it increases our faith, but it is also securing for us greater rewards in heaven, as we endure our training. Our most immediate gains, though, are here and now. Our object is to increase our faith, while we have time.

When suffering comes, we can know that God is giving us the opportunity to grow. That is why we are called on repeatedly to “rejoice” when hard times come, no matter what they are. Our focus is to be on God and not on our circumstances. Our faith is in what we do NOT see, rather than what is crashing down on top of us. Hab. 3:17-18 says this:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

As we begin to mature, we will come to understand and experience the joy and contentment that only God can give, regardless of conditions around us. When we learn to trust, even in tragedy, we will know that we are maturing. We will know the following from verse 19: “The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.” Painful setbacks and scary events plague the growing believer. And we are completely vulnerable and fragile. In the end, there is nothing for us to do but to trust God.

I am moved by the plight of slaves in our country’s history. Their hardship provides an excellent analogy, perhaps an example, of the endurance and faith of a people operating under the worst kind of mistreatment and misery. Perhaps no single group in modern history has been more single-minded in its faith and dependence on the Lord than were these slaves, who toiled night and day at the whimsical mercy of their masters. Yet many of them lived in inner peace, because they were blessed by their God, who gave them understanding and strength in the middle of their suffering. They listened to their masters read the Bible, and encoded what they heard into spiritual songs. And they believed the Word. I opine that their greatest joy and victory was internal, where they worshipped their Lord, and prayed to Him and trusted Him through everything that happened. Their faith is a model for all of us, including their descendents. It seems to me that not enough has been spoken in behalf of the spiritual walk of these slaves.

Whenever suffering takes place as part of God's training, we are instructed to keep on trusting. It is easy to become glib about what we should do when suffering comes. We have developed all kinds of phrases and clauses that are supposed to assuage the pain, but these have become worn and trite. An entire jargon of "Christianese" has evolved, with the result that the severity, as well as the purpose, of suffering has been minimized and superficialized. The faith we need is not the faith of public bravado, but the faith we hold in our hearts and in our hands as we go through the vicissitudes of daily Christian life.

We have many questions about this faith: What does faith "feel" like...on the inside? What happens when we "believe" and express faith? Why is it so hard to keep faith steady in the storm? We are searching for answers.

It is the recognized norm of natural human behavior to detect and avoid danger and threat, so how can we encounter setbacks, disappointments, attacks, mistreatment, deprivation, pain, or bad news of any kind, often with no end in sight, and not react to them in some defensive manner? How can we say, "I am at peace?" How can we have confidence, when we see no relief and no solution? It may be easy to speak of tragedy when it is in the abstract, or to be insouciant when misfortune belongs to someone else, rather than us. But when it is personal and fully felt, it cannot be dismissed like some fictional drama, because we *feel* the pain! Yet we must "trust". This is difficult, and if you have reached this level of intensity in God's training program, you know what I mean.

It is not easy to be a GROWING CHRISTIAN, and it cannot be taken lightly as a "nice option", because it is not without pain. The end result of maturity and the blessings that come with growth will be fantastic in the long run, but getting there is a real grind that requires maximum attention to study and prayer and our walk in the Spirit. I know the passage that says God won't "test" us "beyond our limits", but that limit is an undetermined value, and we cannot assume that our "limit" precludes severity. If we want more of God, to get closer to Him, we must be willing to endure whatever suffering it takes to get us there. As we have said before, there are no shortcuts in God's training program.

God will provide opportunities for advancement that will bring maximum growth and strengthening, but these translate into considerable pain and pressure. This does not happen with Christians who just "dabble" at Christian living, but is reserved for the serious student, the true seeker, the real "thirsty deer" who pants after the waters of the Holy Spirit. The fact that challenges arrive in your life means that you have the privilege of being trained by God, so that your faith will become strong and steady for all occasions.

As you progress into higher levels of maturity, you will learn "fear of the Lord", which brings special blessings. Ultimately, you have the potential to reach the "fullness of God", which is the apex of our intimacy with God while we are still alive on earth. When we reach that point, God's provision will flow into our lives beyond anything we ever imagined, and God's will and purpose will be fulfilled in and through us.

Do you want it? If so, buckle up, because training is in the cards. You must sit at the feet of a teaching

pastor, and/or get regular instruction in the Word from a reliable source. You must stay “pure” through humility and confession. You must pray constantly regarding all things, especially that you will acquire wisdom as you learn and grow. And you must access the gifts of fellow believers to allow them to contribute to your growth, as you offer your gifted service to them. And finally, you must endure God’s training, which brings all processes together in a fast-pace, high-pressure course that will stretch you to the limit. And in the end, you will know what God wants you to see: His GRACE! (Please read the book, *God’s Training Program for Believers*, available by free download at this website.)

We want to clarify: “Enduring” is not the same as “stoicism”, where suffering is grimly borne. Nor is it denial of what is happening. Enduring means to go through the rigors of God’s training with eyes wide open, USING ALL THE ASSETS HE MAKES AVAILABLE TO HELP US THROUGH IT. That is how we train. When the test comes, we access life-preservers and other resources for relief, and we get through it. But to say that God’s way for us to get through suffering is by “grinning and bearing it” WITHOUT THE COMFORT AND RELIEF OF GRACE...is ludicrous! GOD OFFERS RELIEF. Ps. 121:2 says, “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Ps. 18:2 adds this:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

It is legitimate for us to ask for relief from suffering and testing. This is why Jesus modeled a prayer that included this: “Deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 5:13b). And this is why Paul prayed three times—pleaded—that God would remove a “thorn” from his side. (2 Cor. 12:7-10). And this is why prayer is such an important piece in the armor with which we resist Satan and the world, as we see in Eph. 6, where the armor description is consummated with this: “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph. 6:18a). And this is why James said, in James 5:13a, “Is any one of you in trouble [literally, “Is any one of you suffering?”]? He should pray.”

As we see, there are considerable passages in Scripture that make it clear that we can pray for relief from suffering. 2 Cor. 1:3-4a says this: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...” And Isaiah tells us of streams in the desert which God provides for His children, as we see in the following:

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.

Even in the desert, as we saw with the Israelites in the wilderness, God will provide. Grace is never far away, as Paul learned so well. The following describes what he went through as he was learning about grace for training:

2 Cor. 11:24-32—Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, 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 fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 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. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

God loves us. His object is not to make us suffer for suffering's sake, but to get us focused on Him, and to get us to understand fully that we can trust His plan, purpose, power, and provision. That is why He offers help for us as we train. Ps. 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble." Ps. 120:1 adds, "I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me." And finally, Nahum 1:7 promises, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him..." He allows suffering, but He will be our refuge, if we turn to Him for relief in the time of trial, rather than to the world, or to our own solutions.

We have shown so far that *Bible study* and *God's training* bring about our movement toward maturity. We want to add one last thing, which contributes greatly to our growth. It involves the mutual exchange of benefits among believers through interactive edification. Each believer is given one or more gifts to enable him to contribute to the growth of other believers. The interchange of services among believers is the greatest expression of love, apart from dying for each other, and most of our growth objective should center on the refinement and exercise of our gifts in behalf of others. Keep in mind, gifts come from the Holy Spirit, and it is the Spirit who will work them through us. That is the function and purpose of spirituality. He bears His fruit through us by using our gifts.

Growth begins with faith, and as faith increases, we are carried upward through manifestations of that faith. The most significant output of faith is the operation of our gifts, or loving service to others. This progression of faith is seen in 2 Pet. 1:5, which says this:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

We start small and build, and—along with maturity—we develop our gifts, which operate as extensions of "love". And this is a great resource for all of us...if we place ourselves with other believers who are growing as we are...so we can benefit from their gifts, as they benefit from ours. When we get it right, everything we do with other believers will take place with edification as a backdrop, as per Eph. 4:29, which says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who

listen.” Edifying each other is the most important thing we can do.

If you do not know your gift, do not fret. Grow...and trust...and wait...you will know it at some point. And if you operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, it is inevitable that your gift will become fully operational, and that your gift will help produce growth in others. Paul spoke of the operation of his gift in 2 Cor. 4:13, and related it to his faith. Here is what this verse says: “It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.” When faith is functioning, our gifts will operate; and the stronger our faith, the greater our production.

It is a given, then: Gifts are useful as catalysts to maturity. Eph. 4:11-15 frames this well, as follows:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his 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 people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

The working of God’s gifts prepares us for works of service, which revolves around teaching each other “the truth in love”. As mature believers help other believers toward maturity, we all fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), and God is glorified in the following ways:

As a result of the service of mature and gifted believers, the gospel is given to unbelievers in a meaningful and fruitful way.

As believers edify one another, mutual symbiosis and growth occur.

Angels see believers trusting God, which glorifies Him.

Our biggest job—and the outcome of maturity—is the operation of our gifts in edifying each other. This leads to the attainment of the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), which is the ultimate spiritual experience. The fullness of Christ consists of these: God’s love, joy, and peace; operation in the power of the Holy Spirit; commitment to the plan and will of God; and understanding of the grace of God.

As faith grows, spiritual operations will increase, especially that of love, which enfolds the operation of gifts. 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.” This is when we begin to see the “service” of our “faith”, i.e., when it starts to contribute to the growth of others. And once we get into the swing of it, the operation of our gifts even facilitates our own growth. This is what we see in 1 Tim. 3:13, which says, “Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.” So when we exercise our gifts, we strengthen ourselves. (For more on *specific* gifts, see the chapter, “Gifts”, in the book, *Bible Basics on Maturity*, available at this website.)

Growth is a long and arduous process, but if we are going to see meaning and production in our Christian lives...if we are going to be real players in the “game”...we can’t sit on the sidelines after we are saved. Salvation is a beginning...not the end. We are just getting started, and our goal is to reach the “fullness of God”, as per our previous article, “Getting the Fullness of God”. In that study we explained the meaning of Eph. 3:14-21, our source for the concept of the “fullness of God”. We offer here a brief analysis of that passage, phrase by phrase, to see once again this fullness, which is the final destiny in our journey to maturity. Read Eph. 4:14-21 and then peruse the following:

“...strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...” (v. 16) This is being “filled with the Spirit”.

“...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (v. 17) When Christ “dwells” in our hearts “through faith”, He not only occupies our hearts...He manages them. When we “walk in the Spirit”, Christ manages our hearts. This is identical to the control of the Spirit, which is accomplished through an ongoing faith.

“...being rooted and established in love...” (v. 17) suggests the direction and purpose of maturity, which is the growth, not only of faith, but love. This is divine love, the product of our walk with the Holy Spirit.

“...may have power...” means “may *receive* power” (v. 18), which calls for us to access grace assets and techniques so that we will be operating in the power of the Holy Spirit.

“...to grasp how wide...is the love of Christ...” (v. 18) shows us the thing we must understand initially, which includes a full knowledge of mercy and grace.

“...to know this love that surpasses knowledge...” (v. 19) gives us the final step to attaining the “fullness of God”, which is to gain ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE of God’s love. This level of maturity moves beyond techniques and training, and into FULL awareness of God.

“...that you may be filled to the measure [limit] of all the fullness of God...” (v. 19) shows the destiny for all true seekers of God. The “fullness of God” is the penultimate experience we can have with God this side of heaven. This is the place of rest, blessing, peace, and—at some point—reduced Satanic encroachment.

“...do immeasurably more” (v. 20) tells us the extent of God’s work and provision for believers who have received the “fullness of God”. It is beyond imagination!

We must not settle for less than God’s best. We must commit to growth and service, and seek to know the full extent of His love and grace.

WALKING BY FAITH. When we say, “walking by faith”, this implies “walking by the Spirit”, or “walking in the truth”, as well, even though the application for these differs slightly from one to the next. We will see these as basically identical for the purposes of this study.

We have talked about growth, and have seen that the main benefit of rigorous divine training is the

advancement of our maturity. Our topic is “faith”, and the point of growing is to increase the strength and consistency of our faith. There is a strong link between our training by tests and trials, and maturity, which culminates as a walk by means of the Holy Spirit’s power. Both training and “walking” are tied to faith, and each requires its own form of trusting. The object of faith in training is to prevent the events that happen from derailing that faith. If we trust through training, our spiritual walk will not be disrupted, but if we falter under pressure, our walk will be hampered, and we will end up discounting God’s love and may even become bitter toward life.

When suffering comes, how many believers say at that point, “God is great!”? Not enough. It is easy to praise and give thanks when things go well, but it is when things seem to be falling apart that we are challenged to continue believing that everything is working together for our good. On the other hand, when our faith is strong enough to withstand the onslaught of bad news and difficult experiences, we will continue our search for God and our trust in His goodness, even in the middle of the storm. We must understand, and this is not easy to concede: The Christian life is HARD. But endurance will lead to God’s fullness, and then our faith and fellowship will be constant and strong, and God’s blessings and peace will be multiplied.

We have studied previously the difference between being “filled with the Spirit” and “walking by the Spirit”. When we are cleansed through humility and confession, we qualify for the empowerment of the Spirit’s “filling”. After we are filled, we will be “walking in the power of the Spirit” commensurate with the level of our faith. If we are new or immature believers, the influence of the Spirit will fade quickly and we will be back in a pattern of sin or legalism. But if faith is getting stronger, the filling will continue, and we will be “walking in the Spirit”. Put simply, the *continuation* of the filling of the Spirit will depend on our *maturity* level...or the strength of our faith. As faith gets stronger, our walk in the Spirit will be sustained for longer periods without interruption. At every opportunity, the evil forces that invade with sin and self-righteousness challenge this faith, and bring us under the control of the flesh and leave us in a state of carnality. This is why it is so important to stay “clean” through constant confession, until we *mature*, when the frequency of confession will be reduced. This is when our faith will be stronger, thus holding us “in the Spirit” and keeping us away from sin.

Our goal is to develop a faith that is strong enough to keep us trusting under all circumstances, so that we maintain a walk in the Spirit, even in the middle of tragedy or misfortune. Strong faith keeps us close to God, where we find strength for living and confirmation that our faith is well-placed. Heb. 10:22 says, “...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.” The words “sincere”, “assurance”, and “faith” all connote a heart that trusts in the God that dwells within us. “Having our hearts sprinkled” and “having our bodies washed with pure water” are clear references to being cleansed by the blood of Christ and the washing of the Holy Spirit. This is the forgiveness that comes to believers through grace by the confession of our sins. Here are some verses that confirm the validity and veracity of the cleansing process:

1 John 1:9—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify

us from all unrighteousness.

Heb. 9:14a—How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences...

John 13:8-10a—“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean.”

Ps. 51:2—Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Being washed or cleansed is a process offered to believers only through the confession of sins. Their “bodies” have been washed, but—as sin occurs in their lives—their feet need to be washed. When we are washed, we are cleansed, pure...blameless. 1 Thess. 5:23 says, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify [cleanse] you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Blamelessness comes, not through a change in demeanor, though with maturity that too will come, but through confession. We are blameless to the degree that we are *forgiven*. When we are clean, and are in fellowship and controlled by the Spirit, faith can function and grow. So—first things first: Wash your feet!

When we are clean, and are taking advantage of that time of fellowship by studying, praying, etc., we will be operating in faith, or “walking by faith”. Gal. 3:11 says the “just”, or those who are clean, will “live by faith”. Living by faith is walking by faith, and faith is directed toward God, and not toward the conditions we see around us. 2 Cor. 5:7 says, “We live by faith, not by sight.” Things can look bad to our eyes, but faith focuses on God, who sees beyond circumstances and any period of suffering, to that time when we will be mature, walking in a faith that sees what He sees.

When faith is strong, our production will be great. 1 Tim. 1:4b says, “...nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith.” God’s WORK is by FAITH (Note: not EFFORT). Our goal is to stay clean, so faith can grow, to enable us to walk in the Spirit. That’s the summary of all our teaching and writing: Confess to stay clean, as we grow to trust more, so we can produce holy “good” through the power of the indwelling Spirit. This is the circuit we follow; this is the road we walk. There’s no other way.

The purpose of “walking by faith”, then, is to “walk in the Spirit”. Look at Phil. 2:1 and 2 Cor. 13:14, which both link faith with fellowship. 1 Pet. 1:22 wraps up the outcome of fellowship and spiritual power: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.” When we are purified by following God’s methods for cleansing, and walk in the love of the Holy Spirit (same as “walking in the Spirit”), then we can love one another deeply, primarily through the operation of our gifts, as we have seen. The result is the “fruit of the Spirit”.

I hope this is beginning to crystallize for you. We will be filled with joy and peace and love, for as long as we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, which goes on as long as we are clean and walking by faith.

With faith, the filling of the Spirit is perpetuated, thus becoming a “walk”. Rom. 15:13 expresses Paul’s prayer for the Romans: “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.” It doesn’t get much clearer that this: God’s joy and peace, understood as signals for fellowship, are sustained by “trust”, which causes an “overflow of hope”. This overflowing hope is *advanced* faith and productivity, which generates divine good in the “power of the Holy Spirit”. Faith and spiritual productivity are inextricably linked.

For further confirmation that faith and our walk in the Spirit are linked, we offer the following proof texts to establish this point:

Eph. 6:23—“Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The phrase “love with faith” links fellowship with faith. Faith is added to fellowship, because that is what will sustain fellowship and turn it into a “walk by the Spirit”.

2 Cor. 1:24—“Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm.” The term “joy” is another signal for fellowship, which must exist for faith to be operable and growing.

Eph. 3:16-17—“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.” We are “strengthened with power through His Spirit” when we are in fellowship. Then Christ can “dwell in our hearts”, or dominate our walk, “through faith”.

Rom. 15:13a—“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him...” We saw this verse earlier, and use it here to reinforce the notion that fellowship is sustained by trust. (Remember that “love”, “joy”, and “peace” are all indicators for fellowship.)

Gal. 2:20—“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 life of Christ, indwelling us now as His Spirit, is lived out through us, consistent with our ongoing faith in Him.

The filling of the Spirit is perpetuated by faith. Faith leads to empowerment by the Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is in command within us, His fruit will be produced, as seen in Gal. 2:22-23a—“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” These will be seen IN US, when we walk by faith and thus by His Spirit.

IMPACT OF FAITH. “Without faith it is impossible to please God...” So says Heb. 11:6a. Because faith is essential to God’s pleasure, He scans for it constantly in believers, and He spots even the most minute atom of it. Matt. 17:20 tells us that “...if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” We must have faith to please God, and it doesn’t take much. The direction of our faith is its most important aspect, and if it is aimed properly, it will receive nourishment and thrive. Our faith must be directed toward God, rather than the detractors—demons, the world, and ourselves. Our objective, once again, is to grow as much faith as we can.

Faith provides many positive effects. One of them is that—as long as we are believing—we will have the confidence we need to come before God. Job 13:15 says, “Though he slay me, yet will I hope [trust] in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance, for no godless man would dare come before him!”

Another positive effect of faith is that it provides a breastplate for our hearts, which serves as protection from evil as we exercise service toward fellow believers. 1 Thess. 5:8 says, “But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate...” Faith and love, which travel together, protect us and keep us in the “daylight”. Faith is a shield, according to Eph. 6:16, part of the armor of God that we are to “put on” (Eph. 6:11). Protection comes from the “strength and power of the Lord” (Eph. 6:10), which is accessed by faith.

The effects of faith are so significant that faith stands alone as the means for accessing grace assets and provisions, including the love of God. Gal. 5:6b says, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Faith activates grace, which produces love. This in turn prompts our gifts, thus producing the fruit of the Spirit. This is why we BUILD our faith by adding the following one at a time (as we saw before): goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and—ultimately—love (2 Pet. 1:5). Love is an asset of grace and an effect of faith.

One of the outcroppings of faith is that prayers are answered. If we are in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and are trusting the One to whom we pray, our prayers will be answered positively. This does not mean we always get what we ask for, but that the outcome of all events will be the best that is possible...within God’s plan and according to His will. As we mature, our prayers will morph to match what God wants us to have. As prayers are refined, we pray *according to His will*, and—in the end—we will actually be able to *articulate His will* through our prayers. When we reach a high level of maturity, our prayers are so in tune with God that we *pray for* the exact thing God wants us to have. (See *Bible Basics on Being Devoted to Prayer*.) James 5:15a reports this: “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.” The prayer of faith will get results!

Faith also brings righteousness. This includes both the eternal righteousness of Christ, with which we are imputed at salvation, and the experiential righteousness that comes from the control of the Spirit when we are in fellowship as believers. 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’.” Faith generates righteousness, because faith relinquishes God’s work to the Holy Spirit. It is our bodies that are used as His tools when this is done, but the source, origin, energy, and direction for it come from the Holy Spirit.

Faith gives us access to grace, which enables us to stand in peace (i.e., in fellowship), regardless of external conditions. Rom. 5:1-3 describes the process this way:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith [saved], 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.

As we access grace for living, we experience the peace and joy that comes with constant communion with the Spirit of Christ. As we mature, this state of being becomes the norm. This privilege is for those who have *faith for living*, and are thus operating under *grace for living*. We can stand in grace, because we walk by faith.

As we have stated repeatedly, the function of our gifts is a big part of each believer's life, as well as the life of the body of Christ, or the church. Rom. 12:2-6 shows how understanding, grace, faith, and gifts are linked, saying the following:

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. 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. 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.

Grace designs and guides all spiritual operations, and faith is the receiver for grace. The more our faith is tuned to grace, the better the signal for grace will be. In other words, the more we believe the truths from the Word, the greater we will see our faith become; and the greater our faith is, the more grace we will see. The element that increases our faith is understanding and wisdom, and the medium for this increase is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit causes the nutrients of the Word to be assimilated into the heart, where it mutates into greater faith. In a sense, the Holy Spirit helps us “digest” the nourishing content of the Word. Faith, then, comes to the one who wants the truth...who seeks it, acquires it, and believes it. The results will be *more grace*, and—as the passage above suggests—the *meaningful operation of our gifts* and the *fulfillment of God's will* can be expected.

We are to come to God with FAITH, assured that He will honor that faith, and that He will meet *faith* with *grace*. Faith *calls up* grace. Heb. 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” For this to happen, we must follow the steps we have learned, suggested in the following: When we are cleansed through humility and confession, have been praying, are frequently feeding on God's Word, and are trusting Him, we can enter the “Most Holy Place”, which is where the throne of God is. There we can “receive mercy”, an expression of grace-forgiveness; and this will enable us to “find grace”, which will serve us IN OUR TIME OF NEED! Faith is the ticket.

GOD'S PERSPECTIVE AND OUR FAITH. We have seen in previous studies all the alternatives to faith, such as walking in the flesh, trusting in ourselves, relying on the world, and pre-occupation with our circumstances. The focus in this study has been on examining the *correct* objects of our faith, including Jesus Christ, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. The *kind* of faith we have emphasized here is a minute-by-minute trust in the goodness of God...that He will provide everything we need for our physical and material lives, and that He will equip us for spiritual growth and production.

Our tendency is to see faith as a catalyst for immediate change and improvement in our *earthly* conditions. But God's perspective and plan are farther-reaching; they are long-term, and big-picture. We tend to look to God for money, health, good relationships, etc., which are legitimate and immediate concerns...and God is certainly involved in all of these aspects of our lives. But God's greatest provisions for us are for our *spiritual* consumption and benefit, with assurances that all other concerns will "take care of themselves".

We must understand God's *eternal* view. Unfortunately, our corporeal outlook tends to cause us, even those of us who are growing, to see faith as a process related more to "tangible-world" outcomes than the achievement of spiritual goals. There are, then, two perspectives of the function and purpose of faith: 1) God's, and 2) that of humans who are consumed with their own circumstances. When faith is directed *toward God*, and continues to increase, it will eventually cause our view to become like His.

When King Jehoshaphat recognized that he was outmanned and outgunned as he faced the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, he chose to adopt a view not confirmed in his senses, but only in his own faith system. Here is what he said in a prayer regarding this confrontation with a formidable enemy: "O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you" (2 Chron. 20:12). His focus was on God's power, not his own. He was looking at God, and not His dilemma. He trusted God, and not the odds, which were clearly stacked against him. God's perspective was relayed in verse 17:

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.

When we learn God's perspective, our eyes will be on Him and not the problem we face. Even if the problem continues or worsens, grace will sustain us and bless us, if our faith persists. Reminding ourselves of Heb. 11:1, we recall that faith is defined as "being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The issue is this: Will we trust our sight, or will we trust God? We are well-practiced in the certainty of what we SEE. But faith is BEING SURE WITHOUT SEEING. Faith is NOT a sensual experience. God's plan, His love, His grace and mercy...even His forgiveness...are not experienced through the senses. Many churches nowadays emphasize the body and emotions as the center of spiritual engagement, but that is not where faith occurs. Faith deals with the unseen and the unsensed, and is a condition that operates within our hearts.

God's workings will be hard for us to see and understand, until we reach a level of *super-maturity*, when we can come to know His *fullness*, and have *absolute knowledge* of His love. Until then, however, even though truth and grace will always be there, we won't always see them, because we are measuring God's reality and value by what we SEE WITH OUR EYES, rather than what we SEE THROUGH THE EYES OF OUR SPIRITUAL HEARTS (see Eph. 1:18).

As we have seen in previous writings, and see once again in this one, study, training, and growth give us new lenses through which to view our lives. When we reach higher levels of maturity, we will see life

from the divine perspective. Such a view is hard-won, and takes an immense desire for God and His truth. This kind of perspective seems to be rare, but we are assured that it is open to us all. We can all acquire the clarity and acumen of the divine viewpoint. We can all learn to trust as though we were actually SEEING God's solutions, while we are staring right into the face of our problems.

Walking Humbly before God

INTRODUCTION

Humility is an accurate and realistic assessment of one's worth. Rarely do we get this self-review right, erring in two directions. We err, first of all, in our evaluation of ourselves in relation to mankind and the world; and, secondly, in our view of ourselves in relation to God. Considering the first type of error, our self-view regarding our relative value among fellow humans, we see a distortion arising from the comparisons we make between what we see in ourselves and what we observe in others. We see ourselves either as "better" or "worse" than those we see, and we feel excessively low, or unwarrantedly lofty, based on how we stack up against others. This leads, in turn, either to compensation for perceived shortcomings, or to arrogance, because we see ourselves as superior. Neither of these can lead us into thought and behavior patterns which are constructive.

A second error is made when we have the wrong view of ourselves in relation to God. This is more serious than an incorrect view of our value in the world, because its effects reach much further...all the way into eternity. A correct view of our position in the divine scheme of things is based on a very simple premise: God is God; we are not. It seems that this simple lesson is the hardest truth to get right, because we are overwhelmed with the world we see, and the self we sense; thus, we often forget the world that exists beyond our senses. God is usually an afterthought, rather than the center of our existence, so we tend to be preoccupied with our status in relation to our environment...and the relative strength we feel in it...rather than our condition before God. It's all about ME...I am the creator and sustainer of my reality...I am my own reason for existing. When we assume this, God is not God to us; we suppose that WE are all the "god" we need. This is pride.

Contrarily, when we come to see God as God, we will know that our only rightful posture is one of humility toward Him, and we will know that—whether we see ourselves as up or down in the world—our true value comes only from Him; God alone makes us valuable. Without Him we are nothing, regardless of how well we measure up by the world's standards; and without Him we can DO NOTHING, regardless of how much we develop the resources of our humanity. That venerable, highly-educated genius named Paul, said, "I am nothing" (1 Cor. 12:11). Jesus confirmed this for all of us, saying, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The outcome of a corrected view of ourselves as nothing, and of God as God, is that we will allow Him to become the purpose, the provider, and the power for our lives. God is something.

SYNONYMS FOR "HUMILITY"

There are many synonyms that can help us frame the meaning of "humility". One of the most significant of these is the term "confession", which means responding to the sins we know we have committed by naming them to God. (Confession is also accomplished when we go through one of the

other means for confession, such as contrition, repentance, or asking for forgiveness.) There are many equivalents to humility, such as these: fear of the Lord, acknowledgement of God, God-consciousness, being still before the Lord, waiting on the Lord, trusting God, preoccupation with Christ, awe, thankfulness, and resting in God's promises. Humility encompasses prayer, trust, perseverance, and service through our gifts. Words that go along with humility in Scripture include these, among others: lowly, simple, contrite, meek, and submissive.

In discussing humility, we will look at the following aspects: the need for humility in new believers, God's viewpoint vs man's viewpoint, examples of humility, what it means to walk humbly, dealing with pride, humility and growth, humility and suffering, humility and faith, humility and gifts, and the effects of humility. Each of these will be a topic for discussion.

HUMILITY IN NEW BELIEVERS

Preachers, Christian movies, social media posts, numerous books, and so on, suggest or downright declare that a conversion to Christ provides instant and complete equipment for living the Christian life. The assumption is this: By becoming a believer, sweeping and pervasive changes permeate the consciousness permanently, and we are forever enabled to live joyously and sin-free. What a shock it is when reality hits, and Satan and the world pull the rug out from under us, and we find our ever-resident sinful natures in full cooperation with evil forces, creating and practicing sin and legalism!

The need for growth in knowledge and grace, and the uselessness of a believer until his growth is well underway, have been downplayed. Too often, well-meaning witnesses lead the lost to Christ, but then leave them by the side of the Christian path to fend for themselves. New believers who have no firm doctrinal underpinning for ways to proceed in their new lives will founder, and eventually shipwreck, because they do not know what they are doing. The first thing a new believer must understand is that they are BABIES! As infants, there is much for them to learn and understand, before they will be prepared to serve and bear fruit. Fruit-bearing will come through MATURE BELIEVERS, not from a cluster of toddlers playing "church".

Many believers live their entire lives spinning in circles as immature believers and never growing, even though they become heavily involved in church "activity". They don't grow, because they DON'T KNOW THEY ARE IN NEED OF GROWTH. New believers need to understand their need to be humble, and to stand still, be quiet, and learn. Otherwise, they will live on the edge of Christianity forever, believing that they already have all they need to succeed as Christians. They may be quite busy, but they will not be productive, and THIS IS NOT WHAT GOD WANTS. Their achievements will be fleshly, regardless of any "holy appearances" they may exhibit, and they will not know the assurance and fullness that comes to the believer that tends to *first things first*. This includes *growing* (maturing) and *staying in fellowship* (walking in the Spirit). If these are not familiar to you, please read *Bible Basics for Living*, available at this website, to secure the truths surrounding these crucial areas of study.

A new believer must GROW! They will not "walk" until they are strengthened for that experience. No new believer should be expected to start "working", before he has completed intensive and meaningful

training in the *truths for living* provided in God's Word. When we are first saved, we must not delay immediate matriculation into a concentrated study on His truths for living. The energy a new believer gets from the excitement of being converted must be channeled into training, or that believer will either stagnate, or head off in a wrong direction that runs counter to God's plan and purpose.

GOD'S VIEW OF US IS CORRECT; OURS IS NOT

God sees the humble...and recognizes them. Ps. 138:6 says, "Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar." To get God's attention is not to become noteworthy, but to bow our heads in reverence and approach Him as the God that He is, with awareness that He alone is the "Lord on high", and that He will acknowledge us much more when we know our place.

God not only *sees* the humble; he *values* them. This is confirmed in Is. 66:2b, which says, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." When we come before God in humility, and expose our weakness and need of Him, He smiles and says of us, "I particularly like this one." And then He says to us, "Take a step up; I am honoring you," because anyone He esteems, He elevates.

God wants to see us with a correct perspective of Him, and He wants us to know that He is the Creator and Deliverer, and that He is our Provider. He wants us to recognize that we are *dependent* on Him, because He alone has the power to raise us up or hold us down. And notice: Even our being "raised up" has a right and wrong perspective, because it involves more than success, wealth, status, fame, sex, approval, or education. When God elevates, His intention and focus are centered on SPIRITUAL STATUS AND GROWTH! What He wants to see in us has eternal implications, such as spiritual growth, knowledge of God, a walk in the Spirit, trust, prayerful thinking, endurance of His training, and operation of our gifts. These will equip us with everything we need for God's work, and for the accomplishment of His will. As we grow, we will increasingly understand the place of God's provision in the operation of His divine life within us and through us.

It is not what we say about ourselves that gives us value, but what God says about us. 1 Sam. 2:3 sheds light on this, saying, "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed." We always want to "look good", and we always reflect ourselves as the heroes of our own stories, so when we are speaking of ourselves, we always fix our hair, don whatever cosmetics we have available, and set the lighting to reflect our best features...and then we give our favorite face to onlookers. But God is not impressed, because He knows the inside story. He knows where we came from, and what we truly are in our innermost parts. And it's not pretty, most of the time.

Gen. 2:7 tells us that we are made from dust, so how can we think we are really something, when we are just a model of clay? Gal. 6:3 adds this: "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." We are wrapped up in the swirl of our own delusions. We learn something that others don't know and we feel exclusive. We perform an act that sets us apart and we feel special. We

acquire an object that others don't have and we feel superior. Yet we are NOTHING...full of self-deception.

When we can understand that superiority lies with God, and that His view is the ultimate one, we will be getting ready to dine at His table. It is a matter of developing eyes that see what He sees. This is why we are called upon to follow Col. 3:2, which says, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." When we arrive at a sufficient stage of maturity, we will develop a divine point of view. That is the exciting thing about growth...you can look back and see how far you've come...and you can look ahead and know **YOU WILL SEE CHANGE IN YOUR OUTLOOK**, if you will just keep growing.

There is quite a contrast between values and views that belong to the world...and those of God. 1 Cor. 1:20-21 says the following about this contrast:

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

Think of the smartest people you know, or know of, in whatever field you want. You must understand that their most erudite and arcane postulates are utter foolishness in the extended view of the Creator. Verse 25 adds, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength." There is a huge gap between God's most idle thought and man's most brilliant cerebration. God is not looking for human excellence and perfection; He is looking to bring perfection to the imperfect. He doesn't need us to be better or stronger or prettier; these do not impress Him. God wants to be His own perfect and strong and beautiful self *through us*. He doesn't want us to *conceive* wisdom; He wants us to *receive* wisdom. He wants us to know our hands are empty, except for what He places into them; and He wants us to recognize that we have nothing of value to bring to Him, while—on the other hand—what He offers to us is of immense value.

The ones God can use and bless are those believers who do not see greatness in themselves, but have grasped that only God is great, and that all greatness comes from Him. 1 Cor. 1:26-27 says this:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

When we came to God to be saved from eternal condemnation, we did not try to "appear" a certain way, or assume some kind of righteous posture. We came as we were, and brought our nothingness to His completeness. And we have been made forever complete through our eternal union with Him. That is our position. And now that our position is secure, we must address our condition, which is still earth-bound and sin-laden. Once again, God is not looking for qualities in us that make us eligible for advancement; He is looking for our eyes to be directed away from ourselves and toward Him...adopting a view that encompasses and relies on His assets, and not our own.

God's message of grace and the sacrifice of His Son is foolishness to unbelievers, but to those who have believed, it represents the power of God. It is by His power that we have been saved, and then it is by His power that we will be able to live the life of Christ. 1 Cor. 1:18 says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." When God offers grace, and it is accepted, His power goes to work. Grace is seen in the assets he offers for those who employ the techniques that we have discussed throughout our studies: confession, prayer, study, trust, training, and—finally—surrender (complete submission to the "fullness of God").

By the way, just because we grow and increase our use of God's grace assets, does not mean that we, in and of ourselves, actually gain strength or tools that equip us for battle with self and evil. Growth increasingly gives us a perspective of *dependence* on our Father for supplies and resources. We, ourselves, independent of God, will actually be diminishing, though there will be an increase over-all. This may sound confusing. It is important to get this straight. What we are saying is that maturity gives us a realization that the improvement in our thinking and our demeanor does not come from improvements in ourselves, but in a burgeoning influence of God and His truth within us, which enables His Spirit to fulfill His purposes...through us. John 3:30 sums this up well, saying, "He must become greater; I must become less." This is interesting, however: by becoming less, we HAVE more to work with, DO more, and ACHIEVE more than we thought possible. Less becomes more.

The attitude of God being all-sufficient, and man as being needy and inadequate, is the correct one to have. We are failures, regardless of how the world sees us. And this is why we need to confess our sins, to help us maintain the correct view of God *as God*, and ourselves as rescued mongrels. Ps. 51:15-17 tells us what God is looking for in believers:

O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

When we are crushed by our weaknesses, and feel genuine regret at our faults, God will show us mercy EVERY TIME, and that is when we will receive His strength and walk in His power. James 1:9 tells us we can feel good about our weakness and lowness, as follows: "The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position." We can be ashamed of our behavior, but proud of our cleansing. We can beam with "God-pride", as we walk in the Spirit, because our sins have been washed away.

As we look toward God, we can only feel shame at our lack of understanding and insight, and gratefully acknowledge that whatever we are becoming is by God's grace. This is depicted quite well in Ezra 9:6, which offers the following prayer of contrition and confession: "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens." Today, we would personalize this prayer of confession and say that MY sins are higher than my head, and MY guilt has reached to the heavens. This matches God's view of us as helpless and hopeless without Him, but sets the stage for what He loves to do with us, which is to *show mercy*.

GOD HIMSELF IS A STRONG BASIS FOR OUR HUMILITY

We have already established to some degree the basis for humility, which is recognition of the difference between our humanity and God's divinity. We want to dig a little deeper into this well, to see further the underlying conditions that form the sub-structure for the operation of humility. One basic underpinning for humility is our limitation as humans. We are deficient of the resources needed to perceive and operate in the "out-picture", which is God's domain...as God experiences it and sees it. God has an overview of all reality, extending even to His super-reality, which reaches far beyond ours. We can't see it, but we can come to understand it, with maturity. Until we get the mind of Christ, and acquire a transformed mind that has been "renewed"—in short, until we mature—we are stuck with the "in-picture", which is the limited and immediate view we have of the world, as experienced through our senses and the inner-processing we do as we observe our environment. The in-picture obliterates the out-picture; i.e., our focus on the immediate blots out our view of the eternal. Thus we measure ourselves within the finite cosmos, rather than within the eternal state. The result is a dichotomy: pride in one realm, and humility in the other. The more we operate in God's realm, the more our humility will become inevitable.

When we get a panorama of the "out-picture", we will see God, know His standards, and recognize that we are incapable of doing what He requires. Humanity cannot produce divinity. Paul saw this in himself, as he recorded in Rom. 7:14-25, quoted here:

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Paul testified that he could not control himself, because of the overpowering influence of his sinful nature. Since this was true with Paul, it is certain that we can do no better. We do not have the resources within our humanity to stop sinning. And if we say we do, we are liars, as per 1 John 1:8-10. Our inability to "do right" provides a substantial basis for humility. Ironically, when we acknowledge our weakness, God's strength can come to rest upon us, and then we can do in HIS strength what we could not do in our own.

Jehoshaphat understood this, as we see in 2 Chron. 20:12, where he prayed, “O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.” Jehoshaphat could see that he was outnumbered and that he was helpless to stop the gargantuan forces aligned against him. So he committed his dilemma to God...and God responded, as we see in verses 15-17, as follows:

He said, “Listen, King Jehoshaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: ‘Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s. Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the desert of Jeruel. You will not have fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you’.”

Jehoshaphat did not tell *himself* not to be afraid or discouraged; he got his message from God, and therefore it had “teeth”; it had the power of the Almighty behind it. Our lives are no different from this king, and we are as reliant on God for deliverance from evil forces as he was. Humility is appropriate, because we cannot save or deliver ourselves; we must rely on God for this. Andrew Murray said the following, all the way back in 1895:

Apart from Me—you nothing. Lord, I gladly accept the arrangement: I nothing—Thou all. My nothingness is my highest blessing, because Thou art the Vine, that givest and workest all. So be it, Lord! I, nothing, ever waiting on Thy fullness. Lord, reveal to me the glory of this blessed life. (Endnote 1)

It was his “nothingness” that Jehoshaphat brought to God, and we must do the same. God does not want us to bring to Him a frog we caught at the pond, like a young boy might do for his mother. He does not want or need our achievements or accolades; he wants us to come to Him with our nothingness...to be filled with His “everythingness”. We ARE nothing, and we can DO nothing, as we saw earlier in John 15:5. We may be convinced we are something, and that we can DO something of a spiritual nature, but that is the pride of our sinful nature trying to convince us that nothing is something, and that what we do will somehow impress an infinite God. What a limited view we have of God!

Part of the delusion of our pride, and a reason we are not humble, is that we see ourselves as wise and powerful. 1 Cor. 1:18 says, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Truth is foolishness to unbelievers (and carnal believers, according to Rom. 8), and they cannot understand the wisdom and power of God...and their lack of either one. When we come to understand the power of God, which we have studied so thoroughly in the past, we will see the emptiness of human effort. When human wisdom is trumpeted, the power of the cross is negated. There is nothing like self-faith to quell God’s power in our lives. A message is valuable and wise and powerful to the degree that it is connected with the cross...or to the extent that it recognizes and extols God.

The more we understand the way God works, and who He is, the stronger the pull of humility will be. For example, God is the source of good and growth. 1 Cor. 3:7 says, “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.” The phrase “only God” should jump out at us. Part of humility is coming to distinguish which activities belong only to God. Pride wants all operations to be “only mine”, but no spiritual functions and operations will be effective, unless they come from “only God”. He is the one who is good, and He alone makes things “grow” and bear fruit.

Yet we persist in our efforts. This is described in Gal. 3:3, which says, “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” Only I, we say...I can do it...watch me. But even Jesus said it was not He who did the work, but His Father. John 14:10b reports this, saying, “The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.” Andrew Murray said some very appropriate things about this truth—again going back to 1895—as we see in the following quotes:

Of Himself Jesus had said: ‘The Son can do nothing of himself.’ As the outcome of that entire dependence, He could add: ‘All that the Father, doeth, doeth the Son also likewise.’ As Son He did not receive His life from the Father once for all, but moment by moment. His life was a continual waiting on the Father for all He was to do.

Abiding in me is indispensable, for, you know it, of yourselves you can do nothing to maintain or act out the heavenly life.

As little as I created myself, as little as I could raise a man from the dead, can I give myself the divine life. As little as I can give it myself, can I maintain or increase it: every motion is the work of God through Christ and His Spirit. It is as a man believes this, that he will take up that position of entire and continual dependence which is the very essence of the life of faith. With the spiritual eye he sees Christ every moment supplying grace for every breathing and every deepening of the spiritual life. His whole heart says Amen to the word: You can do nothing. And just because he does so, he can also say: ‘I can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth me.’ The sense of helplessness, and the abiding to which it compels, leads to true fruitfulness and diligence in good works. (Endnote 2)

ONLY GOD is able to do His work. This is about God being God, and our NOT trying to stand in His stead. Paul described this very well in 1 Cor. 15:10, where he said, “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.” This is a great expression of humility: YET NOT I! Only God! This is confirmed again in Rom. 11:18, which says this: “...do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.” Many points could be made from this verse, but the point we want to make is that the “root” is the source of all sustenance and empowerment for living and thriving in the Christian life. God is the source of all the good we will ever do. And any “good” that we do apart from Him is not good at all.

This idea was expressed very well in the parable of the vine and the branches in John 15. Jesus Christ is

the vine, and we are the branches. As long as we are sustained by Him, we will be productive. But if we are cut off from His power through sin, thus quenching the control of the Spirit within us, there will be no fruit, and we must confess to have that power restored. When we are restored to fellowship with God through confession, the power of the Spirit is re-activated, and God is then able to work through us.

We must depend on the Holy Spirit to do God's work, as Jesus did Himself. John 5:19 breaks this down for us, saying, "Jesus gave them this answer: '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 recognized that His humanity, though sinless, was insufficient to do God's work, so He Himself said, "the Son can do nothing by himself". This set up what we see next: "...whatever the Father does the Son also does". The Son is not doing it; the Father is. The Father, in the form of His Spirit, is doing the work *through* the Son, because Jesus had put His own Deity in "park" for the duration of His ministry on earth. His humanity was a spiritually-empty vessel, just like ours, which is why He had to "grow in knowledge and grace", and why he had to live in dependence on His Father. If Jesus Christ Himself depended on the Father, how far will we get depending on ourselves?

Carrying the analogy of the "vine and the branches" from John 15 a little further, we see the following, again from Andrew Murray, who saw the truth of our helplessness, and presented that truth in four short lessons, as follows:

There is the lesson of *consecration*. The branch has but one object for which it exists, one purpose to which it is entirely given up. That is, to bear the fruit the vine wishes to bring forth. And so the believer has but one reason for his being a branch—*but one reason for his existence on earth*—that the heavenly Vine may through him bring forth His fruit.

There is the lesson of *perfect conformity*. The branch is a perfect likeness of the vine; the only difference is, the one is great and strong, and the source of strength, the other little and feeble, ever needing and receiving strength.

There is the lesson of *absolute dependency*. The vine has its stores of life and sap and strength, not for itself, but for the branches. The branches are and have nothing but what the vine provides and imparts. The believer is called to, and it is his highest blessedness to enter upon, a life of entire and unceasing dependence upon Christ. Day and night, every moment, Christ is to work in him all he needs.

And then the lesson of *undoubting confidence*. The branch has no cure; the vine provides all; it has but to yield itself and receive. It is the sight of this truth that leads to the blessed rest of faith, the true secret of growth and strength: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Endnote 3)

It is remarkable that such a clear enunciation of the proper God-man hierarchy was made so long ago...by Andrew Murray, pastor and evangelist of his day. We will hear from him again, as he helps us make clear the reason it is proper that we should be humble before God, which is, above all else, that

GOD IS GOD! It's not that God wants to lord His superiority over us, but he wants to replace our inferiority with His superiority. Let Him be the trunk; all we have to do is hang on, be a branch, and receive what He infuses into us.

THREE EXAMPLES OF HUMILITY

There are many examples of humility in the Bible, but we will briefly highlight three of them to illustrate some of the features of humility. The first and most austere example of humility is seen in our Savior, Jesus Christ. After all, He was God, but He did not showcase that side of Himself during the thirty-three years of His earthly ministry. Phil. 2:3-8 describes this perfectly, as follows:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

If we want to know the mindset of Jesus Christ, here it is: He was God, but became a human, and a servant of mankind; He followed His Father's plan all the way to the cross. He is our *example* for the *lessons* given in verses 3 and 4, which is encapsulated in these four principles:

“Don't do anything out of selfish ambition.” When what we want to accomplish tramples on the rights and well-being of others, it can't be right.

“Consider others better than yourselves.” Self-promotion and personal aggrandizement play no role in our spiritual walk. The exercise of our gifts in behalf of others is a labor of “unselfish love” that serves the needs of others, but also recognizes that we can't “do it all”, and that we must rely on others to edify US as we edify THEM.

“Look to the interests of others.” We were cautioned not to try to do it all and not to refuse the gifted services of others. At the same time, as we receive the services of other believers, we must be careful that we do not only “receive”, but that we equally “give” from our gifted capabilities. We must not become a “sponge” for services, but build our faith so we can serve others. There is a balance between giving and receiving.

“Have the attitude of Christ Jesus.” He humbled himself and became obedient. For us, this means that we must obey the commands to confess, to pray, to learn, to trust, to endure, to commit, and to serve. These represent the pathway to growth and a walk in the Spirit, wherein our mindset becomes that of Jesus Christ. What evolves is a singular passion for exercising our gifts in the interests of others. That is real service.

Another example of humility in the Bible is that of Moses. We know what Moses did, as the history of the release of the Jews from slavery and their time in the desert under his leadership are clearly

recorded in biblical history. But we do not know the inner content and processes of Moses' heart. These are known only to God. It so happens, God assessed Moses' heart, gave him the highest marks possible, and recorded the results for us to view. The results say this: "Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). He was the most humble man alive! He had enormous humility. Was he perfect? Of course not. But was his humility deep and sincere? Yes. He was a truly-mature believer with strong faith and a willing heart, shrouded in a cloak of humility. And he was exalted to a place of great leadership because of it...in the vein of "the last shall be first".

One other example is that of Paul, who knew that his gift came from God, and that it was God who "worked" his gift. He knew the limits of his value in the process of God's work, and saw his own contribution as very small. Eph. 3:7-9 gives us a clear statement of Paul's view of his own work:

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, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.

Paul's purpose came from God's power, expressed through Paul as a gift for disclosing the greatest mystery of all time, which was the work and ministry of God's Son. Yet Paul, though he conveyed foundational truths for all of mankind for this age, saw himself as "less than the least of all God's people". So here was the greatest expositor who ever lived, assessing himself as the lowest of all believers on earth.

We need to get this picture. We must settle with our "specialties", and not try to be "generalists", or "jacks of all trades". This is a form of humility. Most of the time, our objective in life is to get "bigger" and to fulfill grandiose images of ourselves as great heroes and leaders. Our goal is too often the occupying of various important jobs in the world and in the church. Our goal must be, instead, to develop and exploit our own particular gifts, whatever they are, and to devote ourselves to their expression.

We may scarcely notice those faithful servants who serve quietly and unassumingly, gently and softly serving others out of their own gifts. These are the *invisible heroes* of our faith, and the ones who will receive great rewards for service, even though their acts may not be highly visible. (See *God's Training Program for Believers*, the chapter titled, "The War Against God".) These are the ones who can strengthen us most. These are the ones we can emulate...the ones who truly serve.

I AM NOT WORTHY

John the Baptizer was questioned about his use of baptism, suggesting that he should not be baptizing, because he did not have the authority to do so. After all, he was not the Christ, or Elijah, or the "Prophet". His response to them was this: "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (John 1:26-27). The

attitude of a truly great servant is not, “I am worthy, because I have done many wonderful things”, but rather, “I am not worthy”, regardless of what has been done. This is a perfect expression of humility.

Grace is not to be refused, but it is not something about which we should be misled. How many testimonies have we heard from preachers and others in which they say, “I have done such and such...and this or that happened to bless me”? An example: “I gave away all that I owned, and God has blessed me many times over because of it.” God will not honor this kind of proud proclamation, because, what this person is saying is this: I AM WORTHY! This is not humility.

In Luke 7, a Roman centurion sent some Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant. Right before Jesus arrived, the centurion sent some friends out to tell Jesus not to bother coming. Here is what transpired, as shown in Luke 7:6-7:

He [Jesus] was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed.

Here is what Jesus recognized in this centurion: “I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (v. 9). He did not consider himself worthy to come to Jesus, yet his faith was the greatest in the land. Obviously, this centurion was a mature believer, as evidenced by his love for his servant and his concern for the Jewish nation (Luke 7:4-5), and as indicated by his humility. His use and understanding of the phrase “I am not worthy” brought the Lord's blessing to him.

What gets God's attention, and brings restoration and blessing to us? Our grasp of this condition: I am not worthy! This is exactly what we see in Luke 15:17-21, where a son took his inheritance and left his father's home to be out on his own. It wasn't long before he had squandered his wealth and ended up with nothing. Finally, he realized how good things had been back home, so he made a good decision: he decided to go back to his father's house. This is a perfect picture of restoration to fellowship, but notice the humility involved in his return, as reported in our passage, Luke 15:17-21. Here is what happened:

When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants’.” So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

And then look at the father's response, which was remarkable, and represents a perfect depiction of God's mercy when we confess our sins to Him. Here is how the lost son's father reacted to his son's declaration of “I am no longer worthy”:

But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and

celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate. (vv. 22-24)

When we see that we are not worthy, when we see our weakness, when we acknowledge our failings, when we confess our sins...we will be restored, and not only that...we will be blessed! Every step of the way requires humility: the realization that we are wrong, the admission that we erred, the acceptance of God’s forgiveness, and the receipt of God’s blessing after we are back in fellowship. (As we have seen in previous studies, this “blessing” may be seen either as prosperity of some kind, or as training for growth through trials and tests. But anything from God is not only “good”; it is perfect.)

WALK HUMBLY

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” So says James 4:10. “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Such is the word from James 4:6. Being humble is mandated in a number of places. Even if there were no reason for being humble besides the fact that humility is completely *appropriate and logical*, and even if there were nothing to be gained from it, we have our orders: we are COMMANDED to BE HUMBLE.

Micah 6:8 refines our view of humility, calling upon us to *live* in a state of humility. This verse says, “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” God requires that we *act* in a certain way, *love* a specific thing, and *walk* in a certain manner. We are to “act justly”, which means that we are to operate within the realm of God’s justice. This justice was satisfied *at the cross*, and is now exercised in our favor *because of the cross*. (See 1 John 1:9) Since God’s justice is satisfied, we are to “act” or live in the light of that satisfied justice. We are also told in this passage to “love mercy”, which means to access the forgiveness of our sins through the means God has provided for believers, namely, *confession*. This restores fellowship, reinvigorates our hearts, and refreshes the operation of God’s power in and through us. And we are to “walk humbly”, or live in a state of constant recognition of God’s superiority and an abiding awareness of His grace.

Micah 6:8 can also be applied to the way we treat fellow believers, and others, but a look at verse 7 tells us that the context in this passage has to do primarily with the *forgiveness of our sins*, which is accomplished through satisfied justice, gracious mercy, and God’s “walk” with the humble. When we are humble, God will forgive us and walk with us. This is fellowship, made possible by the cleansing which confession initiates, which grace propagates, and which mercy generates.

Part of “walking humbly” is being dressed for the occasion. When we dress each morning, we must not forget to put on humility. 1 Pet. 5:5b-6 says this:

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “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.

Humility should be as close to us as the shirts on our backs, moving with us, staying with us throughout the day. This is repeated in Col. 3:12b, where we are told to “clothe ourselves with

compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” We see that humility is featured in the middle of a list of love-garments; which is found at the grace-and-mercy store and bought through faith. The fabric for this clothing of humility comes from the love we get from God when we walk in fellowship with Him. This is a natural by-product of a walk in the Spirit; it will be impossible for us to walk in the Spirit...to be that close to God...and not to walk in love and humility.

NOTE: This humility is not the work of the flesh pumping up some contrived state of negative self-consciousness; it is the result of our contact with an infinite God. When we are in fellowship, humility is inevitable. To “clothe ourselves with humility”, we must first pay attention to all the growth and spirituality techniques and requirements we have learned, and FOLLOW them.

This is why we are to “love mercy”...because it is only when we have accessed mercy, and obtained forgiveness, and found grace again, that we can be clothed in humility. Ps. 123:1-3a tells us what we should be looking for, as follows:

I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy. Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us...

By seeking mercy, and being cleansed and replenished, we will receive grace, which will teach us even more about humility. And when humility flourishes, we can honor and glorify God by fully acknowledging and revering His singular holiness and greatness.

Applied to fellow believers, walking humbly means to place others above ourselves, as we see in Rom. 12:10: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Love from fellowship and maturity is the prompt, and serving through our gifts is the action. As we have said many times, the most common expression of love is the exercise of our gifts. If you want to see a barometer for your own love-status, look at the identification and operation of your gifts. If you do not know your gifts, or if they are not being used in service to others, check your growth routine. There’s more to be done in the area of preparation and training. Do the following: *Constantly*—Confess, pray, and trust. *Daily*—Study. *Long-term*—train and surrender. Do these, and humility, love, and meaningful service will come.

PRIDE

Pride is not limited to “peacocking”, which is displaying our assets for onlookers, as we search for recognition and praise; or “crowing”, which is announcing our good qualities, real or perceived, with or without demonstrating them. Pride is these, for sure, and we will say more about these practices in this study. But pride is frequently more subtle than what we see in peacocking or crowing. Pride is seen in any decision we make that reflects self-dependency in matters for which we should be exercising God-dependency. Any time we face circumstances without factoring in GOD’S ROLE in determining the purpose and outcome of them, we are operating in PRIDE! Faith, on the other hand, is believing that God knows best, and recognizing that our lives are better off in His hands than in our own.

Pride is evident whenever we look at life from the view of the world or of our sinful nature. Pride is a

perspective. If we are perceiving reality through our natural lenses, we will exhibit pride because of misdirected faith...toward ourselves, or others, or forces of nature, or the luck of the draw. Pride is trusting in anything but God, and is both a personal and a species-wide condition. Faith that is directed “up” is valid; faith that is directed “down” is invalid. By that, we mean that faith exercised toward God represents *humility*; confidence aimed at ourselves or the world is *pride*. Humility says, “God can do it!” Pride says, “I can do it!”

Pride is Satan’s calling card, and provides an easy appeal for him to make toward humans. His original sin of arrogance was that he would be like God. That is exactly what we did, when we chose to eat of the fruit in the garden. Satan convinced our original ancestors that they could be as smart as God. Our first and most enduring sin was *independence from God*...or PRIDE! This is more prevalent in and around us than we know, and it is more devastating than we have believed. Pride, all by itself, initiated and perpetuated by Satan, promoted by the world, and generated from the sin dynamo of our own nature...is the greatest divider between man and his Creator. Pride takes us AWAY from God.

Pride is consistently castigated in Scripture. Prov. 16:18 shows us the destructiveness of pride, saying, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” This is followed in verse 19 by this: “Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” That’s the thing with pride: It feeds itself and rewards itself. Pride lives on its own success, which generates more pride, and from there things continue downward into deep-seated arrogance.

To help us frame our discussion on pride, we offer in the following some verses that elucidate the functions and dangers of pride:

Prov. 29:23—“A man’s pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.” Pride seems heady and satisfying at the time it is engaged, but the outcome of pride will eventually be a disastrous drop.

James 1:9—“The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.” When we are kept in less-than-lofty conditions, we are to thank God and take pride in our status, knowing that it leads to His blessings and greater service.

James 4:6—“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” When we are proud, God is AGAINST us. What a losing position to be in!

Prov. 3:34—“He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.” God has no grace for the proud. When we choose our way and our solutions and our plans over God’s, we are mocking Him, and grace will be cut off. This should be an easy choice: the grace-life over a do-it-yourself way of living.

Pride is not innocuous; it is exceedingly wrong. Prov. 30:32 says, “If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth!” When we “exalt ourselves”, we are committing an act that is right up there with “planning evil”. There is no question that pride is bad, but what makes it so hard to manage or spot is that it takes place mostly in the secret chambers of carnal hearts. It is hard to recognize, even within ourselves. I believe this is one of those

sensitivities that will come only through serious refinement and maturation.

Boasting is associated with pride. Boasting is not pride, *per se*, but it is a sin all its own, and it is the evidence that pride is at work. This is why it should be avoided. Changes in our hearts through study and training will help us recognize and confess boasting and pride, and will give us increased discernment to see it when it is rising up within us. But pride will always be at work to cause us to “self-elevate”, rather than humbly waiting on the Lord. 1 Cor. 5:6 says, “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?” Boasting is seen as a form of “malice and wickedness” (see v. 8), so the yeast in this verse (v. 6) represents boasting as a sin, which creeps throughout the heart and even into the hearts of those that hear it. Boasting corrupts self and others, as it draws attention away from God and toward the assets of humanity. James 4:16 echoes this view, saying, “As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.”

There is no place for boasting before God. 1 Cor. 1:28-29 says, “He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not, so that no one may boast before him.” No one can boast before God; it is utter folly. Prov. 27:2 calls for us to allow others to praise us, and not to praise ourselves. This verse says, “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.” This is another call for us *not to brag*. When we brag, we are preaching the devil’s lie that goodness and life come from us, rather than God.

Because pride is evil, and because it is promoted by Satan, it is appropriate that we should fortify against it through prayer. Of this, Jesus said, as we see in Matt. 6:13, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” There are many forms of evil that Satan uses to entice or pull us into slavery to him: sin, pride, attachment to the world, self-righteousness, doubt, and so on. This is why we have to pray for “deliverance from evil”, which is a call to be extracted to safety.

Pride also has the effect of disrupting our fellowship with God. Speaking of this, Andrew Murray said the following, suggesting that restoration of the filling of the Holy Spirit is the only way to have the strength to overcome pride:

Brother, have we not here [in our pride] the cause of failure in the pursuit of holiness? Is it not this, though we knew it not, that made our consecration and our faith so superficial and so short-lived? We had no idea to what an extent pride and self were still secretly working within us, and how alone God by His incoming and His mighty power could cast them out. (Endnote 4)

Pride prevents holiness, which is cleanliness. This is because, in pride, we hardly recognize God, let alone see and acknowledge our own deficiencies and weaknesses (translated “sins”). So we “play the fool” and try to exalt ourselves, thus keeping grace at arm’s length, as we continue on the path that we are blazing for ourselves.

Pride also prevents service. Pride is about serving “self”, not others. With pride, we are not esteeming others better than ourselves, so we are not serving them. Instead, we are comparing ourselves with others to make sure we get our share of the spotlight, ascertaining that our worth is properly

showcased. 2 Cor. 10:12 tells us this:

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.

Comparisons lead to competition. Competition in life (different from “games”) without an over-riding spirit of service leads to envy, jealousy, greed, and—eventually—hatred. These are the opposite of love, fellowship, maturity, spirituality, and a life that represents being “...devoted to one another in brotherly love”, or obeying the command to “...honor one another above yourselves”. (See Rom. 12:10.) When we honor others above ourselves, our first concern is service, and as we serve, we can be humble enough to graciously receive the edifying services of others.

In summary, pride is the opposite of humility. If we can grow into greater faith and stronger humility, pride will be upstaged, and we will be able to walk in dependence on our Father, rather than ourselves.

GROWTH AND HUMILITY

The purpose of everything we do as “seeking” believers is related to our growth, which will enable us to get closer to God. When we are at last close to God, we can—from that vantage point—fulfill His will, glorify Him, serve others, and enjoy His “fullness”. Some might say our interest in such growth is a “selfish” pursuit, but our relationship with the Lord is individual and personal, and WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ATTENDING TO OUR OWN GROWTH. Growing is actually the most “unselfish” thing we can do. And we must pursue it with all our being.

Humility is a product of growth. As we learn more about God and His grace, and as we use the techniques and believe the promises that we are learning, we will be growing. This will give us a new perspective, and humility will naturally follow. When God comes into focus, and His truths begin to crystallize in our hearts, we can only acknowledge how great He is. When we are in His presence, we can do none other than bow our heads in submission to the Almighty God.

We have studied in the past the place of learning “truths for living” to enable us to grow. I suggest you read Volumes 1 and 2 of *Bible Basics on the Power of God’s Word*, available at this website. These studies provide a complete discussion of the process of growing in the Word. It is essential that *every believer at every stage of growth* takes time to study each day, in order to assimilate truth and take in spiritual nourishment. Without this, spiritual strength will atrophy, and the Christian walk will become a crawl, and—eventually—a collapse.

Many different forms of study are available. The primary method for learning is to sit at the feet of a pastor-teacher who teaches AT LEAST every other day, and who teaches *how to live*, based on Scripture. There are also books and recorded studies that teach the Word. And in-depth personal studies can be done, as well, using Bible dictionaries, commentaries, systematic theologies, word analyses, translations, and topical studies. Correct information is available IF YOU WANT IT AND SEEK IT!

In Proverbs 2, we see a picture of the growth process, as facilitated by gaining wisdom. Verse 6 in

chapter 2 says, “For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” This wisdom comes to the “blameless”, the “upright”, and the “just” (verses 7 and 8). Clearly, wisdom is for those who are in fellowship continually, those walking in the Spirit. The result of acquiring wisdom is accurately depicted in verses 9-11, as follows:

Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

Wisdom in the heart is the most strengthening quality we can acquire, outside the Holy Spirit Himself. When we get wisdom, we will see God as He is, as per verse 5 (still in Prov. 2), which says we will “understand the fear of the Lord”. This fear amounts to full recognition of the greatness and perfection of God. Wisdom, then, leads to greater insight into the person and works of God. Proverbs 4:7 caps this, saying, “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” This is because wisdom leads to humility.

Even though “humility” is not mentioned by name in the following passage, notice the footprint of humility. Verses 8-9 of Prov. 4 say the following about the effects of wisdom, all of which are also the results of humility: “Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor.” When we embrace wisdom, humility will blossom, and we will be exalted. And as we grow in wisdom, we will also serve others. This is a direct result of increased humility, as shown in James 3:13 which says, “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.”

Colossians 1:9-12 tells us about the growth-gains we get when we acquire knowledge, understanding, and wisdom from Scripture. Here is what this passage says:

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Paul is praying that God will fill the Colossians with “knowledge of his will through all wisdom and understanding”, so that they will benefit in the following ways:

They can live a life “worthy of the Lord”.

They can “please him in every way”.

They can “bear fruit in every good work”.

They can “grow in the knowledge of God”.

They can be “strengthened with all power”.

And they will end up with endurance, patience, joyful thanksgiving, and an inheritance.

The most important truth we see in this verse is that knowledge and understanding cause growth, which is succeeded by increased closeness with God and correspondence with His will. And closeness with God causes us to feel what? Humility! When we are looking into the light of the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6), there is no other way to feel.

Another way to grow is through God’s training. Please take time to read *God’s Training Program for Believers*, also available at this website. A big part of God’s training is through trials and tests to “strain” our faith and build it up. In reality, the term “strengthening our faith” could be seen as something of a misnomer, because faith doesn’t get more *potent*; it just incorporates MORE BELIEF that God is there working in our best interests, that He knows exactly what we need, and that He is capable of delivering the right assets at the right time. “Greater strength” actually comes from God, and not from us. By *believing more*, we *access more strength*...strength which belongs to God and is shared with us. As our faith is characterized by MORE, God’s strength is MORE WITH US.

One of the ways that faith is tested in order to make it grow is through suffering. This is a common way for God to introduce conditions that will cause us to re-focus on Him, and make us look to Him for relief and remedy. When we suffer we are “down”, which means we have been “humbled”. Suffering adds to faith and leads to humility. Humility then leads to *more faith*, and so on...a spiral of growth has begun in which spirituality and maturity can flourish. Suffering, on the surface, appears to be a bad thing, but it can have a positive outcome, if it leads us to humility and greater faith.

To increase the humility and faith of the Jews after they escaped from Egypt, God led them into the desert. What was necessary for survival? Food and water. What was missing in the desert? Food and water. As they faced this deprivation, is it any wonder that these Jews were thinking that the hard labor and occasional lashes back in Egypt weren’t really so bad, after all? But God brought them into the desert for one reason, which is depicted in Deut. 8:2-3, as we see here:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors 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.

God humbled them to teach them. They had to understand that God was their true caretaker, and not nature or the world. They had to know where their faith was to be directed, and understand their dependency on the Lord. But notice something else: They were provided for, even during the time of testing. Verse 3 from Deut. 8 says, “Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.” They had manna, fresh clothes, and comfortable feet. Not bad for a time of “testing”. But the trials were real and numerous in the desert, and enormous pressures were exerted on them while they were there.

Times of pressure and pain are difficult, so God provides prayer as a means for seeking relief, as we examined closely in the book on *Training* mentioned above (also, see James 5:13). When we “HUMBLE OURSELVES AND PRAY”, relief can be forthcoming. In the meantime, we endure testing to increase faith and humility. These have a function before, during, and after the testing. We exercise faith and humility to fortify us for, and to foreshorten the time of, our suffering. And we *pray* to have the suffering removed, as Paul did in 2 Cor. 12:5b-9, which says this:

...I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. 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.

So, why did God permit the angel of Satan to continue to torment Paul? To keep Paul from becoming “conceited”. And what was produced by this pressure on Paul? Humility, leading to grace and power. His weaknesses became God’s opportunities to work. Paul was humbled by his “suffering” and acknowledged his inability to manage his own spiritual life, realizing that his only strength came from God’s grace and power. Paul was not given the “relief” he asked for, but “grace” instead. So, if we are praying and trusting, the “provision” will consist of one of two things: 1) relief...or 2) grace to stand the test. And when the test is over, growth and greater power will be in evidence.

Growth leads to humility, which leads in turn to closeness to God. Closeness will not occur without humility. We cannot approach the throne of grace with pride hidden in our pockets. We can only approach with clean hearts, dressed in humility. Andrew Murray offers another statement which helps us explain this principle. Here is what he said:

We knew not that 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 5)

Get humble, grow, get humble, get close, grow, get humble, get humble, get humble....

HUMILITY AND FAITH

We will rely heavily on Andrew Murray, who lived from 1828 until 1917, to provide insights into the relationship between humility and faith. Fortunately, the material from Murray that is quoted in this section is in the public domain, so we can freely present his remarks on faith and humility. (For more on Andrew Murray, refer to Endnote 1). We begin with a quote citing the need for humility, and highlighting the problem of pride as an impediment to faith, as follows:

Brother, have we not been making a mistake in taking so much trouble to believe, while all the

time there was the old self in its pride seeking to possess itself of God's blessing and riches? No wonder we could not believe. Let us change our course. Let us seek first of all to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God: *He will exalt us*. The cross, and the death, and the grave, into which Jesus humbled Himself, were His path to the glory of God. And they are our path. Let our one desire and our fervent prayer be, to be humbled with Him and like Him; let us accept gladly whatever can humble us before God or men;—this alone is the path to the glory of God. (Endnote 6)

Any attempt to have faith and build it up will be futile, as long as our hearts are dominated by pride. It is only when we are “humble” that we can *believe*...and grow our faith. Murray said that pride and faith are mutually exclusive, as we see in the following:

In our text [John 5:44] Jesus discovers to us that it is indeed pride that makes faith impossible. ‘How can ye believe, which receive glory from one another?’ As we see how in their very nature pride and faith are irreconcilably at variance, we shall learn that faith and humility are at root one, and that we never can have more of true faith than we have of true humility; we shall see that we may indeed have strong intellectual conviction and assurance of the truth while pride is kept in the heart, but that it makes the living faith, which has power with God, an impossibility. (Endnote 7)

We can acknowledge the truths we hear and go through the motions of Christian living, and still not enjoy that “life” which comes through deep and rich communion with God, made possible by God's grace and accessed by faith. If pride is resident within us, we will be seeking to “receive glory from one another”, and thus will not be exercising faith toward God.

Clearly, pride gets in the way of faith, which is why we must confess arrogance as often as we observe it in ourselves. Pride blocks grace and brings “cursing”, as per Jer. 17:5, which says, “This is what the Lord says: Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.” When we depend on ourselves or others, rather than God, the grace-flow is cut off. By confessing pride, we remove its power, and restore our fellowship with God. It is then that we can operate in humility and faith, which opens grace-doors for strengthening and blessing.

Faith and humility go together, but our end-goal is to increase our FAITH. When faith is truly strong (or great), pride will decrease and humility will become a constant in our walk. Murray gives us the following on receiving “glory”, or grace, as a result of faith:

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 8)

Faith opens grace, and permits us to advance toward the “fullness of God”. But it all begins with laying-to-rest our pride, a task accomplished through spirituality and maturity, facilitated by humility.

Finally, Murray adds this about faith and humility:

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 9)

Humility trumps pride and permits faith to operate, thus allowing us to live daily by faith. Humility ushers us into the “kingdom” (which does not mean heaven, but a life close to God). Humility presents our “nothingness” to God, who transforms it into the production of divine good through Spirit-led service.

GIFTS, HUMILITY, LOVE, AND SERVICE

Gifts and humility and love and service are all parts of the same train. We want to see how these are hooked together and what we can hope for as a result of their joint function. For openers, pay close attention to the following verses regarding gifts:

Eph. 4:8—This is why it says, “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.”

1 Cor. 1:7—Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

Eph. 4:15-16—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.

1 Pet. 4:10—Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

We receive gifts to serve. Then we come together as a unit, in order to strengthen the group, as well as each individual in the group. Eph. 4:2-3 tells us how this works, as follows:

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace [fellowship].

Fellowship among believers aligns and combines individual hearts into harmonious units under the control of the Holy Spirit. Fellowship with each other, or “unity”, must begin with the filling and control of the Holy Spirit. If anyone is out of fellowship with God, the function of the group is affected. But when all are in fellowship, the force of the consolidated collection of believers is unstoppable.

With unity, the gifts of numerous believers meld into a cohesive whole, which functions with the efficiency and solidarity of a single body. The body has many parts, and each must complete its function in order for the other parts of the body to work smoothly. 1 Cor. 12:18 anchors this truth, saying, “But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” God is the one who designs and operates the body, and He must be the one who coordinates and directs its activities. If each part of the body has its own agenda, and is pursuing its own independent objective, the body will pull itself apart and will conduct only random and chaotic activities. Nothing meaningful will get done, though many strategies may be implemented and great energies expended. The work of the body depends on each part submitting to the Head (Col. 1:18), so that the efforts of all the parts will be meaningful and productive.

For believers to work together as a unified group, each must be connected with the Head, which is Christ, experienced in each of us as His Spirit. This means that each believer must have his or her sins confessed, and must be using the techniques for walking in the Spirit and growing. When there is connection with the Head, gifts will be engaged by the members...and each member will benefit. Everybody will be working for everyone else, and *not for himself*! Service is meant to have an *outlook*, rather than an *inlook*. Jesus expressed this perspective when He said this:

You know that the 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 your slave—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.” (Matt. 20:25b-28)

The exercise of our gifts has the view of seeing to the needs of others. This is the way the church is supposed to work...not just as a collection of mechanical water birds (with heads nodding), but as a dynamic group of Spirit-energized believers with EVERY MEMBER CONTRIBUTING TO THE GROUP through his or her own gifts. When we gather to be taught, the pastor is the teacher, but we also need to spend time together in exchanging our gifts. Note: we are all ministers!

The idea of our serving, or being a servant, is seen again in Mark 9:35, which says, “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all’.” Notice the suggestion of humility, which is seminal in the performance of our gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit. The highest rank in the Christian army is “servant”; this is the position from which most of the real work gets done.

God Himself selects the gifts which each one of us is to have, and He is the one who will work the gifts. Our job is to stay connected to Him through fellowship, so He can work through us. 2 Thess. 1:11 frames this well, saying this:

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.

God's "calling" is the gift he has given us; it is an extension of His grace (see 2 Thess. 1:12). Paul's prayer is that we will be "counted worthy" of this grace provision, which means having all sins confessed and standing before God with a clean sin-record. This is confirmed in Eph. 4:1, which says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." Once again, "being worthy" precedes occupying and fulfilling our "calling". Fellowship comes before service. When we are filled with the Spirit, He can do His work. Phil. 2:13 says, "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (See *Bible Basics on Maturity*, the chapter on "Gifts", for *lists* of the various gifts, as well as additional discussion on the timing and receipt of gifts.)

Gifted service works in conjunction with humility, as we have seen before. Titus 3:2 tells us "to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men." When we live peaceably and show humility, we enhance the effectiveness of our gifts. Phil. 2:3-4 backs this up in a passage we saw earlier, saying this:

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.

Humility is linked with the operation of our gifts. When humility is absent, pride and ego demand that we elevate ourselves and get recognition, even in (and sometimes *especially in*) church. Selfishness, ambition, and pride have no place in the operation of our gifts.

When we identify our gifts, we are to accept them and sincerely assume our place in the body. 1 Cor. 12:14-20 tells us we are to faithfully occupy the roles that God assigns, and accept the place that God determines will allow us to contribute the most to others...and that will bring us the greatest blessings. Here is what this passage says:

Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

We can imagine what mayhem the church would be in if all the body parts were acting independently, OR if each were trying to be a different body part. This has comical implications, but the serious upshot in this is that we can actually witness this in many Christian churches. Where is the fellowship? Where is the coordination of the Spirit? Where are gifts being used interactively? By this last question, I mean to ask this: Where are gifts being used in a divinely-structured system, underpinned by humility, supported by faith, and performed through fellowship? Gifts must be coordinated by the One who provided them to start with, and they must be performed by maturing believers *in fellowship*!

Service: That's what it's all about. Humility: That's the prerequisite condition. As we step out to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit, having grown in favor and faith, we carry with us a spirit of love and humility. This is featured in Matt. 23:8-12, where Jesus gave us the following admonition:

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.

We are not to seek titles, or the power and approbation of "position". This is the work of pride. Instead, we are to perform the work of our gifts in humility, recognizing that it is God who is working, and that there is no place for self-adulation in the body of Christ. We do not exercise our gifts for ourselves, but for the Lord. As Paul said, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." And how do we serve? Through our gifts.

The backdrop for service through gifts is love. Love is a sign of fellowship, and the prompt for humility. Love motivates us to serve, as per Gal. 5:13b, which appoints us to "serve one another in love". Col. 3:12-17 also gives a spin on the notion of humbly serving in love, as we see in the following:

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 one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Notice the sequence. We are to clothe ourselves in love (v. 12), conduct our service in the power of the Spirit (v. 15, "peace" being "fellowship"), and edify each other through our gifts (v. 16). It is impossible for us to operate in jealousy, envy, competitiveness, hatred, gossip, and rudeness and still perform service through our gifts. These must be removed through fellowship and growth, so that love can blossom, humility can be expressed, and service can thrive. The process is simple: Get in fellowship, grow, and then perform services through your gifts. This is "doing it all in the name of the Lord Jesus".

Rom. 12:9-13 announces our goal: to meet the needs of fellow believers. This passage admonishes us to do the following:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in 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 the

Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

All we ever do as believers funnels into a single purpose, which is, once again, to meet the needs of fellow believers through loving service. Everything should be aimed at enabling each other to STAY IN FELLOWSHIP and to GROW, our two greatest needs. There are other needs, both spiritual and practical, that can be met through our respective gifts, but the most important ones are related to our spiritual condition and progress. Rom. 14:19 clarifies the purpose of our service, saying, "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification." Fellowship and growth: These are the results that God wants to see from our service. If we aren't supporting the edification of fellow believers, we are not serving.

Any kind of service requires humility. The greatest expression of humility in connection with our gifts is seen in the support we give to other believers. This makes love very concrete and brings it into pragmatic experience in a very tangible way. 1 Cor. 13:4-5 shows us exactly what this kind of love looks like, as follows:

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.

This is the attitude of love that supports and energizes our gifts. Love is simply the presence and character of the Holy Spirit, who is present and in charge when we are clean and walking in dependence on Him.

We mentioned earlier that faith and humility travel together. We want to provide a reminder here of that connection. Faith and humility interplay in a symbiotic relationship whereby each strengthens the other. And the result is service. Eph. 5:21 says, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Reverence is fear of the Lord, and fear of the Lord is a graduated form of faith. So, "out of faith" comes submission to one another. Faith generates humble subservience of each of us to all the rest of us. This is the frame for service.

As for finding and developing our gifts, these will be timed by God, and will be developed through maturity. If you don't KNOW your gift, GROW your faith. We are told to "fan into flame the gift of God" (2 Tim. 1:6a). This is elaborated in 1 Tim. 4:13-16, which tells us to GROW, so that we will not NEGLECT OUR GIFTS. Here is what this passage says:

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 prophecy 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 both yourself and your hearers.

As we grow, faith will increase. As faith broadens, humility will develop. As humility evolves, love will flourish. As love blossoms, service will expand. This is the Christian life. This is our purpose.

With all the emphasis on service rendered to fellow Christians, the question that may arise is this:

What about evangelizing, or giving the gospel? It is not excluded. If we are serving other believers and mutually edifying each other, the lost will be reached by mature believers who will be available at all times to dispense the gospel. The bulk of Scripture dealing with gifts tells us our main job is to EDIFY FELLOW BELIEVERS; when this happens, “evangelizing” will get done. Some believers even have the *gift* of evangelizing, and much of their service will be conducted in the field...outside the church. We MUST understand that evangelism is to be directed by the Holy Spirit, in whatever form He wants to conduct it, and it is something we should all be prepared to do, as the Spirit leads. God will always accommodate positive volition, meaning a desire for the gospel, and He frequently uses us to deliver the message of salvation. But this is a RESULT of the “servicing” and growth that has taken place within the church. EDIFY FIRST; “witnessing” will follow as a work of grace within the plan of God. Giving the gospel, then, is an OUTCOME of spirituality and maturity.

THE EFFECTS OF HUMILITY

Humility opens spiritual doors. Without humility, many avenues of growth and service will be cut off, and we will stagnate in our Christian walk and not understand why we aren’t moving farther and faster. A lack of humility halts progress and hinders our relationship with God, whereas its presence frees us to have fellowship with God, and moves us along the maturity track. There are many positive side-effects of humility, and we want to examine some of these, but first we want to look briefly at two important techniques that humility makes operational: namely, learning and prayer.

The “humble” are the ones who are taught. Ps. 25:9 says, “He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.” The converse of this is that God does *not* teach without a condition of humility. Humility not only brings instruction, according to this verse, it also invites God’s “guidance”, which is the leading of the Holy Spirit. In summary, when we are humble, we will stay in fellowship, be taught, and enjoy the filling and direction of the Holy Spirit. This is because the Word brings light and understanding to the humble. Ps. 119:130 gives us the following to further establish that humility affects learning: “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”

Pride interferes with learning, as in the case where we say, “What I know already is sufficient.” This kind of self-satisfaction and refusal of truth cannot turn out well, as we see in Pr. 11:2, which says, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.” Prov. 16:18-20, parts of which we saw earlier, shows that getting this wisdom is something we do *when we are humble*. The evidence and outcome of *pride* is that instruction is refused. Here is what this passage says:

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud. Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.

We have some choice about being humble and being taught. If you catch yourself being proud, confess it and get back into the Word as quickly as possible.

Humility also influences the effectiveness of our prayer life, as per Dan. 10:12, which says this:

Then he continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain

understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.”

Daniel did two things: first of all, he *wanted* the truth; secondly, he *humbled* himself before God. Because of this, his prayers were heard and he got answers for the questions he had. Notice Daniel’s humility in verse 15: “While he was saying this to me, I bowed with my face toward the ground and was speechless.” In the next verse (v. 16), Daniel said to the messenger in front of him, “I am overcome with anguish because of the vision, my lord, and I am helpless. How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe.” It is then that Daniel’s humility brought strength to him, when God infused Him with divine power. The messenger said, “Peace! Be strong now, be strong” (v. 19). And what happened within Daniel? He said, “I was strengthened and said, ‘Speak my lord, since you have given me strength’” (also v. 19).

Humility results in restoration, followed by strengthening. 2 Chron. 7:13-15 gives a clear depiction of this, saying the following:

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

When believers humble themselves AND pray, then God will “hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” God hears the prayers of the humble, but not the prayers of the proud.

Pride is a slippery slope. Prayer itself can become a source of pride. This is what Jesus spoke against in Matt. 6:5-8, where He made the following statement:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

When we pray, we come before the throne of grace, not onto the stage of man. God knows our inner beings, and if we come to Him with hearts that are pure and humble, we do not need to generate prayers filled with weighty paragraphs and sentences trimmed with grammatical correctness and concrete nouns. We only need to sit still before Him. He knows our list. He knows our needs. We can specify, if we choose, to be sure we have asked for the things we need or want, or to be sure we have interceded thoroughly for others. But He already knows beforehand what we will pray. When He sees a heart that is *right* coming to Him in prayer, He says, simply, “Yes, I’ll take it from here.” That’s all that’s needed.

God does many other things for the humble besides teaching them and answering their prayers. Here are some other things that humility brings about:

Humility averts discipline. This is what we see in 2 Chron. 12:12, which says, “Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord’s anger turned from him and he was not totally destroyed. Indeed, there was some good in Judah.” Implicit in the idea of humility is the technique of confession. Confession operates as an expression of humility. Confession and humility stop discipline, at least in the form of *punitive* suffering. Suffering may continue for training, but the discipline aspect of it will cease.

Humility heals. “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). We saw this verse earlier, but we feature it now regarding the impact of humility on healing. Based on James 5:14-16, we believe this principle can be applied to the healing of the body, as well as that of a nation, within the scope of God’s will and purpose.

God comforts the humble. 2 Cor. 7:6a says, “But God, who comforts the downcast [the humble] comforted us...”

The humble are sustained. Ps. 147:6 tells us, “The Lord sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground.”

God delivers the humble. 2 Sam. 22:28 says, “You save [deliver] the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.”

The humble are exalted. We see this in several verses, as follows:

Prov. 15:33—The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor.

Prov. 22:4—Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.

James 4:10—Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

God blesses the humble. 1 Chron. 17:16-19, gives an account of David’s humble prayer of thanksgiving for his blessings, as follows:

Then David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men, O Lord God. What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, O Lord. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises.

Because of David’s humility, he was given blessings...according to God’s will and by God’s grace toward his servant.

Watch for the effects of humility. They are everywhere in Scripture, and they are significant. Being humble is essential for Christian living, and it's not that hard. Just notice God, and wait for the shock of recognition to sink in.

DON'T FORGET GOD

The Old Testament was written for the Jews, but there are many principles cited there that have implications for all ages. Deuteronomy 8 is one of them. We want to quote verses 10-20 from that chapter to show what can happen whenever we forget God. When God is removed from our consciousness, we lose sight of God's greatness and our own weakness, and we need to be reminded of His place in our lives and in the universe. Here is what this passage says:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

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

This passage refers to the Mosaic Law, but has meaning for us. Applied to us, we can glean the following from these verses: When God-consciousness fades, displaced by self, sin, and the world, we can be sure that we are in line for discipline. This is because, when we forget God, we forget how absolutely powerful He is and how utterly helpless we are. When we are not looking at God, we will be looking at ourselves, handing the helm over to pride. It is God we want. It is God we seek. It is God we are waiting for.

LOOKING FORWARD

When we cave in to our yearning for God, and surrender to an all-out search for Him, then we will know why we should be humble, because we will see how indescribably great God is. Long after George Muller came to faith in Christ, he came to understand what total surrender to God is. He said the following after his ninetieth birthday, addressing a group of ministers and workers:

The love of money was gone, the love of place was gone, the love of worldly pleasures and

engagements was gone. God, God, God alone became my portion. I found my all in Him; I wanted nothing else. And by the grace of God this has remained, and has made me a happy man...and it led me to care only about the things of God. God is an infinitely lovely Being. Oh! Be not satisfied until in your inmost soul you can say, God is an infinitely lovely Being! (Endnote 10)

Written in the late 1800's this call still rings true and current today, beckoning us to stand in front of the Almighty God in reverence and awe, and to surrender to Him.

Next article: "Surrendering to God"

ENDNOTES for "Walking Humbly before God"

Endnote 1. Andrew Murray was born in 1828 and died in 1917. He pastored a number of churches in South Africa and founded organizations supporting evangelism. He wrote 240 books and numerous articles, almost all of which are in the public domain.

Any references to Andrew Murray in this study were taken from his books and articles, which are available at the following sites:

Books—Books are from Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org

Articles—Articles are available at www.biblestudytools.com

Endnotes 2-9. See Endnote 1.

Endnote 10. George Muller, a comment recited by Andrew Murray in a sermon. Exact reference unknown.

Surrendering to Our God

Preview

INTRODUCTION

Surrendering is “giving up”. When surrendering takes place, the custody of your “person”, your possessions, and your power is transferred to another person or entity. This is a time of divesting all your resources into the care of someone else. Your treatment after you surrender will depend on the character of the one to whom you are surrendering. It is likely that surrender to a person or a world-connected entity will bring pain and loss. Assuredly, there is uncertainty as to what will happen when we surrender, and we must weigh the feasibility of either giving up...or resisting. The question that arises is this: Will we lose everything when we surrender and—if so—will we ever gain it back? Or is it possible that we might even improve our condition by surrendering, even if we give everything up?

The surrender we are thinking of in this study is that which is directed toward God, and it so happens that this surrender will bring great benefits. This is the one time when we can be assured that surrendering will lead to a better life.

COMING UP

In this study, we are going to ask you to work toward a time of surrendering, and we are going to show you how this is done, and why you need to do it. The assumption is that the “surrender” we are asked to do is a good and desirable thing, even though we must be willing to lay down everything we have. We will look at obstacles to our surrendering, and at the way surrendering is accomplished. This will require us to examine these five questions: What prevents surrender? How can we prepare to surrender? How can we practice and rehearse our surrender? How can we be primed at last for surrender? And what stipulations have been made to warrant our presenting ourselves for surrender?

Practices or Conditions that Prevent Surrendering

“SURRENDER” IS RESISTED

We are talking about surrendering to God. It seems so mindless to refuse to surrender to Him, since He is the Creator and Sustainer of time and space, the holder of all life and knowledge, and the provider of all good things. Yet there are powerful forces and arguments around that make it easier *not* to surrender, even though we have been assured that He always has our best interests in mind. We will look briefly at a few of these. Perhaps surprisingly, most of the things that prevent our surrendering have to do with conditions inside ourselves, rather than outside. The biggest impediment is that we are just not *prepared* to surrender, and—even if we occasionally do surrender—it does not “stick”, because

the groundwork has not been laid on which to base a complete giving-in to God.

BEING CHRISTIAN IN NAME ONLY

Is. 48:1-2 describes a condition that prevents our surrender, as follows:

Listen to this, O house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel and come from the line of Judah, you who take oaths in the name of the Lord and invoke the God of Israel—but not in truth or righteousness—you who call yourselves citizens of the holy city and rely on the God of Israel—the Lord Almighty is his name...

Substitute “Christian” for “Israel” and the “line of Judah”. Now look at what it takes to properly “invoke God”. This passage discloses two indicators for the quality of our relationship with Him. These include “truth” and “righteousness”. If you have studied our previous writings, you know that these are markers for “maturity” and “fellowship”, respectively. (If these doctrines do not resonate with you, do the following before continuing: complete the course, *Bible Basics for Living: Essential Foundations*, available at this website.) We are to “mature” and we are to “walk in fellowship”...or “by the Spirit”. We have seen before how this is done. Learning truths from the Word builds our maturity, while confession followed by ongoing faith enables us to understand what we learn and empowers us to walk in the strength of the Spirit. These lead to the production of divine good (“righteousness”).

We will say more about “preparations” for surrender later in this study, but for now, we can conclude that—if we are not taking care of our growth and spirituality—we will be prevented from surrendering to God, because we are not ready. And if we are not even *moving* toward “surrender”, we will be functioning as Christians in name only.

SELF WILL

Another condition that prevents surrender is our own volition, or will. We were given freedom of choice at creation, and we can reject God’s way as the way for us to live, even though we are His children. This is the result of pride and our own inclination to believe that we are the ones who must hold our destiny in-hand and determine what is best for our lives, rather than giving these over to God. Even when it comes to Christian living, we often believe we have the right ideas and skills for producing the good and fruitful life.

Gal. 3:3 sizes up our reluctance to relinquish the reins of our lives to God, saying, “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” Andrew Murray offered insight into this passage, saying the following:

Now, we have here a solemn discovery of what the great want is in the church of Christ. God has called the church of Christ to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the church is living for the most part in the power of human flesh, and of will and energy and effort apart from the Spirit of God. (All quotes from Murray in this article are from his public-domain book, *Absolute Surrender*, published in 1895.) (Endnote 1)

Self-will leads to all the other “self-something’s” that dominate humanity. Self-anything prevents

surrender.

SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Self-will, self-confidence, and self-righteousness prevent surrender. Job trusted God and lived in prosperity, and he was the most mature believer on earth at the time he was alive. But he had not surrendered completely, and he ran out of gas under God's testing. Job 32:2 says the following about Job's response to his suffering: "But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God." Job had sinned, before and after his trials began, and he was refusing to confess his sins. Furthermore, he was blaming his suffering on God as being some kind of unjust treatment.

In Job 34:5, Elihu said this: "'Job says, 'I am innocent, but God denies me justice. Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound'.'" Elihu had quoted Job as saying, "I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt" (Job 33:9). So Elihu countered with this: "But I tell you, in this you are not right..." (Job 33:12). Elihu knew that unconfessed sin prevents fellowship, let alone surrender.

It is certain that Job could never surrender until he shook off his self-righteousness, confessed his failure, and substituted God's will for his own. Job finally acknowledged his self-will and self-righteousness, and ended up confessing his sins and surrendering completely to God, saying, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself [complete humility] and repent in dust and ashes [confess]." And for that he received "double-blessings" (Job 42:5-6). (See Job 42 for Job's entire confession and the results of his surrender to the Lord.)

UNBELIEF

"Unbelief" is another condition that prevents surrender, thus keeping us out of God's rest. This is what we see in Heb. 3:16-19, which says the following:

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

The "rest" cited in this passage does not refer to salvation; it is related to a rest that was denied the Jews in the desert, and is now open to *believers* in the Church Age. Heb. 4:9-10 says, "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." This is the place of surrender...entering God's rest...and the condition that prevents this is "unbelief", a lack of faith. The only way to remedy this is to build our faith.

We will explore these and other obstacles as we proceed through this study, and see in more detail why we are prevented from surrendering. The obstacles are endless.

Preparations for Surrender

PREFACE

Preparations for surrender include choosing well; learning God's will; confessing our sins; and growing to maturity through study of God's Word and endurance of His training. To surrender, we must be prepared.

CHOICE

We are clearly at choice about most things in life, even though realistic limitations define certain parameters for our choices...certain conditions of our birth and life over which we have no control. But when it comes to spiritual matters, in particular, we have absolute freedom and choice.

The choices we make will be based on what we value and what we want, and our values follow what we treasure within our innermost being. Matt. 6:21 says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Here is the evolution of choice: What we treasure determines the place where our hearts will be focused. Values are then generated from our hearts, and our attention and energies are drawn to the things we value.

If we treasure God, thus valuing Him in our hearts, we will be drawn to Him; if we treasure things related to the world, we will seek what the world offers, such as possessions, money, power, pleasure, and so on. Matt. 6:24, following up on what was said in verse 21, 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." The choice is ours, and we will choose according to what we value.

If our focus is on money and things related to money, we will serve our flesh and the world. We can choose, instead, to emphasize our spiritual lives, and make worldly things secondary. In Matt. 6:25a, Jesus told us, "...do not worry about your life..." Virtually, He is saying that focus on the world brings worldly and "fleshly" concerns, whereas seeking God's kingdom and righteousness brings focus on spiritual pursuits (see Matt. 6:33). It is no wonder that surrender is more likely when we reject the world as the source for value and meaning, and look to God for provision and security.

Josh. 24:14-16, illustrates our ability to choose God, saying this:

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the god of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

We can choose whom we will serve. This is the exercise of our free will, a right given to us by God. He wants us to choose Him, but He will not force that choice.

LEARNING GOD'S WILL

God has a “will” in all matters, and it is important for us to know as much about His will as we can, so we can know what we are shooting for when we seek to “do His will”. Paul taught about God’s will, as we see in Acts 20:27, where Paul said, “For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.” The more we learn about God and His grace system, the better we will understand His will.

Once again, it is important to know His will. In Ephesians 5:17, we see Paul saying, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” He is calling for us to study and grasp the principles of God’s program for believers, which is standard and identical for ALL believers. This is the “standardized” will of God, which is the same for everyone. This includes all the techniques and promises we have studied, which apply to all of us the same. But there is also a “specific” will for each believer, which is personalized and unique. Everyone’s “personalized” will looks different from that which God has designed for all others. In Eph. 5:10, Paul cites the individualized will of God, saying, “...and find out what pleases the Lord.” So we are to *learn* the “generalized” will of God, by which we will eventually *find out* His “personalized” will. Knowing the separate and individual will of God for each of us will only occur when we have reached a high level of maturity. Until then, our hands will be full trying to master the techniques by which we learn to operate in His general will. Still, we aspire to know the specifics of God’s personalized will.

Whether we are talking about the general or specific will of God, once we *know* it, we are to seek to *submit* ourselves to it. In Matthew 6:10, we witness Jesus’ submission to His Father’s will by His saying, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is the view-point we should have: one of submission to the Father’s will. Of this, we said the following in *Being Devoted to Prayer*:

When we commit our will to His, we will have reached the pinnacle of maturity, because we are saying to God, “I know that your plan is perfect, that your power is absolute, and that all outcomes belong to you.” We are not giving God permission to be Himself; we are interjecting ourselves into His heavenly picture by submitting ourselves to Him. When we give it all to Him, we demonstrate the kind of faith that enables us to do incredible things by His power.

Jesus came to do His Father’s will, and that is our objective, also. Heb. 10:5-7 reports the following about Jesus’ purpose on earth:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God’.”

Old Testament sacrifices were insufficient, except to illustrate the most efficacious sacrifice of all: that of Jesus Christ. It was the Father’s will that the Son should make this sacrifice, and that is why He came: to fulfill the Father’s will. He “submitted” to that will. Now the choice is ours: Will we live according to “thy will be done”, or will we live by the prideful phrase that Satan declared, which was “I will” (see Is. 14:13)? If we subscribe to the “I will” principle, we will never submit to God’s will, and

we will therefore not be able to surrender. We can choose whose will we are going to follow.

CONFESSION OF SINS

Another piece in the process of preparation for surrendering involves the confession of our sins. The sin record must be clean, and we must be restored to fellowship before we can grow and move toward surrender. Confession is more about RETURN than anything else. We must CONTINUE with Him, and PERSEVERE, regardless of how we fail. We WILL fail, but that is not where we must stay. We must return to growth and God-consciousness and service immediately. This is the way of grace and mercy, and this is a primary way to prepare for surrender.

In setting up this topic, we must be aware that confession is for believers only. Pastors and evangelists frequently make the colossal mistake of attaching confession to the plan of salvation, and this is patently false! Confession is the way for Christians to stay clean and grow through fellowship. This is a technique designed for BELIEVERS to prevent sin from spoiling their record and corrupting their faith.

Most people have, at one time or another in their lifetime, gone past the due date for a vehicle inspection, or allowed car insurance to lapse, and have been ticketed for this kind of error. But isn't it nice when the officer informs us, "If you will correct this by such and such a date, and show evidence to the judge that this has been done, there will be no fine, and this will not go on your record." It will be as if it never happened. No fine, no punishment. That's the way it is with God. This analogy does not fit perfectly with the function of grace and mercy, but the connection follows that, by owning up to our mistakes, we are absolved of all guilt, and no record of the infraction is kept. On the other hand, if we do not face the judge, and continue on as if we did not make a mistake, then punishment kicks in, which—for believers—is discipline. It is easier just to face the music, rather than being "fined".

Once again, confession is for believers only! Unbelievers live in condemnation, and their earthly lives are conducted by completely different guidelines and rules, which are not related to spiritual growth and a walk in the Spirit, as ours is. The difference between believers and unbelievers must be distinguished when we study the Scripture. And there is another distinction which must be made, and that is this: determining when Scripture applies to 1) our POSITION in Christ, or 2) our CONDITION before Him. What is "position"? It is *where we are* for all eternity, which is *in union with Christ*, because we have *believed in Him*. Put another way, "position" is our place IN GOD'S MIND. This is our permanent record, one that cannot be altered or erased. And then there's our "condition".

What is "condition"? It is our status in these bodies, including minds, souls, spirits, and hearts, related to sin and faith. For our condition before God to be favorable, we must have a clean sin-record, which means that all sins must have been genuinely confessed. Another aspect of our condition is the strength of our faith. When we grow sufficiently, our faith will be strong, and our walk in fellowship with God will be consistent.

A "good" condition involves being clean and moving in God's direction. Confession is the grace method for achieving this cleanliness, and we must recognize that we cannot perform this on our own...we

cannot “forgive” ourselves, or “cleanse” our own sin record. Only grace and mercy can do this. A nice side-benefit of staying clean is that we can advance toward maturity in that state, which leads to *less sinning*!

The things we have said already about confession have all been covered in previous studies. We recommend you master the techniques discussed in earlier books, articles, and blogs, to get maximum benefit from this current study. For now, we want to briefly review some scriptures on confession, to ascertain that it is a viable principle and requirement in Scripture.

First of all, Paul clearly supported the notion of admitting our faults and mistakes for forgiveness in 1 Cor. 11:31-32, where he said the following:

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.

Rather than being “condemned” for all eternity for committing sins, as all believers do, we are “disciplined” as God’s children. Correction of believers’ sins is a family matter, and is handled as an “inside” issue. For forgiveness, all that is required is that we “judge ourselves”, in which case we will not experience God’s “judgment”, or discipline.

1 John 1:9 has been cited throughout our studies as a pivotal verse in John’s treatise on fellowship in his first epistle. This verse says, “But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.” (NET) When we cite and admit the sins we know we have committed, they are forgiven, and even the sins we did not think of or know as wrongdoing will be forgiven. Confession is the basis for forgiveness.

2 Tim. 2:20-21 introduces “spiritual hygiene” to us, saying the following:

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter [ignoble purposes], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

Don’t be misled by the phrase “cleanses himself”. This has to do with following grace procedures for *getting the cleansing*, an act performed completely by the Holy Spirit whenever we confess our sins. As we said earlier, we don’t forgive ourselves; God has to do this. And notice what happens when we are “clean”: we become an “instrument” for God’s use, we are “made holy”, we are “useful to the Master”, and we are equipped to “do any good work”. This is why cleanliness is so important. Cleanliness makes us “holy”, which enables us to relate harmoniously with the Holy Spirit, and this—in turn—allows us to be used by God as His instruments for service and divine good.

Being made “holy” is also known as “sanctification”. Sanctification is “purity” or a state of being “cleansed”. We receive *eternal* sanctification when we become a believer, as a provision of our new *position*. *Experiential* sanctification, on the other hand, is a matter of being clean in our *condition* while we are still in these bodies. Our present topic of confession is related to our “condition”, since our

“position” is eternally secure. Concerning sanctification, 1 Thess. 5:23-24 says this:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Who cleanses? God (as in “...he will do it”). In fact, God doing the work is the basis for this whole study on “surrender”. We surrender to Him because HE DOES IT! God does the cleansing, which leaves us blameless, and then God’s power does the work that needs to be done. It looks like we would be eager to turn the hard work over to someone else, but, as we shall see, “not working” is the hardest thing we will ever do.

We saw above a good example of a believer refusing to confess when he became self-righteous, speaking of Job. Job 33:8-13 describes this mistake completely, once again in the words of Elihu, who said the following:

But you have said in my hearing—I heard the very words—“I am pure, I have done no wrong; I am clean and free from sin. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.” But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than any mortal. Why do you complain to him that he responds to no one’s words?

Lack of faith, rebellion, pride, self-righteousness: these characterized Job’s state prior to his confession and restoration. This had to be satisfied before he could move toward full surrender to God’s will, which eventually resulted in great prosperity for him. (Job 42:12-16)

When we sin, we are not to pine away at our failure, and sit endlessly in “sackcloth and ashes”. We are to confess our sins and move on. Failure can feed on itself, because WE ALL FAIL; it is what we do with our failure afterwards that counts. We can either wallow in the mud of our sin, or become prepared to surrender. Confession will be needed, for sure, but once that is done, we do not stay attached to our guilt and shame. We leave them behind and get back in step with the Spirit. Before we confess, we can say, with Paul, “What a wretched man I am!” (Rom. 7:24). After confession, we can say—again with Paul—“I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13).

By moving on, we can resume service. But if we do not let go of it and TRUST GOD TO FORGIVE AS HE HAS PROMISED, then our service cannot go on. Luke 9:62 says, “Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God’.” Confess and resume service. 1 Sam. 12:20 brings this into focus, saying, “‘Do not be afraid,’ Samuel replied. ‘You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.’” When we fail, we must confess and return; this is the only way we can be re-equipped to perform the service made possible by our gifts. If we don’t confess AND accept the forgiveness that goes with it, we will be “turning from the Lord” and we will remove ourselves from God’s instrument table.

Confession is an integral component for surrender. Murray described this well, saying the following:

The command comes to us individually, unitedly. God wants us as His children to arise and place our sins before Him, and to call upon Him for mercy. Oh, are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye perfecting in the flesh that which was begun in the Spirit? Let us bow in shame, and confess before God how our fleshly religion, our self-effort, and self-confidence, have been the cause of every failure. I have often been asked by young Christians: “Why is it that I fail so? I did so solemnly vow with my whole heart, and did desire to serve God; why have I failed”? (Endnote 2)

Murray responded to this question, saying this:

My dear friend, you are trying to do in your own strength what Christ alone can do in you.....And when they tell me: “I am sure I knew Christ alone could do it, I was not trusting in myself,” my answer always is: “You were trusting in yourself or you could not have failed. If you had trusted Christ, He could not fail.” (Endnote 3)

Confession is followed by faith, and that is the Christian life. Murray invites us to confess, saying: “Oh, come and confess [to God] every failure of temper, every failure of tongue however small, every failure owing to the absence of the Holy Spirit and the presence of the power of self.” (Endnote 4) Every failure must be surrendered to God through confession.

J Hampton Keathley, III, in his book, *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation* (p. 523), discussed Jesus' use of foot-washing to illustrate the process of being cleansed from daily sin, as part of the Christian walk. He showed the distinction between the Greek verb used for “bathing”, which is for the whole body, and the one for “washing”, which Jesus used regarding the feet. (See John 13:6-11.) When Peter refused to have Jesus wash his feet, Jesus replied, “Unless I wash you [not “bathe” you], you have no part [fellowship] with me” (John 13:8b). Keathley summarized the application of this illustration, saying the following:

He [Jesus] was not denying Peter the possibility of salvation or relationship with Him [by saying, “...you have no part with me”]. The issue was intimate fellowship. For fellowship to occur, there must be daily cleansing through honest confession of all known sin (1 John 1:9). When we confess, He, the Lord Jesus, is faithful to forgive and cleanse us (wash our feet). (Endnote 5)

To this, Keathley added the following (p. 524): “The daily washing through confession is needed for the privilege of fellowship and the power of Christ through the control of the Spirit in one's life.” (Endnote 6) Once again, we see an encapsulation of the essence of Christian living. We are to confess and walk (by faith) in the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot repeat this often enough. Even with all the repetition, I witness so few who really get it. I will reiterate this until I die: God alone can do God's work. My objective is to be the crescent wrench He holds in His hand while He is doing it.

Eph. 3:20 concludes it nicely, saying, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus...” He does it, by His power, which works within us...if we are in fellowship with Him.

(For a more complete study of confession in all its forms, see *Bible Basics for Living*, the chapter titled,

“The Solution for Sin”, beginning on page 41. This book can be downloaded, or parts copied, from this website.) (Endnote 7)

MATURITY AND GROWTH

Another step in preparation for surrender is growing into maturity. Without upper-level maturity, based on intensive growth, we may surrender for short bursts, but that condition will not be long-lasting. There is no easy route to maturity, and no short-cut to surrendering. If we want it, we must get ready for rigorous study and training, as we shall see very soon.

There are immediate reasons why growth is desirable. We want to grow, first of all, because it glorifies God. 2 Pet. 3:18 says, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” As we grow, we learn ways to please God, not because we become smart and beautiful; after all, He loved us infinitely, even in our most imperfect state. Rather, we are able to PLEASE God as we *grow* into His grace operations *through knowledge of Him* and *through the training He brings*. When we mature, we adopt behaviors and patterns that follow grace, and please Him.

We want to grow also so that we will be productive. There are rewards for “divine good”, which we will receive when the nature of our “deeds” are evaluated by Jesus Christ at His Judgment Seat. But we also have a desire to give our lives meaning and purpose now, while we are still alive. So we want to grow and use grace techniques, build our faith, and become fruitful through the work of the Holy Spirit. Concerning our fruitfulness, Jer. 17:7-8 tells us the following:

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

This tells us that the believer who is maturing, and who is learning to “trust in the Lord”, and to have “confidence in him”, will not be deterred from service, even though the direction of the swim is upstream. He perseveres in faith, whatever the circumstances, and fruit is continually borne through him.

God takes care of those who are maturing. Ps. 33:18 says, “But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.” God attends to and PROTECTS believers who are maturing. This is because they *qualify* for it by being close to God; and they *need* it, because maturing Christians are a threat to Satan. Spiritual growth requires the devil to concentrate his attention, and that of his minions, toward the site of growth, i.e., on a maturing believer. His intention is to bring harm and confusion to faithful believers, and to disrupt their walk with God. But extra danger is an occasion for extra protection, so—even though the fight is tough—by staying close to God, we can withstand Satan’s probes and attacks.

Growth also enables service. Look at 2 Tim. 2:1-5, where Paul advises Timothy regarding his gifted service:

You, then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.

By growing and becoming stronger IN and THROUGH the grace of God, we will become equipped to serve Him. We have discussed gifted service in previous articles, and we will have more to say about it in this one, but—for now—what we are trying to establish is that growth makes our faith stronger, and more gets done because of it. In other words, grace does more when we mature, and surrender looms large in the future of the believer who lives by grace.

Maturity follows a specific path, through which a believer becomes stronger in his faith, and by which his life and closer association with God yield greater satisfaction, power, and productivity. Col. 1:9-12 lays the process out perfectly, as follows:

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: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

We could spend many pages extracting all the rich meanings inherent in this passage; it is over-flowing with truth. But the main point we want to see in these verses is how the maturation process is broken down into parts. The question that is answered is this: what are the major components of our growth? Here is what we suggest is happening to the growing believer, as seen in this passage: He is...

Being filled with knowledge with all wisdom and understanding.

Living a life worthy of Him, pleasing Him in every way.

Bearing fruit in all kinds of “good work”, also known as “divine good”.

Becoming fully strong in faith and love.

Living a life of patience, endurance, and joy, i.e., walking in the Spirit.

All of these advance as a single front, so that—as we are growing—we become more knowledgeable, which pleases Him more and enables us to bear fruit. We are also building our faith and increasing our walk in the Spirit. It is not hard to see how these would be essential to our reaching the point that we are able to fully surrender to God.

The sequence for our growth and movement toward surrender involves a kind of evolving consciousness, which gradually morphs from self-confidence to God-confidence. Here is what happens from the time we are new believers, until we become mature and are ready to surrender ourselves to

God:

When we are regenerated, having just become believers, we are convinced that we have “full power”, and can conquer evil, doubt, and all on-comers. We believe this: “I can!”

But setbacks, disappointments, resistance, and failures start to surface very soon, which erodes our confidence, and causes us to say, “I can’t!” This is when we begin to realize our impotence. At this stage, we will either despair and give up, or get correct information and begin to grow.

If we will continue to grow, at some point we will come to realize how the grace-life works, and maturity will cause us to see that, even though we thought we “could”, and found out that we “couldn’t”, we realize that “God can!” When we start to see that God alone can do what God expects, we will be reaching the point when we will trust Him to be all He is...in us, and to do all He requires...through us.

When we reach the apex of maturity, we will finally see God doing it all...all that we *couldn't* do...and all that we learned He *could* do. This is when we can surrender, and sell out to God completely, and know the full experience of God in every piece of our hearts and in every part of our lives. When we surrender, there will be no obstacle remaining to impede the flow of grace into our lives.

To reach the point of maturity that we can surrender to God, we must go through the training rigors designed by God to bring us there. This involves, first of all, intensive study of the Scripture, and—secondly—enduring the tests and trials that come to us as training to strengthen our faith. We will look at these now.

STUDYING TO GROW

When we talk about “studying”, various images come to mind. This means different things to different people. I believe each of us should “learn” the way we learn best. One primary way, almost universally employed, is to be “taught” truth. Following a pastor/teacher is one of the prescribed ways for us to learn God’s ways for living. The problem with this is that it is difficult to find anyone who is actually *teaching truth*! And if what you are learning is NOT TRUTH, then you will not be growing; rather, you may end up practicing all kinds of legalism and rule-keeping that will lead to EVIL and take you away from the grace-life that God has designed for you. Or you may chase some “prosperity” rainbow in pursuit of worldly acquisitions. Some churches actually promote this, and measure God’s blessings by monetary gains. The key is this: To get the real truth, you have to WANT IT! If you want the truth, you will find it.

There are other ways to study. There are CD’s, DVD’s, mp3’s, and whatever else is “current”, electronically, to hear and watch lessons on the Bible. Far-and-away, my best study routine is to look for scriptures dealing with a topic of interest to me, and looking throughout the Bible to find the truths regarding that topic. But then I write about what I find, assuming that my gift will be instrumental for those who learn best by reading what others have written.

It is especially important to look for and learn truths for *living*. If you know every historical and prophetic and factual reference in the Bible, but have not understood the “how-to’s” of the Christian life, then you are no better off than someone who has never even cracked the Book. When we say “knowledge”, we are not talking about memorization of facts and academic content; we are talking about understanding principles of living by God’s grace and in His power. These are the essential foundations for living, and it is the objective of our studies to master these.

The Bible has a lot to say about studying to grow. There is no way to learn the truth initially without studying it, whether it is by reading, listening, or some other form of assimilation. You won’t acquire truth by sitting in a quiet, dark room and waiting for answers to bubble up from somewhere inside of you. Truth comes from outside of us (Plato was wrong!), and the object is to take it from the outside and move it to the inside. This involves our deliberately, consciously absorbing information into our minds, where the process of truth-acquisition can begin.

We must be clear, though. I am totally convinced that human IQ has nothing to do with absorbing the truth. The truths of the Bible are quite simple, and the techniques God has provided for living according to these truths are easy to learn. The hard part is getting over our own flesh, and our own thoughts and preconceptions, and opening our hearts to *believe* what we learn. What matters in learning is our *spiritual* IQ. If we are believers, AND if we are in fellowship, we can be taught by the Holy Spirit. All that is left is exposing ourselves to the truths in God’s Word.

1 Cor. 2:12-13 confirms this, saying the following:

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Jesus predicted this teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, when he told His disciples that they would be taught by Him, as follows:

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:25-26).

The teaching process works through the Word, but enlightenment comes from the Holy Spirit. Learning must be processed into the soul by hearing it and believing it, whereby it is understood; and when we capture it as a treasured possession, it becomes wisdom that can be applied. (This is discussed thoroughly in *The Power of God’s Word*, available at this website.) For as long as we are in the “condition” of being controlled by the Spirit, we can expose ourselves to the truth and receive it into our hearts. As we do this, we will be acquiring “nutrients” that will strengthen our faith. In this way, we can learn *everything* we need to know to live in God’s will and to please Him. There is a way!

Studying to grow and mature was seen by Paul as a vital part of our Christian lives. His entire mission was, apart from advancing the gospel, to lead believers to greater maturity. In Col. 1:28-29 (NET), Paul declared this:

We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ. Toward this goal I also labor, struggling according to his power that powerfully works in me.

Paul understood that the function of his gift, operating in the power of the Holy Spirit, was targeted at building up believers until they reached maturity. He said this again in Col. 2:2-3, which says this:

My purpose is that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

He wanted the Colossians (and us) to have a complete understanding of truth, so that we can all participate in the grace of God, as personified in the Son. As we grow, and wisdom and knowledge increase, we will gain the assurance of truth and intensify our confidence in the Holy Spirit. Put simply, teaching and learning will lead to maturity. 2 Tim. 3:16 summarizes this nicely, saying, “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.”

If we do not absorb truth, we will not grow. This means we will be locked perpetually into a state of immaturity, which makes it difficult for us to “walk in the Spirit”; instead, we will be “walking by the flesh”. Our lives will be characterized mostly by the control of the sinful nature. Spirituality vs. carnality refers to being in or out of fellowship; if we are not growing—we cannot maintain fellowship, because our faith will not be strong enough to prompt us to confess our sins. Thus we will remain in a carnal, or “fleshly”, condition.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and told them that he could not speak to them as “spiritual”, but only as “carnal”. This is what we see in 1 Cor. 3:1, which says, “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as fleshly—mere infants in Christ.” He then told them that he could not teach them, except with the most rudimentary concepts. Here is what he said: “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.”

We must start off with milk, or basic doctrines, but we must stay with our training program and move on up to meatier concepts. Heb. 6:1a says, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance...” The idea here is that we must move past a study of the gospel message, because we are already saved, and we must not keep on repeating earlier, fundamental teachings such as “repentance”, which deals with changing our minds about Christ...an event that takes place when we first believe in Him. So why do we “leave”, or move beyond, elementary teachings? To move on to *maturity*!

As we move upward into more-advanced levels of maturity, we can fulfill 2 Pet. 1:2, which says, “Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Grace has to do with what we increasingly receive as we grow, and peace is connected to our walk in the Spirit. Both of these come through what? Practice? No. Determination? No. They come through KNOWLEDGE of God and Jesus Christ. We cannot perform that which we do not understand. As we

learn grace techniques and acquire grace assets, God will be able to do His work through us...work that we can't do without Him.

In essence, we are maturing IN Him, as we learn ABOUT Him. Eph. 4:15 tells us how this happens, saying, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." By exercising our gifts with each other, we can all grow "into Him", which means drawing closer to Him and having His power motivating and equipping us for divine production. As we grow, we do more, yet it is not us, but God, who is working through us. He does more when we trust more, and by building our faith, we are depending more on Him to accomplish what He wants in, from, and around us.

As we are built up, knowledge builds on knowledge, and wisdom accumulates. Prov. 9:9 says, "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." Understanding one principle opens the way to grasping two more, and knowledge begins to grow. This process will continue until knowledge reaches significant levels. As I learn, I expect to grow, and I anticipate that new principles will move into the range of my understanding. There is always more to be learned, because the Word is said to be dynamic and powerful (Heb. 4:12).

Keep in mind is that what we want to "master" is "truths for living". Principles, techniques, procedures, protocols, and methods...these form the texture of truths that build us up and strengthen our faith. In my opinion, all the rest of Scripture...any doctrine not directly related to what we DO to live the Christian life correctly...is there to SUPPORT such truths. Truths for living tell us all about Who God is, what He expects, how he equips us for godliness, and what He provides in the way of sustaining and empowering resources to enable us to function within the parameters of His will. The rest of the Bible illustrates, contextualizes, frames, or exemplifies "practical" truths. So the most important things we can learn deal with God's provisions, God's precepts, and God's pre-eminence.

The Word is always our source of knowledge, which we learn as we are taught and directed by our Teacher, the Holy Spirit. Acts 20:32 says, "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Study builds us up. This is why we must continue our growth through study for as long as we live. As we see in Deut. 4:9, we must stay committed to our pathway of instruction, as follows:

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them.

Studying is the first avenue to growth. Training through trials and tests is another. If God's training is unknown to you, please take time to read the book, *God's Training Program for Believers*, as it provides a complete description of God's preparation of our hearts for service and blessing.

TRAINING THROUGH TRIALS AND TESTS

Diamonds are formed under pressure. Similarly, growing believers are "perfected"...moved toward maturity...by trials and tests. Job 23:10 says, "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me,

I will come forth as gold.” Testing refines and enriches. Testing has the potential to increase our faith, if we permit God’s training to build us up. It is possible to reject the training and become bitter when hardship comes, but it is also possible to recognize God’s hand in whatever is happening, and to grow from the experiences God brings to (or permits in) our lives.

1 Pet. 4:19 tells us what our response to suffering should be, saying, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” We should re-focus our energies and passion onto God and His Word, so we can continue in fellowship and the control of the Spirit, even in suffering. But, obviously, since we can choose to “continue”, we can also choose to walk away, redirecting our faith into other resources, such as ourselves or the world. The proper response to suffering is commitment, which is the beginning of surrender (more on this later).

When our commitment is renewed, we will endure suffering, because we will be basing our faith on God’s Word. Rom. 15:4 gives us this: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us; so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope [faith].” When we know that God is training us through suffering, we can know He is bringing it to us either by design or by permission. Either way, it is happening by God’s plan. And whatever comes to us will give us the opportunity to practice our faith before Him...and to strengthen that faith.

God’s training is God’s follow-up to our learning His Word. When we believe what we have learned, we grow. But then there is training “in the field”, where we must see how God’s truths go beyond academic exercise and enter the real world of internal and external events. God’s “field-training” shows us how His Word applies to experience. There is so much to be said about this topic. Our suffering is ESSENTIAL for our growth, and unless we learn to trust God under adversity, we will not build our faith. This concept is crucial, which is why we have written an entire book about it, titled *God’s Training Program for Believers*. This is a “must” read to get the full concept of the value and “feel” of God’s training, and to see how it is designed to bless us.

Presently, we are discussing training, both through the Word and through experience, as a way to increase our faith. These two aspects of training are provided so that we can prepare for surrender. And these operate within a larger context in which all the techniques that we have taught over the last several years come into play. When we stack up all the techniques, and successfully complete the training drills intended for us, there is yet one thing left to do: Surrender.

Surrender becomes possible when we have learned how to operate in God’s grace system, and are applying the techniques we have learned. We have studied the following grace techniques for attaining spirituality and maturity in great detail throughout our books and articles:

Confession of sins to be cleansed.

Acknowledgement of God, or God-consciousness.

Prayer.

Growth through the assimilation of truth.

Trusting in the Lord and giving thanks.

Maintenance of humility.

Growth through perseverance and the endurance of tests and trials.

Fear of the Lord.

Drawing nearer to God and believing His promises.

All of these things, taken together, have the effect of preparing us for entering a surrendered state. I believe very few believers ever reach this level of maturity...probably just a handful throughout history. But I believe it is open to us all. We cannot claim that—once we have surrendered—we will never fail again, because that would deny the persistent presence of our evil nature. Sin is still open to us, and we are still at choice. But I do believe that “surrender” is a new plateau of spirituality that will yield such great strength that the horrible struggle will ease, and that we can get a foretaste of the victory that we will have when Christ returns. This is worth any effort we can make (with grace still doing the “work”, of course) in order for us to reach super-maturity.

Along with, and mixed in with, the techniques that we are applying, there are certain routines that we can “practice” in anticipation of that time when “surrender” becomes possible. We will look at these next.

Practicing for Surrender

PREVIEW OF THE PRACTICES

The practices that refine us for surrendering to God include seeking God, living by faith, walking by the Spirit, waiting on God, and operating in our gifts. These practices are blended with the techniques we have learned, and might even be considered “techniques” themselves, but we will view them here simply as key steps toward our final “surrender”.

SEEKING GOD

Pastors and preachers often say, “If you seek God, you will find Him.” This is accurate and reflects Scripture perfectly. We will say it again in this section. But knowing you *should* do something is different from knowing *how* to do it. Keep in mind as you read this section that seeking God means spending time in study and prayer, all the while having the humility to confess your sins. Seeking God means using His techniques for walking in the Spirit and growing in knowledge and grace. “Seeking” is an indication of “wanting”, when we reflect a desire for more of Him by following His methods for staying clean, and by learning to depend on Him.

We seek God, anticipating at some point that we will reach “perigee” (meaning “closest to the earth”) with God. This will be the time of maximum maturity, greatest work, and—finally—surrender. Right now, we are SEEKING, which is what we are told repeatedly to do. This is commanded in the following extractions from Luke 11:9 and 11:10, respectively, which say, “seek and you will find”, and “he who

seeks finds". Since this is a firm promise, that if we "seek" we will "find", seeking is, of necessity, a serious pursuit of God and His truth, and not just a dreary-eyed glance in God's direction...some fleeting curiosity that flashes and then fades. This is a sustained, persistent search...a relentless chasing after God. 1 Chron. 16:11 tells us, "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." We can never stop searching for God.

Seeking God is a commandment, and an opportunity. Jesus told us that our needs will be met, if we will "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). In Ps. 34:4 David said, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears." Then in Ps. 119:58, David added, "I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise." And once again he declares, "I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands" (Ps. 119:10). Seeking God is seen as a perpetual requirement in 1 Chron. 16:11, which says, "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always."

And when will the search end? When will we find Him? Jer. 29:13 answers by saying, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you..." In order to seek God with an "all-your-heart" intensity, we must be mature and spiritual. Finding what we are searching for is the product of enormous attention to growth, and persistent endurance of God's training. And then there will be many upshots from such "seeking", as we see in the following verses:

Zeph. 2:3—"Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands, seek righteousness, seek humility..." For us, this is a command to seek God in fellowship, the product of confession and humility.

Hos. 5:15—"Then I [God] will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me." For our search to be effective, we must—once again—have all our sins confessed.

Ps. 105:4—"Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." We seek His strength, favor, attention, forgiveness, knowledge, and blessing. All of these are inherent in "the Lord and his strength".

Deut. 4:29—"But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul." Notice the distinction between just "seeking" and "seeking with all your heart and all your soul". To find God...really get close to Him...we must reach advanced maturity, and this doesn't happen in a day.

1 Pet. 3:11—"He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it." "Turning from evil" is confession, through which we can "do good". Seeking peace is the second step in the "turning" process; peace means, as we have seen many times, "fellowship" We pursue fellowship as part of seeking God.

Ps. 24:4-6—"He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his

Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.” Notice that being “clean” and “vindicated” by God is the condition of those who are able to “seek him”. For us, being clean results in being controlled by the Spirit, and He is the One who can guide our search.

Seeking God is a spiritual exercise that gives us “practice” for surrendering. This is true, as well, for exercising our faith, as we will see next.

LIVING BY FAITH

Faith, as we have seen so many times before, has two applications. There is faith for salvation...believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead as our Savior...and then there is faith for living. When we look at faith in Scripture, we must determine whether its usage applies to salvation, or to living. Context will determine this. We will attempt to be clear in the distinction between these two as we review the principles of living by faith.

Most of our discussion of faith in the past has dealt with faith for living, and has reflected it as a technique for accessing God’s power (walking in the Spirit). But we have also reflected faith as being receptive and credulous toward the promises of God. Before we discuss further the procedures of faith as parts of a “technique”, we want to review the application of faith toward God’s promises.

We said the following about “believing the promises” in the book *Power of God’s Word*, Vol. 2, p. 66:

“Believing the promises” is the *unseen* part of our faith, the place of waiting on God in stillness, the act of *not acting*, but trusting; the haven for resting and “not working”; a time of surrendering to His will and not our own; and the position of comfort that comes from divine assurances that He is God...and that He loves us. When we *believe*, we will know that God will meet all our needs, and that His perfect plan is working. This is a time of quiet, steady confidence that God will provide what He has promised.

There is nothing to DO with these promises, except to *learn* them and *believe* them. Applying the “techniques” involves the “doing”, or *active*, part of faith operations. Believing the “promises” is the “waiting”, or *inactive*, part of faith. The promises themselves do the work, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The promises also have a connection with our topic of “surrender”. We can never surrender if we do not KNOW what is promised, and the promises cannot be fulfilled, if we do not ACCEPT them.

A list of promises, broken down into categories, is given in *Power of God’s Word*, Vol. 2, pp. 68-74. The list is too voluminous to include it in its entirety here, so we will give representative verses, and refer you to the book for the complete list. The categories of promises are, as follows:

Love

Protection

Provision

Blessing

Empowerment

Here are some examples of promises within these categories:

Love Promises

“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.” (Rom. 8:38-39)

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed’, says the Lord, who has compassion on you’.” (Is. 54:10)

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever....Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.” (Ps. 136:1, 26)

Protection Promises

“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. 91:9-10)

“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. 91:14-15)

“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.” (Is. 41:10)

Provision Promises

“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.” (Heb. 4:16)

“And my God shall supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:19)

“For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matt. 6:32-33)

Blessing Promises

“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.” (Ps. 92:12-15)

“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’.” (Jer. 29:11)

“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.” (1 John 3:21-22)

Empowerment Promises

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Ps. 73:26)

“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.” (Ps. 46:1-3, 10a)

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (2 Cor. 4:7)

These are a few of the many things that God promises. Notice that most promises come with requirements, all of which revolve around our being mature, spiritual, etc., which reflects the underpinning of a rigorous faith.

Then there is faith for living. This type of faith is “operational” and active, to be applied to the circumstances of our lives. This is the faith that accepts the validity of grace operations, such as confession, prayer, and Bible study, allowing all the techniques to have their full impact. Without faith for living, the entire grace system would collapse within our hearts and within the scope of our daily activities. Without this active faith, we will never mature, we will bear no fruit, we will not be content, and we will not be rewarded...either in this life or the next (i.e., even in heaven, our rewards will be scant).

The kind of faith that is effective is directed toward the unseen. In an incident we saw earlier, John 4:46-53 describes a “royal official” coming to Jesus about his son, who was sick in Capernaum. He came some distance to see Jesus and to plead for him to come to Capernaum to heal his son. Jesus assured him that his prayer had been granted, that his son would survive, and that he could go. A key verse in this passage is verse 50, which says, “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.” He believed what Jesus said and found out on the way home that his son had been healed at the exact time that Jesus had told him the boy would live. This official had faith, even before he saw the results.

Such faith is required, if we are going to be effective in the Christian life. Heb. 11:6a says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God...” It is impossible for anything truly good to come out of a life and mind where faith is absent. Think about this: “Good” is virtually impossible for man, as evidenced by the fact that we have to *believe* in someone else to produce it. Thanks are owed to God that what is impossible for us is possible for Him. Mark 10:27 says, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” God can do what we cannot do...viz., produce divine good. Our job is to TRUST HIM TO DO IT! The condition that allows our participation in God’s “possibility” is our faith.

Keep in mind that the object of our faith is God, in the person of His Son, and not some “outcome” that we hope for. We trust Him that whatever result He brings to us will be right, just, and loving. We trust always that He knows best, which is why we always pray, “Your will be done.”

Living by faith is the goal. Gal. 2:20, which we have seen so many times, says this:

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.

We are “crucified with Christ”, which means that we are dead, yet we “live in the body”; but the life we are now living, the part that is not “dead”, is an expression of *divine* life that is not ours originally, but is imparted to us because of our faith. We have *eternal* life, because we believed in Christ at salvation; and after that, we have a *perpetuation* of that life within us, *in time*, TO THE DEGREE THAT WE OPERATE IN FAITH. We live by faith, we walk by faith, and we stand by faith. Regarding our stance, Is. 7:9b says, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” Faith gives us the strength to stand and to “do”. This strength is *God’s strength*. No self-directed “obedience” will accomplish what the Spirit of God will do, when our faith takes us from our “impossible” to His “possible”.

Faith that keeps us standing will only be possible when we walk in fellowship with God. Murray said the following about fellowship:

That brings me to just one more thought in regard to faith—faith implies fellowship with God....if you want to get into this life of godliness, you *must* take time for fellowship with God. (Endnote 8)

Fellowship is required for empowerment. Even learning the Word is affected by fellowship. Without the faith of fellowship, the Bible is just a bunch of paragraphs and sentences. For its value to be fully infused, it must be received in communion with the Holy Spirit, which makes faith operable, thus enabling understanding. But when we are out of fellowship, faith will not work for any of its designed purposes. Remember, faith needs fellowship to work for divine good, and it needs the strength of maturity to operate consistently. When we choose not to confess and we choose not to grow, our faith will sag, and we will be “walking in the flesh”, instead of “living by faith”.

For categorical lists of verses on faith, see *God’s Training Program for Believers*, p. 52, available at this website.

LIVING BY THE SPIRIT

The Christian life, as we have seen, is a matter of “choice”. Even when we are controlled by the Spirit, we are still free to choose to walk away at any time. The Spirit only “controls” us in the sense that His power enables us to participate in the production of His fruit, which continues ONLY FOR AS LONG AS we are trusting in Him! When we choose the world’s way, or accept the pull of “fleshly” desires, or decide to fashion our own righteousness, or “fold” under pressure, we will walk away from our faith, and will neither be led by the Spirit, nor continuing on our pathway toward maturity. The object is to stay clean and to continue to grow, in order to strengthen our faith and CHANGE the pattern of our

lives.

If we could just “follow the rules” on our own, we would not need to spend so much time trying to understand and practice ways that lead to engaging the Holy Spirit to get things done. The role of faith is to open the door to the power of the Spirit, so that He can do what we can’t. This is our goal: To let God BE God...through us. God help those who suggest that “obedience” through self-effort is the way to please Him. The way to please God is to TRUST Him. That’s obedience! Faith unleashes His Spirit within us, so that we can—indeed—please Him.

The only real life is the “life of the Spirit”. Rom. 8:13 says, “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” First of all, “death” and “life” do not always indicate either “eternal” or “physical” death and life, but can stand for “temporal” death, or a kind of death that occurs while we are still physically alive. Rom. 8:6 says, “The mind of the sinful [fleshly, carnal] man is [spiritual] death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is [spiritual] life and peace.” So there is physical life and death, eternal life and death, and temporal life and death. In *physical* death, our bodies die. In *eternal* death, our souls are dead into perpetuity until we believe. And within the scope of our lives as believers, *temporal* death can take place in the form of carnality, or the loss of fellowship. This is why Eph. 5:14b instructs carnal believers to “rise from the dead” and return to the “light”, or to fellowship. We “live” in fellowship; we “die” in carnality.

When we are not in fellowship, we are controlled by the sinful nature. Lack of spirituality is due to our unplugging from the Spirit’s power, and engaging the flesh. (We don’t “lose” the Spirit; we just truncate His control by becoming and remaining “unclean”.) When the flesh takes over, we are the ones who must stop it...by confessing and then moving forward in faith. After that, *ongoing* escape from the control of the flesh can be achieved through sustained dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Lewis Sperry Chafer, in his book, *He That is Spiritual*, p. 97, published by Zondervan in 1918, said the following in a lengthy, but meaty, paragraph about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives:

It is often the “beginning of days” in a Christian’s life, when he really believes and heeds the Word of God enough to be made aware of his own limitations, and seriously considers the exact revelation as to what he of himself can or cannot do, and attempt to do the work we have engaged another to do. We naturally *rely* on the person we have engaged to do it. Have we ever learned to *depend* on the Spirit for anything? Are we intelligently counting on the Spirit to undertake those particular things which, according to the Scriptures, He is appointed to do? Do we really believe we are just as helpless as His Word declares us to be? Do we really believe He is able and waiting to do everything we cannot do? Having begun in the Spirit, so far as the divine undertaking in salvation is concerned, are we now to be perfected by the flesh? In meeting the impossible issues of a true Christian life, are we consciously living upon a *works-principle*, or upon a *faith-principle*? The Bible emphatically declares the believer to be upon a *faith-principle* when he is really within the plan of God for his daily life. These uncomplicated teachings are on the pages of God’s Book and an attentive Christian can hardly avoid them. (Endnote 9)

As founder of one of the most prominent Christian institutions in evangelical Christianity, Dallas Theological Seminary, Chafer led generations of God's servants to fruitful ministries throughout the world. Probably one of the most mature believers in the Twentieth Century, his message still rings true today. He believed that the power of the Holy Spirit is the key to everything we will ever accomplish. His words present this issue clearly, as he continues the quote begun above, adding this:

The God-honoring quality of life is always the divine objective in the believer's daily life. Its realization is never by a human resolution or struggle or the resources of the flesh: it is by "fighting the good fight of faith." There is a vast difference between "fighting" to do what God alone can do, and "fighting" to maintain an attitude of dependence on Him to do what He alone can do. The child of God has an all-engaging responsibility of *continuing* in an attitude of reliance upon the Spirit. This is the point of his constant attention. This is his divinely appointed task and place of co-operation in the mighty undertaking of God. (Endnote 10)

Thank God that this message is still being preserved. The practice of most churches and Christian organizations today assumes the opposite view, proclaiming that the Christian life is a matter of "human resolution" or "courageous determination" or a myriad of other "resources of humanity". They may preach "godliness", but they omit the POWER (2 Tim. 3:5).

One of the scriptures that Chafer, no doubt, had in mind, when he said we can "hardly avoid" the "uncomplicated teachings on the pages of God's book", is this one:

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. (2 Cor. 3:4-6)

This is a very clear statement proving that the source of "competence" for Christian living is God. We have strong "confidence", or "faith", in Him, and therefore He shares His competence with us in the form of the Holy Spirit; it is the Spirit *through whom we have "competence"*! Living by the law, following its "letter", adhering to legalities, or staying "obedient" to rules, WILL NOT MAKE US GOOD OR INCREASE OUR COMPETENCE! Good is from God alone!

In 2 Cor. 3, verses 7-11, we see a contrast between the power and glory connected with the Spirit, and that pertaining to the law. This passage says this:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

So the law has a certain "holiness", because it expresses God's standards. But mankind has repeatedly

demonstrated that he cannot follow them or live up to them. The law itself is good, but following the law, or living under it, is not a good system, because its demands are beyond our capabilities. We just end up being criticized by its standards. Even so, the law “glows”, or carries with it a kind of “glory”. And if the law has a glow, how much more brilliant will be the glow of the Holy Spirit, expressed directly through the lives of believers?

It is the Spirit who brings righteousness, not keeping the law. His light will shine through us, when He is controlling our lives, and it will be much brighter than self-induced compliance or conformity to the law. Of this, Murray said the following:

God has called the church of Christ to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the church is living for the most part in the power of human flesh, and of will and energy and effort apart from the Spirit of God. I doubt not that that is the case with many individual believers; and, oh, if God will use me to give you a message from Him, my one message will be this: “If the church will return to acknowledge that the Holy spirit is her strength and her help, and if the church will return to give up everything, and wait upon God to be filled with the Spirit, her days of beauty and gladness will return and we shall see the glory of God revealed among us.” This is my message to every individual believer: “Nothing will help you unless you come to understand that you must live every day under the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Endnote 11)

Nothing can be added to this, except to say that, 120 years later, the body of Christ is still languishing in efforts of the flesh, trying to please God...man’s way. And nothing pleases Satan better, because nothing scares him more or damages him more than God’s power in a connected believer. How foolish we are to attempt to do God’s work apart from His power. We always end up doing a lot more harm than good. Wherever else I may be wrong or naively interpreting Scripture from the comfort of my office chair, I am completely convinced of this one truth concerning our Christian lives: God does it all; we are stick-men with no might of our own. But with His strength, we can accomplish the impossible.

A great warrior of truth and faith, a student of Chafer’s teachings, though possibly not of Chafer himself, J Hampton Keathley, III, echoes the view that the power of the Holy Spirit is required for us to succeed in our mission as God’s soldiers. He said the following concerning life lived in God’s power:

Is our *best* what God wants? No! He wants faith in *His* best, the Lord Jesus, and in the person of the Spirit whom God has sent to indwell us and empower us so we can experience the power of Christ and the ability to do our best, not in our own strength, but in the strength which God supplies. ‘And for this purpose, I work hard, struggling constantly in accordance with His working which continues to work in me mightily’ (Colossians 1:29, author’s translation). (Endnote 12)

It is God’s strength that works “mightily” in us. Keathley goes on to disclose the reason we need the Holy Spirit to empower us to do the Lord’s work, saying, “So often, we tend to run off to do this or that in our own steam because we are all so prone to trust in our own resources.” (Endnote 13) If we

operate under the assumption that we are the ones who can and must do the work, we will fail. Keathley understood where the power lies. When will we start thinking about surrendering to this superior source for good? When will we decide to let God be God?

But I'm not through. I will hit you with every verbal hammer I can find to forge in you an understanding of God's grace and power. In that vein, here's another blow from Andrew Murray:

The power to do is not a permanent gift, but must be each moment received from the Holy Spirit. It is the man who is conscious *of his own impotence as a believer* who will learn that by the Holy Spirit *he can live a holy life*. (Emphasis is Murray's.) (Endnote 14)

It is our consciousness of God's grace and power, contrasted with our own insufficiency, that helps us understand that our efforts will fail, whereas God's will always succeed. One of the greatest signs of our weakness is our sin. We deal with sin by confessing our sins, which cleanses us and qualifies us for restoration and fellowship. But then we still have the SIN NATURE, which wants to (and does) pull us into sin and/or legalism. This must be dealt with. Once we are returned to fellowship, the empowerment of the Spirit will be resumed, and this will be sustained commensurate with our faith. So get this: This state of "spirituality" will not last long, unless our faith is strong. If our faith is firm, the Holy Spirit will be kept in power within us, and THE SINFUL NATURE WILL BE CONTROLLED. So here it is: *Confession* takes care of *sin*, and the *Holy Spirit* takes care of the *sin-nature* (the duration of which depends on our maturity). The effect: more good; less sin. Don't tell me that our reason for emphasizing God's grace is so we can have a pretext to sin! No! It is so we WON'T SIN!

WAITING ON GOD

Waiting on God is a spiritual exercise that helps us get ready to surrender. When we can wait on the Lord in faith and with abiding patience, we will be entering an upper-level of maturity that precedes surrender. The spiritual skill we want to practice now is "waiting". Ps. 5:3 says, "In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation." We pray, and then "wait in expectation", which means to "wait on God while we are trusting in Him".

Waiting is not as passive as it seems. It involves "watching". We don't just wait and nap. We are to be vigilant, actively *believing*, and waiting to see how God handles our request. Ps. 130:5-6 says this:

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Notice the emphasis on "more than watchmen", stated twice. Watchmen are trained to be alert, always scanning for alterations in the environment. We are to be MORE aware than they are, as we watch for the Lord's workings in our lives. And what we "expect" while we are waiting is not so much a specific outcome, as we saw before, but that God will bring the best possible result. Our faith is always in our perfect God; not in a specific outcome.

We are to wait in stillness, which means we do not have to scurry around, frantically attempting to solve our own problems. This does not remove common sense as a part of real-world decisions, but

calls for an attitude that we are to take into all our daily functions and decisions. This attitude consists of an abiding trust in God, as we do what we do in our careers, relationships, home-lives, and so on. We do “normal” things with “super-normal” power behind them.

Ps. 37:7 carries this further, saying, “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him...” This does not mean we have to wait until the end of the day, when the smoke from the fires of the day has cleared, before we can be still. “Stillness” is an aura of trust that we live in and by, as we run through the flames. And while we are still, we are waiting...patiently...with an ongoing faith, knowing that all of God’s workings are “good”.

Sometimes, there are no exits or escape routes from the danger...or no water holes across the scorching desert. This is when we have been reduced to helplessness...when self-trust is no longer an option. Our resources have been depleted, and we can only hope in God’s mercy and grace. We can “stand still” as a choice, but sometimes, it’s the *only* thing we can do. Either way, waiting and watching for the omnipotent hand of the Almighty God to bring us all we need, to be all He expects, is always the best option. As the Jews stood before a deep and churning sea, and Pharaoh’s army bore down on them, Moses made this speech to them:

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Moses is calling for them to reach inside themselves and dredge up all the faith they can to allow the problem of the Red Sea and Pharaoh’s army to be God’s problem, and not theirs. Who will do the fighting? The Lord. And what is our part? “Only to be still.” Then we will “see the deliverance”, which is God handling the problem the best way HE knows, while we believe that His solutions are the best.

Then there is the story of Jehoshaphat, who faced a hideously-huge army in full battle gear, arrayed against the men and women and children of Judah. His response was consistent with his life: He responded in faith, trusting God’s word to him, which was this:

You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.

This charge was given to another people in another age, but it applies to us in this one. We do not have to fight the battles. We are to “take our positions”, assume our “stations in life”, and then “stand firm”, meaning to hold steady in a growing faith. Then we can watch for the Lord to work, as we wait on Him. He will deliver us in the BEST way and at the RIGHT time.

While we are waiting, it is possible for us to stay strong, because waiting itself is an indication of maturing faith. Ps. 27:13-14 confirms this, saying, “I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” This is a familiar theme: “I am confident”. And what is the foundation of this confidence? “...the goodness of the Lord.” We have confidence, because we KNOW that God is there, that God is good,

and that His plan is perfect. We know that His plan is not to harm us, but to give us “hope and a future”, as seen in Jer. 29:11-13. This promise was given directly to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, but, once again, reflects God’s attitude in dealing with us. As much as HE IS OUR GOD...HE CARES...for us. So we, too, can “take heart” and “wait”.

Waiting is a much bigger topic in Scripture than most Christians realize. And it requires advanced maturity. Here are some references that can be perused at your leisure. These call for us to WAIT: Ps. 37:34; Is. 26:8; Ps. 33:20; Ps. 27:14; Ps. 130:5; Micah 7:7; Hab. 2:3; Prov. 38:15.

Waiting is an attitude...an inner working of the heart. But be prepared: we are going to be very busy while we are waiting, as we will see next.

GIFTS AND SERVICE

We have covered this topic thoroughly in previous books and articles, but we include it here in our discussion of “practicing” for our upcoming surrender, because it is the external expression of an internal faith and love. When we are exercising our gifts in faith and thus in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be demonstrating our preparedness to surrender.

We will give a brief reminder here of the principle of gifted service, as seen in Scripture. Eph. 4:1-16 gives a good summary of the purpose and operation of gifts, as follows:

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

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly region? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his 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 people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of 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 has been quoted in its entirety, because it provides a poignant presentation of all we want

to say about gifts, which includes the following:

That we are “called” by being given specific gifts, and then we are charged to use them.

That humility and love are the basis for gifted service.

That fellowship is crucial to service...both between us and God, and among ourselves.

That the Spirit of Christ is the source of our gifts and that gifted service is a function of grace.

That gifts vary from one believer to the next.

That gifts exist to “equip us all for service”, to “build each other up”, and to “cause each other to grow” toward maturity.

That we can mature to the point that we attain the “fullness of Christ”.

All service is orchestrated and conducted by God, and the concert is played by those who brought their instruments (are filled with the Spirit). Once we are in tune with the Conductor, we will play to His cadence, and by His direction, all reading off the same sheet of music. Otherwise, we will just be making noise. Gifts are to operate in harmony and synchronicity...working together according to God’s arrangement.

A good picture of harmonious and constructive service is seen in 1 Th. 5:12-15, which describes it like this:

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Notice the respect, humility, love, fellowship, and cooperation that these believers are called upon to exhibit. This is how corporate gifted service is to operate, with each contributing, and all benefiting. And that means ALL. No one is to be neglected or ignored. We are to “gin up” those who are doing nothing; encourage and pay attention to those who never say a word; and be patient with everyone. Patience is perhaps the hardest thing to achieve, and this requires a perspective of faith that trusts God for outcomes, even when dealing with some who seem insufferable. Above all, we must be growing ourselves, and building our faith, which will enable fellowship and love, and maximize the effectiveness of our gifts.

Serving within the scope of our gifts, in a spirit of love and care, prepares us spiritually for surrender, because—not only are we helping others, we are growing as a result of their gifts functioning in our behalf. And I believe we grow by *serving*, as well as by *being served*.

Specific gifts have been thoroughly delineated in previous studies, so they will be given only cursory attention here...just enough to acknowledge that gifts are specifically allocated to each believer. The main purpose for listing gifts at all is so that we can 1) perhaps see our own, 2) see that gifts differ from one believer to the next, and 3) acknowledge that all gifts are essential. Many, but likely not all,

gifts are cited in Scripture. For example, we see some of these gifts in Rom. 12:6-8, 10, taken together, which gives us the following:

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 [maturity]. 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.

The gifts suggested in this passage reflect the mature spirit in which they are to be conducted. No gifts should operate prematurely, meaning that expectations for performance in the "gift exchange" should be constrained by the levels of maturity. No baby believer should be doing anything but going through basic training in the Word.

To see the condition under which services should operate, we turn to Rom. 14:17-19, which says this:

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

The kingdom of God is often a symbol for fellowship (see *Bible Basics on Sin and Mercy*, pp. 58-83). It is a matter of "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit", which have been described before as conditions that indicate fellowship. And notice that the fellowship takes place "in the Holy Spirit", which is where it resides and from which it draws life. When we serve Christ "in this way" (in fellowship), it will be "pleasing to God" and will be received by those who want and need it. We should never try to serve without confession and restoration, to ascertain that fellowship always precedes service. When service is done in this way, it will lead to "peace", or fellowship among believers, and "mutual edification", which is the central purpose for gifts.

What needs to happen in this nation is the strengthening of God's people. That is more important than revivals and improved morality, even though Christians everywhere, mostly babies, are dragging nets and beating drums, trying to increase their numbers or get changes in behavior. What is needed is MATURITY, with SPIRITUALITY. Then, REAL service can go on in God's energy. Without mature believers...walking in the Spirit...there will be no meaningful service, and edification will be a lost art. But when believers unite in faith, and grow together, real church operations can flourish, and gifted service and Spirit-directed evangelism and discipleship can be conducted with genuine purpose and significance.

When gifted interaction takes place, believers grow. And when growth is sufficient, surrender is possible. But we are not quite there yet. We must be "primed" to surrender.

Priming for Surrender

NEARING THE TIME OF SURRENDER

When we go through the levels of maturity, we will reach a point when we are ready to be “primed”. This is a time when we do the final “priming” (part of “priming”) before our featured performance in the consummate act of surrendering. We will not be able to surrender until all “priming” requirements have been met, and that will not even be possible until we have completed “preparation” and “practice”. When we reach the level of “priming”, we will have reached super-maturity, when the last leg of our journey toward surrendering lies before us.

There are several aspects of “priming for surrender” that we want to look at. The first is the full and final realization that “we can’t”, meaning that we have come to realize completely that God is the only one who can perform His work. When we fully grasp this, we are nearing the time when our minds will have been re-worked (renewed), giving us God’s viewpoint and making us ready to relinquish our lives to God. Another requirement is that we must understand what it means to be a believer that follows “God’s heart”, and KNOW that failure does not have to be the end of the road leading to maturity. Also, we need to spend whatever time it takes to fully comprehend the source of power for our lives, which is *God alone*...and never the initiative or determination of the flesh. Finally, we must engage the “preliminary” forms of surrender, which include drawing near, yielding, offering our bodies, submission, and commitment. We will look at each of these steps separately.

KNOWING THAT “WE CAN’T”

This is a central theme of all our writing: understanding our helplessness and God’s all-sufficiency. The contrast between these is infinite. We fail to grasp this because we do two things: 1) aggrandize our own potency and place, and 2) reduce an infinite God to the finite, where His position and power are roughly on the same plane as ours. We exaggerate ourselves and discount God. This is the greatest tragedy in all of Christianity.

What we must understand before surrender can be completed is that we must depend on God for everything. He is able to work through us when we are willing to let Him, AND when we have matured to the point that our faith will unleash His power within us. At lower levels of maturity, we are incapable of this kind of faith, even if we are willing. We have to go through the steps, and grow into the kind of faith that is needed for spirituality, and *we all have the potential* for this. Remember this: Faith releases the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what we keep repeating. And when faith is strong enough, we will be “walking by the Spirit”...virtually all the time.

One verse that we use over and over is worth re-quoting here: “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?” (Gal. 3:3) When we stop trying to do the job that only God can do, acknowledging that only He can do it, then He can go to work fulfilling His plan and will in and for our lives, and produce divine good through us.

We must remember the difference between us and God, as per Luke 18:27, which says, “What is

impossible with men is possible for God.” There are many things that are “impossible” for us to do: stopping sin, loving God and man, producing real spiritual fruit, generating divine righteousness, and conducting Spirit-led gifted service. These have to be done by God’s Spirit; we are but the instruments he uses to do the work. When it comes to divine good, only God can produce it.

Even Paul did not claim to be able to do anything good on his own, as we have seen before in 1 Cor. 15:10b, where Paul said, “No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.” Add to this Phil. 2:13, which was also quoted earlier: “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” And pile-on Rom. 7:24a, where Paul says, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Paul had the Spirit of Christ, but did not fully understand yet what the Spirit could do for him. Concerning the plight of not knowing the power at our disposal, and our own limited view of our need for it, once again we quote Andrew Murray from his book, *Absolute Surrender*:

Here is the great mistake made by many Christian people: they think that when there is a renewed will, it is enough; but that is not the case. This regenerate man [Paul] tells us: “I will to do what is good, but the power to perform I find not.” How often people tell us that if you set yourself determinedly, you can perform what you will! But this man was as determined as any man can be, and yet he made the confession: “To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not” (Rom. 7:18).” (Endnote 15)

Notice that in Rom. 7 the names of Christ, God and the Holy Spirit occur only one time each, until the end of the chapter, when the name of Christ appears as a transition to chapter 8. Chapter 7 shows the futility of man’s efforts. The *law*, symbol for human effort and self-deliverance, appears in this chapter nearly twenty times. The words *I*, *me*, and *my*, occur collectively more than forty times. This is because this chapter depicts the impotence of a believer who is trying to please God without the filling of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s confession, “What a wretched man I am!” (v. 24) tells us that he is finally turning the corner on self-effort, and seeing where his hope lies...in Christ Jesus...as shown by his question and answer: “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 24b-25a) This is why he mentions God or Christ or the Holy Spirit in the next chapter (chapter 8) at least 29 times. Paul is showing the contrast between a life lived in the energy of the flesh and one lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Self-effort is a form of legalism, which is a product of the sinful nature, as we have seen before. When we are *trying* to conform to a standard, even a good one, we are depending on ourselves to achieve it, and this means our *sinful nature* is trying to “do good”. Good of some kind may be forthcoming, but it is not divine good, and “human good” always leads to sin, because it is generated under the control of the sinful nature. Think this is not true? Go into the homes of Christians. Look at the loss of temper, the bitterness, the invective, and the sharpness of tone. And go into churches. Look at the strife and envy and jealousy and sensitivity and pride. These are the direct results of attempts to SERVE GOD through self-effort. (Suggested by Murray)

It is easy to say, “I can do”, and fail to finish the complete statement, which is, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:13). Between the “I can” and “through him”, there is the realization that “I can do nothing” (John 15:5). He must “strengthen me”, without which I truly can do *nothing*. We must not stop with, “I can”, but go on to the source for enablement, “through Christ”.

Murray said “let it be my glory to be helpless”, reflecting Paul’s statement in 2 Cor. 12:9-10, where he said he would “boast” about his weaknesses, and “delight” in them, because he could become “strong” by recognizing them. Murray adds the following about our helplessness:

I pray you learn the lesson now. If you felt you could not do it, you are on the right road, if you let yourselves be led. Accept that position, and maintain it before God: ‘My heart’s desire and delight, O God, is absolute surrender, but I cannot perform it. It is impossible for me to live that life. It is beyond me.’ Fall down and learn that when you are utterly helpless, God will come to work in you not only to will but also to do. [Murray’s source: Phil. 2:13] (Endnote 16)

With advanced maturity, we don’t recognize our *strength*, as faith grows, but our *helplessness*. As our awareness of God increases, we become more aware of our incapacities. We want to do right and be right...to do our part...but we see clearly that we are helpless to make this happen. Self-faith is an expression of our weakness; the more we think WE can do it, the less we will actually do, regardless of how big a splash we make in our little pond. Surrender will require an emptying of the self and all its attachments, and the infusion of the power of the Holy Spirit. We must know how helpless we are and see how powerful He is...and how essential He is to us...if we are ever to participate in His glory—that glory which He, alone, can bring to Himself. When we know our place, we will be carriers of that glory.

When we know we are helpless, we can learn faith. Faith begins with despair. When we find we must cease from man and the world, and realize that our only hope is in God, then we will learn what it means to TRUST in God. I really like what Murray said about this:

...another must do it for me. And that is the secret of the spiritual life. A man must learn to say: “I give up everything; I have tried and longed and thought and prayed, but failure has come. God has blessed me and helped me, but still, in the long run, there has been so much of sin and sadness.’ What a change comes when a man is thus broken down into utter helplessness and self-despair, and says: ‘I can do nothing!’” (Endnote 17)

Seeing ourselves, not as others see us, but as God sees us, propels us toward the time when we can surrender our inadequacy to His capability...when His perfection can continually cloak our flaws with His goodness. The refinements He brings, operating within us as His Spirit, enable us to do right and glorify Him.

A MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART

Before we talk about the “God-can” part of the surrendering equation, we want to briefly look at what it means to be a “man after God’s own heart”. Look first at Abraham, as described in Rom. 4:18-21, which says this:

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

So Abraham exhibited great faith, and God’s promise of a son...a “seed” between him and Sarah...was eventually fulfilled. In James 2:23, Abraham was even called a “friend” of God.

David was another super-believer. His faith was so great and his attachment to God so strong that God said he “kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.” (1 Kings 14:8) It was also reported that he “walked uprightly” before God, “in integrity and uprightness”. (1 Ki. 9:4) And it was said of his son Solomon that “his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.” (1 Ki. 11:4) So David was an exceptional man of faith. (See this also in Heb. 11:32-33.)

And who can ignore Job, of whom God said, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8b). Job was highlighted as the most mature man alive at the time, as per God’s testimony. And Job’s own words confirm his faith, as we see in his statement: “Though he slay me, yet will I hope [trust] in him” (Job 13:15a). Surely, here was a man whose faith was stellar, and whose patience was endless. James 5:11a assessed Job’s perseverance, saying this about him: “As you know we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.”

Job has to be counted among the great adherents to faith, and one whose heart followed God’s.

But here the consonant and harmonious tones that we are enjoying in these stories begin to wax dissonant and even a little cacophonous. Something is wrong. Don’t we read in Scripture that Abraham lost faith in God’s promise and slept with Hagar so that he could bring about what God had not finished...i.e., making an heir of his *own seed* with his *own wife*? And didn’t we see in Scripture that David stole Bathsheba from her husband Uriah and had him killed in battle? And didn’t Elihu castigate Job for accusing God of unfairness for causing him suffering that he did not deserve? In fact, here is what Elihu said to Job:

But you have said in my hearing—I heard the very words—‘I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.’ But I tell you, in this you are not right...

The surprise is that these believers, extolled for their exceptional faith, were also consummate failures, not as unbelievers or as baby believers, but as seasoned and trained paragons of maturity. And still they failed. So what is wrong with this picture?

The difference in these men, what made their faith noteworthy, was not witnessed in their performance or perfection, but in their willingness to recognize that the key to pleasing God is found in humble recognition of our failures and our inability to do *good* and produce *righteousness*. Each of these men failed, but they also recovered. Abraham fell on his face twice before he received confirmation of the covenant between him and God. (Gen. 17:3, 17) As for David, he confessed his sins directly. This confession, found in Ps. 32 and 51, is poignant, exemplified in Ps. 32:3-5, which says this:

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 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.

Job also confessed his sins, as he re-awakened to his own inadequacy. This is what he said:

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, “Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?” Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, “Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.” My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

These all failed, but notice the contrition expressed by each of them. Many have failed from time to time since: Solomon, Paul, Peter, and endless others...and so have you and I. These all repented and confessed. And hopefully we will, as well.

The secret to forgiveness and restoration, to returning things to their original condition, AS IF sin had not happened, is the same for all of us: genuine confession. But *surrender*, the ultimate state of maturity, goes further; it is characterized *no longer* by ISOLATED ACTS of confession, but by an ongoing MINDSET of humility and repentance...a perpetual attitude of confession and relinquishment. This is what super-mature believers do with failure. Key point: God will build on our failings, if we commit them to Him. Failure alone cannot stop us; rather, *not recognizing and admitting our failings to God* is what will do us in.

It is not what we “do” that pleases God, but what we “believe”. God erases sins that are confessed, and when we reach super-maturity, confession becomes a constant melody played for the Spirit within us. Then, it will be our faith on the peaks of spirituality that God will remember, not the sins that occurred in the valleys of carnality...because we are living in the mercy of His forgiveness and the grace of his provision. Over time, when we are primed and ready, those peaks and valleys will level into the smooth and open plains of surrender, and we will see sin controlled and righteousness produced. What a day that will be!

KNOWING THAT “GOD CAN”

When we think about God, as compared to ourselves, the difference is incomprehensible. Which may be one reason that not many seem to get the idea that God alone can do what we cannot. God does

not favor us on the basis of our being strong and capable, or highly disciplined and educated, or attractive and winsome. God chooses by a criterion not related to inherent, pre-existent qualities that are ours by birth or training within the cosmic system. No. God chooses on the basis of His foreknowledge of our humility and submission. “Chosen ones”, or believers who thirst after God, become the heroes and true generals in God’s army. One of the best expressions of this truth is found in 1 Cor. 1:26-31, which gives us the following:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Paul, himself, one of the smartest people who ever lived, said he came to the Corinthians, “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor. 2:4b-5). Faith in man and in self may yield results in the world, but they will mean nothing in the kingdom of light. Paul added that the “wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age”, is “coming to nothing” (1 Cor. 2:6b).

So, we *are* nothing, can *do* nothing, and all that we create is *coming* to nothing. By contrast, “nothing is impossible for God”. We can’t; God can. Go back to verse 30 in 1 Cor. 1, quoted directly above. Jesus Christ is “for us wisdom...our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.” We can never boast, then, except to praise the efforts of God. God is the only one who can say, “I can,” and “I did.” But do not despair. We are not “useless” just because “we can’t”. God can use our uselessness, helplessness, and weakness, if we turn them over to Him by acknowledging our worthlessness and recognizing God’s greatness. Is. 40:28-31 tells us how God props us up and gives us vitality, saying this:

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 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.

What a beautiful description of the process for God’s perfection flowing into our nothingness. We are like grass (Is. 40:8) that dries up and falls; or grasshoppers (Is. 40:22), hardly noticeable or visible. To such inconsequential creatures, God says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9a). It is He who leads us by still waters. It is He who restores our soul. It is He who strengthens and comforts us. It is He who gives us hope and a future. It is He who fights the battles. It is He who protects us. It is He who gives us wisdom. It is He who delivers us, and

ultimately saves us. “And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8b). When we know this, we will know that “God can”.

We are saved by His grace and kept by His power. This is what we see in 1 Pet. 1:3-5. In verse 3 we see that “he has given us new birth”, and then in verse 5 we see that, “through faith” we “are shielded by God’s power”. After we are born again, the shield of God’s power is granted THROUGH FAITH. If faith is strong, we have His shield...in the form of His power. 2 Thess. 3:3 says it this way, “But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.” It is the devil’s work to trick us through deception or tempt us into sin, and it is he from whom we MUST have protection. God provides that for us...when we trust Him. Strong faith secures a strong shield.

There is much talk around Christendom about “godliness”, about doing and saying things that reflect devotion or commitment; but there is little talk about the power of God, and the ways He has provided for us to access it. This is the result of Satan’s work. 2 Tim. 2:26 warns us about the “trap of the devil, who has taken them [carnal believers] captive to do his will.” Then 2 Thess. 3 describes much of Satan’s work as “a form of godliness, but denying its power” (v. 5). When we operate with the belief that “I can”, we are captives of Satan, and sin and/or legalism will follow. When we recognize that “God can”, we will exist and move by His power, and divine good will ensue.

Power was anticipated in Acts 1:8a, where we see this: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...” This is what Jesus promised to his disciples, and this promise applies to every believer since that time. We have access to infinite power from the time the Holy Spirit “comes upon us”, a permanent condition that begins at salvation. But just because the power is there does not mean that it is turned on. God will not impose His holiness on a space occupied by sin, so—for the Spirit to fill our hearts—we must be cleansed. The power is always there, available as a case of “God can”, but it will work for us only when we have learned that “we can’t”.

When the power is on within us, God can produce His fruit through us. Phil. 1:9-11 says this:

And this is my prayer: that your love [fellowship] 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 and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness THAT COMES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST—to the glory and praise of God. (emphasis mine)

When we are “pure and blameless”, we can be “filled with the fruit of righteousness”...which comes ONLY through Jesus Christ, or—in other words—through His Spirit. He can; we can’t. We must get this: Righteousness comes from God; not from us! And I must distinguish something once again: *salvation* righteousness is imputed forever; *living* righteousness is only produced when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

The expression of God’s power, His “can-ness”, is seen as grace. This is why He told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.” But this grace is not like an aspirin, to help us get by. This grace is all-encompassing and grand. 2 Cor. 9:14 calls it “surpassing grace”, which God “gives” to those who serve in faith. With grace comes strength. 2 Tim. 2:1b tells us to “be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Without

grace, there will be no strength. Remember Paul's statement about how his own work was being done: "No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). Grace is essential to every aspect of our Christian lives, including our accessing and drawing on the power of God by using *grace techniques* to acquire *grace assets*.

When we trust God to DO what we CANNOT DO, He goes to work. Heb. 13:20-21 says this:

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.

How can the seminal doctrine of God doing His own work escape so many pastors, Christian leaders, and believers, when it is literally on every page of Scripture in some form or another? Many times, it is completely obvious and clearly stated, as it is in this passage from Hebrews: "...may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through [the Spirit of] Jesus Christ." He "works" what pleases Him, and we have the privilege of *participating* in His work, if we get the techniques down pat, and follow them. This is PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY! This is for *implementation* through our faith, which engages God's *practices* by His *power*. By following the techniques, we are able to be used in the process of God doing "what is pleasing to him".

Repetition of this principle may become a little laborious for those who "got it" a long time ago. But all of us need to be reminded of the SOURCE of all good, all strength, and all of life. So, as Peter said in 2 Pet.1:12, "I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have." And what had he told them? In verses 3 and 4 he had said the following:

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

God's power equips us for "everything we need". His Word gives us the techniques we are to follow, and then specifies assurances in our behalf when we do. If we confess, we are assured that we will be forgiven. If we pray the "prayer of faith", we can be sure that we are praying "according to God's will", and we will get what we ask for, because our prayer has been adjusted to what God wants to give. (Otherwise, we would not be praying a "prayer of faith".) By studying "in fellowship", we are assured that we will receive nutrients for our souls that will strengthen our faith. If we endure God's training through trials and tests, we are assured that our faith will be refined and enriched. And if we progressively move toward maturity, and eventually fully understand the love and character and grace of God, we are confident that we will reach super-maturity, which can then serve as a launching pad into surrender and the fullness of God.

But who supplied the techniques for achieving this? God. And who enables the completion of each

step? God. And who is waiting for us to surrender, so that He can bring His fruit and blessing into all aspects of our lives? Yes, it is God. He wants to express His infinite Self in our mortal bodies. He wants to be Himself...in us...and He doesn't need our strength to do it...He only needs our permission. 2 Cor. 4:7 says, "But we have this treasure [knowledge of the glory of God] in jars of clay [mortal bodies] to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Our hope is that "the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal body" (2 Cor. 4:10b). By His power, God's life is seen in us, which comes, of course, from Him, and not from us.

We are told to be strong, not in our own strength, but in His, as we see in Eph. 6:10, which says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." And we see this again in Eph. 1:17-20, which reads like this:

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...

The power comes from HIS strength, not ours. Even our gifts do not operate in our own strength. They must function by the filling and direction and control of the Holy Spirit; otherwise, the "service" is just the work of the flesh, which will produce no good. It LOOKS like service, but it is serving one who is an enemy of God, the one who wants to use us in his evil army. The Christian life is made up of *acts of God*, performed through willing and prepared believers. Gifted service, rendered in Spirit and truth, is a product of growth and fellowship, a work of God, as we see in the following passage:

I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:4-9)

The gifts are there, the growth is there, the cleansing is there, the fellowship is there...hence the "keeping" is there, "because of his grace" (v. 4). Thus Paul can say, in the next chapter (chapter 2, verse 4), "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power..." His gifts were constrained by the Holy Spirit, as ours are now, and all gifts get their effectiveness through abiding faith in the Spirit's power. 1 Pet 4:11b tells us, "If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." Anytime we do the work, we want credit for it. When God does the work, He gets the credit.

We want His power to operate in us, not so we will “feel powerful”, because we may not feel a thing...but so we can know that His fruit is being produced through us, that He is being glorified, and that He is pleased with us. Eph. 3:16-19 says this:

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 Lord's holy people, 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 will see this passage again in the section on “surrender”, but for now, we want to drive home the point that our objective is to access HIS POWER! It is HIS strength that has an effect...not ours. There is nothing about us that counts, except for the expression of our faith. And even that brings no merit or credit to ourselves, but simply recognizes God's power. God “can”, because He has the power. He “can”, because He is God.

Finally, we offer the following verses on “grace and power”, for your perusal and meditation:

I Cor. 3:10. “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it....”

Rom. 15:15-16. “I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus....”

II Cor. 1:12. “We have conducted ourselves in the world...in the holiness and sincerity that are from God...not according to worldly wisdom, but according to God's grace.”

II Cor. 6:7. “...we use truthfulness, and the presence of God's power.”

II Cor. 13:4. “For to be sure he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him [Jesus] to serve you.”

Eph. 3:7. “I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.”

I Cor. 15:10. “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.”

Once we understand what “God does”, it seems natural to want to get closer to Him...nearer to the Source of the power. When we start to get the picture of who He is as God, we want greater intimacy and communion with Him. We want to “draw near”, which is the first of the preliminary steps for surrendering.

PRELIMINARY STEPS FOR SURRENDERING

As mentioned earlier, the “preliminary” steps to surrender include drawing near, yielding, offering our bodies, submission, and commitment. Each of these lends itself to the surrendering process in its own way, and we shall look at each one.

The Preliminary Step of Drawing Near to God. Closeness to God is a condition associated with maturity. The more mature we are, the closer we will be to God, because our faith will be stronger and the “eyes of our hearts” will see Him more clearly and accurately. Of course, maturity is predicated on extensive periods of spirituality, during which we will be praying, studying, enduring, and growing. And as we mature, we draw nearer to God. This is not only wonderful and reassuring, it is required, because it is commanded in the Bible.

James 4:8a tells us, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” This crucial command, which we will re-visit when we get to the section on “surrendering”, tells us to move in the direction of the Deity...to draw near. We would not be asked to move closer to God, if it were not—first of all—possible, and—secondly—expected. This is something we can and should do! Now, we want to know more about the *process* for drawing near, so we can know *how* it is done.

In Heb. 10, verses 19-22, we have a description of the conditions and steps for drawing near, which is presented, as follows:

Therefore, brothers and sisters, 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 and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

To get closer to God, there are certain things we need to “do” and/or “have”. Here are two conditions which are prerequisite to getting closer to God, as seen in this passage:

The first condition indicated is that we must have “confidence”. This is a state of believing, or having faith in God and His “way”. Notice that our faith is in the “blood of Jesus”, which gets us saved to begin with, and then that faith has the potential to sustain our spiritual lives in our post-salvation state. This condition involves “drawing near” with a “sincere heart” and “full assurance”. “Sincere heart” connotes humility and acknowledgement, and “full assurance that faith brings” indicates maturity. When our attitude is one of recognition of God’s character, and our faith has grown through the consistent use of all the techniques, we will be ready to draw closer to God in mature confidence.

The second condition involves cleanliness. The word “having” in “having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us” (v. 22) means “already having”, which discloses an *a priori* condition, indicating that something must be done before we can have the faith required in step 1. Cleansing and restoration to fellowship must be done prior to our “having faith”. This is essential, because faith is the primary mechanism for moving us toward God, and faith will not work if we are out of fellowship. To have faith, we must first of all be cleansed from our sins by confession, as per 1 John 1:9. In James 4 above, we saw that “Come near to God” is followed by “Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (all in verse 9). Cleansing precedes the operation of faith.

Notice that verses 19-20 in Heb. 10 show Jesus Christ as the “new and living way opened for us through the curtain”. Before Jesus completed His sacrificial work on the cross, the “veil”, or curtain,

was used to separate the “Holy Place” from the “Most Holy Place”, which was the place of contact with God in the Temple. This room could be entered only by the high priest, and then only once a year after extensive cleansing.

But when Jesus’ work was finished, the veil was ripped from top to bottom, and is no longer an obstruction to “closeness to God”. Believers can now enter the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place, but there’s a catch: We must be clean and we must bring our faith with us (Heb. 10:22). Furthermore, our faith must be strong enough to sustain us there. Otherwise, we will be in and out of the Most Holy Place in an instant, and we will not be experiencing the benefits of “closeness to God”.

So, at this point in our progression toward “surrendering”, we reach a point in our maturity that the conditions of cleanliness and strong faith are being met. This means that we are qualified to occupy the Most Holy Place. This is what we see in Heb. 4:14-16, which says this:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus Christ is now our high priest, and—through our union with Him—we are also priests. We qualify to enter the Most Holy Place. Through our identification with Him and the imputation of His righteousness at salvation, we are *eligible* to enter, and by the forgiveness of sin through confession and the presence of faith, we are *qualified* to enter. In this passage, entering the Most Holy Place is described as “approaching God’s throne of grace”...which is drawing near to the presence of God. But notice the sequence as we approach: 1) we receive mercy, and 2) we find grace to help us in our time of need.

When we “receive mercy”, we find forgiveness. Mercy for believers is absolution through confession. This then qualifies us to “find grace”, which is ALL WE NEED! When we move closer to God, we will find the “mother lode of grace”. But the road to this point is long and arduous, and will not be traveled by immature or carnal believers. “Drawing near” places us standing before God, in faith, ready for the swearing-in ceremony, waiting to surrender.

The Preliminary Step of Yielding. Yielding, offering our bodies, submitting, and committing are all lighter forms of surrendering. Before we can surrender, we must complete these “practice runs”. This sounds easy enough, but the level of maturity required to do these is at the “exceptional” level.

To frame the process of “yielding”, we will use two scriptures: 1 Cor. 2:16b and Phil. 2:5-8. The first reference looks like this: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.” Believers have access to the contents of Christ’s thoughts. This is primarily the divine view-point of Christ, as expressed in His Word. By knowing the Word, we know the thinking of God. But there is another meaning in this verse, which becomes clear when we couple it with the passage in Philippians.

Phil. 2:5-8 says the following:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

What was the nature of Christ, his attitude, his behavior? In essence, what was the “mind” of Christ? Primarily, it consisted of “yeildedness”. He did not seek equality with God, as Satan did. He did not take advantage of the power He knew He had, but submitted to His Father’s will and power. And He became like a servant...subservient...obedient to the plan of His Father. He constantly gave in to all requirements and fulfilled them to the letter. He had learned His Father’s plan and yielded to any outcome which had been designed for Him. He trusted His Father; He was dependent on Him.

If this was true for Jesus, how much more should it be true for us? If we do not reflect a dependency on Him, it is because we do not understand the reality of God and our place in His plan. When we truly know God, we can do nothing but humble ourselves and yield to Him, confident that He will maneuver the affairs of our lives so that everything will work for our good, and so that He will be pleased with what we have become in relation to Him.

The Preliminary Step of Offering our Bodies. “Body” is the same thing as “life”, including body and soul. Offering our “bodies” sounds a bit morbid, but this is actually offering our “lives” to God. This is what we are told to do in Rom. 6:12-13, which says this:

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.

Instead of offering the pieces and components of our lives to our sinful nature, which will take us in a direction *away from God*, we must offer them as instruments to His service. If we are *servants* of sin, meaning it has not been subdued in our lives, we will not be able to offer ourselves to God. When we achieve a higher level of maturity, and are walking in the power of His Spirit, sin will be removed as an obstruction to our making this offering to God. Until then, we are not ready to offer anything except our *time*...in growth...through study and endurance; and our *attention* to the filling of the Spirit, through confession and prayer. One primary proof that we are ready to offer our lives to God is that sin will be under control, as per the next verse in the passage just quoted, Rom. 6:14, which says, “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

If we have spent time in “grade” maturing and walking in the Spirit, this will be evidenced by “purity” in our walk, as well as in our hearts. Our hearts are purified through confession, but if sin is still haunting us and controlling us, then we have not used spiritual resources sufficiently to resist it. We are left with only “flesh” to control flesh, and we will be kept perpetually in the grip of sin.

Furthermore, we will be operating “under the judgment of the law”. Gal. 5:18 says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” The key to changing this is consistency...in confession, in prayer, in learning God’s truths for living, and in enduring whatever training is necessary to bring us into line with God’s will...UNTIL WE GET IT. The key is in *persevering* until our faith is strong enough to beat the sin. The battle cry is this: Don’t let up! Never stop moving forward...keep going...even when we fail and fail and fail. At some point, if we keep growing, we will no longer be under sin’s mastery; we will be ready to offer ourselves to God.

Rom. 12:1 follows this theme, saying, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” First of all, notice that offering our bodies takes place “in view of God’s mercy”, or through the process of His forgiveness of our sins. It is because we are forgiven that we are able to offer ourselves. Why? Because this is the only time when we are “holy and pleasing to God”. By being cleansed (“holy”), AND by maturing and walking in the Spirit (being “pleasing to God”), we are qualified to conduct the spiritual act of worship, which is “offering our bodies”. See the prerequisite? See the process? Through advanced maturity and spirituality...reaching the point that we are “pleasing to God”...we are able to take the next step, which is to offer our bodies...our very lives.

The Preliminary Step of Submitting to God. Submission is related to God’s will. When we submit, we are bowing to God’s wishes and wants where our lives are concerned. It is acquiescing to His divine preferences. We are saying that what He wants is what we want, because what He wants is perfect. Therefore, we submit to Him.

James 4:7a says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God.” This is a simple command, incorporated with a string of commands, all having to do with “surrender”. We will integrate this command with the others when we get to the section on surrendering, but right now we are giving “submission” our full attention, so that we can understand what it means and how it is done. We want to submit because it is commanded, but also because we want to move toward surrender.

In the middle of a passage telling us to submit to masters and rulers, 1 Pet. 2:15 tells us what God’s primary will is regarding our *entire mode of conduct*. This verse says, “For it is God’s will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” Doing right, and thus intensifying the light we shine before men, is one important outcome of producing “divine good”; but there are other outcomes, such as sharing our gifts with other believers, spreading the gospel message to a lost and dying world, pleasing and glorifying God, and building up rewards in heaven. By submitting ourselves to God’s will, we will see these outcomes generated. Once again, we pound on the dual drums of maturity and spirituality, which are the media for achieving a submission that satisfies God’s will and results in divine good.

When we submit to God, we will honor him with our lives. 1 Cor. 6:19-20 says this:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God

with your body.

Honoring God involves choosing the Spirit over the sinful nature, the filling of the Spirit over sin. This is the starting point for a long and difficult journey toward strong faith and sustained spiritual empowerment, which we will reach if we don't give up. We must drag our failing selves along by the grace of God, and know that the baggage of sin is a permanent attachment that will weigh us down and stop us in our tracks...if we do not find a way to control it. The passage above refers primarily to sexual immorality (see v. 18), which shows submission TO the body, rather than OF the body. Sexual sin is the scourge of the human race, and a place of human weakness constantly exploited by Satan. But even this can be controlled through higher-level faith and the power of the Holy Spirit. Once again, don't give up. Don't stop short. Good will appear, if you persevere.

When we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than being crushed by sin, we can submit our lives to God, which is one more step toward full surrender. This will be evidenced by the "good" we do. When faith is strong enough, our lives will follow God's will, and we will practice "obedience that comes from faith" (Rom. 1:5b).

The Preliminary Step of Committing to God. Commitment is an expression of loyalty, and loyalty is an extension of love. Love, then, is at the base of our commitment to God. Love, as God frames it, is the product of extreme maturity and consistent spirituality. Keep in mind that maturity is a continuum of growth, following a track of progression or retrogression; while spirituality is an on or off proposition, in which we are either controlled by the Spirit...or controlled by the sinful nature. The ultimate product of maturity and spirituality is love, which is the most prominent fruit produced by the Holy Spirit.

Commitment comes out of love for God, which is accompanied by love for our fellow-man. The first and most binding command Jesus ever gave, outside of "believing in Him", was that we love God. Mark 12:30 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." In an article called, "Paramount Issues of Life", p. 24, J. Hampton Keathley, III gave a framework for understanding each of the four sources of love described in this verse: heart, soul, mind, and strength. With my own twist added, here is what Keathley said about these:

Heart-love. Heart-love has to do with fellowship, whereby we stay close to Him by confessing sins. When we are continually in fellowship with Him, this lays the groundwork for commitment.

Soul-love. Soul-love relates to submission of our bodies, as we saw in "Submitting to God" above. But commitment goes beyond submission, to a deeper level of devotion. When we truly reach the level of maturity that we love God without reservation and without a break, we give ourselves to Him in prayerful submission and commitment.

Mind-love. This love is linked to our view-point of life. When we have mastered the truths of God's Word, we will have acquired the perspective of faith, based on full understanding of the

message of mercy and grace. Every thought will be brought into obedience to Him.

Strength-love. This love is related to our “strengths”, particularly our gifts. When we are committed to God, we focus our energies on the operation of our gifts in service to others. All of our energy goes into edifying others through our own spirituality and God-given abilities. (Endnote 18)

When we love God, we will have no trouble committing to Him: all that we are, think, imagine, intend, and hope for belong to Him. And this commitment remains, even in hard times. 1 Pet. 4:19 says, “So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” This may seem like an odd time to commit...when we are suffering...but this is a time of intense training, at which time we can take giant steps toward full maturity and commitment. At the end of perseverance is commitment.

Commitment will bring our performance in the production of righteousness to a peak, giving us unprecedented energy for service. This is what we see in Ps. 37:5-6, which says, “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.” When we are committed to God, and I mean “mature” commitment, we will see the fruits of fellowship, the obedience of our faith, the fulfillment of God’s promises, and a harvest from all our planting. And, most important of all, we will stand as candidates for the final stage of Christian advancement: our surrender.

We have looked now at the preliminary steps to ultimate maturity, and are ready to see how the finish line is crossed. You will notice that we have described a sequence for these steps, and have labeled the processes for each stage. We called them drawing near to God, yielding, offering our bodies, submitting, and committing to God. The labels and the contents they suggest are from Scripture, but the sequence in which they occur can be challenged. The *process* for maturing, however, and the *graduated nature* of our progress toward surrender, are beyond dispute. At some point, we must do it all to reach the pinnacle of Christian faith and service. There are no short-cuts or detours. There is one way to get to surrender, and that is to keep moving forward.

Presenting Ourselves for Surrender

INTRODUCTION

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.

It is important to interject that God's working does not make us "passive". When He works, we will expend our own energy to the point of exhaustion. God's work is done when we *actively* confess, pray, study, trust, and endure, concomitant with the engagement of our gifts. If we are spiritual and mature, we will be active and busy in the way God has designed for each of us. There is a lot of "work" to Christian growth and service, but notice: The efforts come from the strength supplied by the Holy Spirit, and are only meaningful if they originate with Him.

Put simply: The Christian life is about GROWING by means of a WALK IN THE SPIRIT, made possible by faithfully using grace techniques and assets, and believing what God has promised. And—if we grow enough—we will reach super-maturity, when we can surrender our hearts and lives to God. God will then be pleased, and we will be party to the accomplishment of His perfect will in our lives. That is our objective.

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John 15:1-17 records a message that Jesus gave to His disciples. But it was meant for dissemination to all believers, as the disciples were instructed to pass His message on to all who had come to faith in Christ. In this message, Jesus illustrated the "Christian" life, which consists of "abiding in Him". This phrase means "walking in the Spirit" through "constant fellowship". The application of "abiding" must not be misunderstood. It would be a giant leap to believe that it has to do with our being in "union" with Christ, since that is clearly an eternal and unchanging condition for all believers. "Abiding" does not mean "saved". It is a *condition* of the saved. The state of "abiding" must be seen as an intermittent condition of the heart, which is elsewhere described in Scripture as being controlled by the *Holy Spirit*, as opposed to being controlled by the *sinful nature*. Abiding in Christ can be started, stopped, and restarted, which cannot be said of the position of a believer, who is forever identified as a child of God.

We will look at salient points in John 15:1-17, relative to surrendering. When Jesus made a point of our needing to "abide" in Him, He was thinking beyond fellowship; He had in mind an *ongoing* state of submission that displays little deterioration or decline (this does NOT mean an unchangeable condition; only *salvation* is eternal). "Continual abiding" cannot be used to describe most believers, as most oscillate quickly between fellowship and carnality; some never achieve fellowship at all, except for the initial fellowship experienced at salvation. But once a truly-seeking believer reaches super-maturity, and knows the "fullness of God", he will be walking in the Spirit, have greater strength to deal with sin, experience stronger awareness of the reality and plan of God, enjoy better use of divine techniques and assets, and acquire more faith to operate in God's power. From this vantage point, deviation is less likely, and the continuation of fellowship will become the norm. This, I believe, is "surrender".

Here is what we see in John 15:1-17 (please open your Bible to John 15):

Read verses 1-4. Jesus Christ is the vine, meaning that He is the source for all spiritual life and production. We are the branches, who are expected to “bear the fruit” of the vine, easily recognized as the fruit of the Spirit. Those who are in fellowship, or who “remain” in Him will bear the fruit generated by the vine, because they have been “pruned”, which the NIV also translates as “cleaned”. When we are “cleaned”, the production of fruit will be possible.

Read verses 5-8. If we are not cleaned and do not bear fruit, we will be “cut off”, which means we lose our fellowship, and will no longer function as fruitful branches. It is only when we “abide in Him” that we can bear fruit, because without Him we can do *nothing*. If we do not “remain in Him”, we will be thrown away, or removed from fellowship, and we will “wither”, which means we will become dried up and useless spiritually. The sap of the vine will not flow, if we become detached. Staying attached to the vine follows a procedure, and the entire *process* for drawing from the vine is encapsulated in this passage, including the following: confession (being “cleaned”), prayer (“ask what you wish”), learning the truth (“If my words remain in you”), walking in the Spirit (“If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit”), and glorifying God (“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit”).

Read verses 9-13. Fruit is seen in these verses as love and joy, referencing the upcoming Pauline letter to the Galatians, in which he described the fruit of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control” (Gal. 5:22-23a). These are the spiritual qualities that will exist whenever a believer is growing and is filled with the Spirit. When we obey the command of Jesus to remain in Him, we will “remain” in His love, and He will complete His “joy” in us. When we are told to “lay down our lives” as the greatest expression of love, this depicts the sacrifice we make in the preparation and operation of our gifts. Our gifts are the media for bearing fruit; God’s power is the source.

Read verses 14-17. Jesus Christ gives us an indescribable honor by telling us we can become His “friends”. It is one thing to be a “servant” of Christ; it is another to be His “friend”. It is not hard to see the distinction between these two. When we are growing and *learning* the protocols for spirituality and trust and service, we are “servants”. When we reach the point of super-maturity, we know and practice “grace procedures” with “steadfast faith”, and qualify to become his “friends”. This is the time of “surrender”. As servants, we are learning. As friends, we KNOW. “I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (v. 15b). His final command to those who have reached this level of commitment and maturity: “Love each other” (v. 17), which means to “walk in My Spirit” and “bear fruit—fruit that will last” (v. 17).

We are commanded to stay in fellowship, grow in the knowledge of Christ, build our faith, pray to Him, and bear fruit through His strength. These have the potential for bringing us to rich friendship with Jesus Christ, whom we relate to as the Holy Spirit, where we will live in the place of surrender and intimacy with God.

Andrew Murray, once again in his book, *Absolute Surrender*, shares the following “effects” from “abiding in the vine”, or surrendering, as seen in John 15. Some of his observations are quoted, while others are

summarized and paraphrased, as follows:

Absolute Dependence. “If I can learn every moment of the day to depend on God, everything will come right.” (p. 61) God is responsible for doing the work. We are responsible to let Him, by being branches. The sap flows; all we have to do is receive it. “If I am something, God is not everything.” (p. 62) When I am nothing, God is everything.

Deep Restfulness. The rest of surrender is deep, but this rest is not passive. “No one who learns to rest upon the living Christ can become slothful, for the closer your contact with Christ the more of the Spirit of His zeal and love will be borne in upon you.” (p. 63) Work will be done and we will be fatigued by the time God is through. Every good thing that comes THROUGH us, comes—not FROM us—but from God. That includes love. Romans 5:5 (KJV, quoted by Murray) says, “The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” When we let it all come from Him, and stop trying to produce it (meaning the “fruit”) by ourselves, then God can go to work. And when God works through us, our “deep restfulness” will entail great activity.

Much Fruitfulness. We cannot bear fruit if we are not in close connection with Jesus Christ. “Lord Jesus, nothing less than the sap that flows through thyself, nothing less than the divine life is what we ask. Lord Jesus, I pray Thee let thy Spirit flow through me in all my work for thee.” (p. 64) The sap is the power of the Holy Spirit! When you get Him flowing through you, fruit will be produced.

Close communion. “What is the application to our life of this abiding communion? What does it mean? It means close fellowship with Christ in secret prayer.” (p. 65) Abiding, or “communion”, is “fellowship”.

Absolute surrender. What is this? “...just as entirely and absolutely as Christ gave up His life to do nothing but seek the Father absolutely and entirely, I am to do nothing but to seek the pleasure of Christ.” (p. 66) This is the removal of anything in our lives that is not in line with God’s will, or that is held back as “ours”, and not given up to God! What is there that we are not willing to give up? And what about willingness to be reduced to absolute helplessness and weakness; are we prepared to face this? Not yet; we are simply not ready. We have much to do before we reach the level of full concession to God. But when we *are* ready, we can surrender. (Endnote 19)

Murray continues: When we surrender, “He can, and does indeed, come and take actual possession of us, and gives unbroken fellowship all the day.” (Endnote 20) “Lord, everything in my life has to be in most complete harmony with my position as a branch of Thee, the blessed Vine.” (Endnote 21) Christ invites us, as follows: “I, the living One who have so completely given myself to you, am the Vine. You cannot trust me *too much*. I am the Almighty Worker, full of divine life and power.” (Endnote 22) And He adds, “I will draw you to myself, I will bless you, I will strengthen you, I will fulfill you with my Spirit.” And to Him we can only say, “Thou art my Vine, and I am thy branch. It is enough, my soul is

satisfied.” (Endnote 23) Here it is: “The vine is calling us to absolute surrender.” (Endnote 24)

Our challenge is to mature to the point that we can surrender. When we reach that point, we will know that our surrender is going to be absolute. Murray said the following about the act of surrendering:

I do not understand that word *surrender* fully; it gets new meaning every now and then; it enlarges immensely from time to time. But I advise you to speak it out: “Absolute surrender to Thee, O Christ, is what I have chosen.” And Christ will show you what is not according to His mind, and lead you on to deeper and higher blessedness. (Endnote 25)

When we see our place as branches, know our dependency on the vine, and recognize our need to become what we already are...His arteries for divine goodness on earth...we can start “practicing” surrender. At the same time, we must continue preparation for that time when we can truly surrender, giving it all to God.

SURRENDERING TO OUR GOD

Setting Up the Surrender. Prior to super-maturity, our primary question cannot be, “How do I surrender”, but must be, instead, “How do I *prepare* to surrender”. We will always hope and seek and wait for surrender, *but our focus is on these*: the growth of this day, prayers for this hour, confession for this minute, and faith for this and every second. When we concentrate on growth, we can reach the point of surrender.

We must remember that the “will” to which we are surrendering is perfect. Rom. 12:2 calls God’s will “good, pleasing, and perfect”. What God wants is perfect, and He will bring His “perfection” to our lives, if we permit it. What He wants for each of us is the best life possible, within the scope of His plan for us. His plan revolves around our *choices*, and includes some combination of discipline, training, and blessing that accommodates these choices. Our only limitation is our own volition; He will not force His will on us. So God plans discipline, training, and blessing in ways that facilitate our adoption of His will; but this is effective only to the degree that *we* want what *He* wants. If we are truly *wanting* and *seeking* His will for our lives, we will grow to super-maturity, and then we can surrender to that will.

When we couple God’s perfect will in Rom. 12:2 with God’s program of mercy and grace, we see that He offers to help us *know* and *achieve* His will. Phil. 2:13 is a big part of our study on “surrender”, because it tells us about the assistance we have from God. The verse preceding verse 13 (v. 12) sets up verse 13 by saying, “Continue to work out your salvation [temporal deliverance, not eternal salvation] with fear and trembling.” Working out our deliverance involves the whole spirituality/maturity process, which consists ultimately of 1) fear and trembling, or total reverence toward God, and 2) recognition of His awesome power. A “fearful” acknowledgement of God, “with trembling”, is the response of a mature faith, one which is ready to surrender.

Verse 13 gives us the underpinning for this advanced level of insight—seeing God as He is—by saying this: “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” When we

have reached the level of closeness to God that we fully acknowledge and trust Him, and walk close to Him with awe at His greatness (v. 12), then we have come to the moment of surrender (v. 13). It is then that God goes to work IN US to do two things: 1) make us willing to surrender, and 2) enable us to take the final step of surrendering. But notice this, just to be clear: He doesn't usurp our "will" to make us "willing", *unless* we have reached the level of faith that we are *willing to be made willing*. Then He will work in us to empower us to ACT, "according to His good purpose". The choice is still ours, but the work is His. When we get close enough to God, and want Him enough...in short, when we surrender to Him...He plants His will, and then He goes to work in us to implement it!

Surrender is the accumulation of all that we have done on our journey. It is as though we have reached a level of trust and communion (maturity and spirituality) sufficient to allow our spiritual momentum, driven by the Holy Spirit, to carry us across the line of surrender. The *path* to surrender has consisted of growing and trusting and waiting and watching, while God has brought us to the *moment* of surrender.

The Power to Surrender. To mark the difference between the operation of our power and that of God, even in surrender, we cite a statement from *ABC's for Christian Growth*. On pages 135-136, author J. Hampton Keathley, III, quotes William D. Lawrence, who is quoting from a transcript of class notes taken from a lecture given by Lewis Sperry Chafer. Here is what Chafer said:

Your obligation is not to do it [obey God] in any strength of your own, or to try to do it, but to do it in the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit... You will do it in the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit and this is where the believer's responsibility brings him. That is the thing that constitutes the ability to live the spiritual life and that is none other than the ability to walk by means of the Spirit in your daily life. That is the salvation from the reigning power of sin... Therefore you fall back upon the *infinite* power—think of it—the infinite power of the indwelling Spirit. (Ital. orig.)

We draw on the Spirit's power through a simple prayer of dependence in which we acknowledge our inability to accomplish anything for God apart from Him. We tell the Spirit, 'I cannot do this in my own power. I give myself to You for You to enable me to do what You want me to do and I thank You by faith that You will keep your promise to me to enable me to obey and serve You. (Endnote 26)

I know that I must rely on Him to empower me to do what I must do. When we truly understand the following prayer, we will be ready to surrender: "I cannot do this in my own power. I give myself to You for You to enable me to do what You want me to do..."

We see an example of this kind of surrender in Paul. He was exercising his gift, which was to bring maturity to believers in the early church, and he was clear about the source of his "work", saying this: "To this end I labor, struggling with all his [God's] energy, which so powerfully works in me" (Col. 1:29). Paul recognized, as did Lewis Sperry Chafer, that God's work depends on God, and we extrapolate from this that surrendering to God is relinquishing His work to Him. As we stated before,

however, this does not imply “passivity”, or inactivity on our part. The surrendered life is one of enormous exertion under the direction of the Spirit...one of great production in His power. With surrender, working in God’s power becomes a rigorous venture.

We get directions for surrendering *to* God *from* God, as per Is. 48:17b, which says, “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go.” He tells us what we will have to do to reach His “best”; He directs us as we are moving toward Him; and He gives us what we need to achieve the final step. Heb. 13:20-21 tells us that He “equips” us for surrender, saying the following:

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.

The source for our act of surrendering could not be any clearer. HE *equips us with everything good for doing His will*, and then HE *will work in us what is pleasing to him*, through Jesus Christ. How can we sufficiently magnify this passage to get the full impact of its message. God equips us for doing what He wants, and then He takes the equipment He gave us and works it within us to cause us to think and perform in ways that please Him. And here is our part: 1) maturing to the point that we trust Him to do what this verse says—i.e., to “work in us what is pleasing to him”—and 2) maintaining spirituality, so the Spirit can direct us in doing His will.

I am amazed at the consistency of the message on surrender throughout the Bible and hence through all my studies. The message has always been that God works...through us...when we get close to Him. This has been my position since I started writing in 2010. It is refreshing to go back to the simple messages of my first book, *Getting Closer to God*, where I espoused the same points I am making now. This is before I discovered Keathley, or Murray, or Chafer. This is what I saw in the Word, and I did not even have an NIV at the time. Why am I saying this? Because the truth is just THERE...in the Word! Here is what I stated about “surrender” in my first book, *Getting Closer to God*:

It is time to get down to the core of this study. The point of faith, or of our “knowing” God, is *surrender*. Faith is the conductor; surrender is the endpoint. It is the most important component in our relationship with God. Surrender is the peak of acknowledging God, fearing the Lord, and being God-conscious. When we get close to God, we SUBMIT to Him, and to His will. He becomes more as we become less. God is in us...waiting for our submission to Him...so that He can open the gateway of our lives to His divine production. He produces IN us and THROUGH us. God IS. God DOES. How can we ever see this or describe it? This is the heart of being in Him...and Him in us; it is about surrender.

God is the source of all good things, the Ultimate Energy, the origin of everything. When we see this, we will fear Him, and surrender to him. Faith is Godward, as are fear and surrender, but it is also lifeward. It brings the God we fear to the lives we live, and He meets all our

needs. God is then revealed through us. We surrender to all He is, so we can become all He intends.

The truth regarding surrender persists for all times, cultures, generations, nations, and peoples. Full surrender to God is the most important, though sometimes the most elusive, goal for all believers everywhere, including you and me.

What Happens When we Surrender. When we “surrender to all He is”, then we can do His will by His strength...thus becoming “all he intends”. Jeremiah 17:5-6 tells us what happens if we refuse to build our faith or grow to maturity. Here is what he said:

Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

Then, in the next verse (v. 7) Jeremiah contrasts this sorry state with that of the surrendered man, who is characterized, as follows:

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

I believe this kind of blessing is reserved for the surrendered believer. New or carnal believers should not get too excited that the flood-gates of heaven are going to open and yield profuse prosperity. If they have not matured, they are “living in the desert”, regardless of any trappings around them that suggest profit and gain. But when a believer matures and surrenders, blessings will come, as they did for Job. Later in this study, we will say more about the blessings that come through surrender.

Surrender is the peak level of maturity, faith, and commitment. When we reach a sufficient level of understanding and “abiding”, we will enter a time of perpetual blessing, spiritual production, and unprecedented peace. As we have stated before, few reach this point, but all can. When we surrender, we fulfill 2 Cor. 5:15, which says, “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Life is no longer a matter of pleasing self. Humanly speaking, we are incapable of abandoning self-interest, but the time of yielding to the greater forces of God’s spiritual world will enable us to give up self-pleasure, changing our focus instead to one of pleasing Him. Ironically, pleasing Him will turn out to be the greatest pleasure we can ever know.

When we surrender, our definition of life and our whole perspective will change. It is important to know that a surrendered believer will no longer think the same way he did before. “Sacrifice” will be seen as “opportunity”. “Surrendering” will be seen as “conquering”. “Giving” will be seen as “gaining”. And “letting go” will be seen as “taking hold”. When we surrender, all the superlatives in our language come into play to describe the outcome. All the great promises of Scripture will be fulfilled. And our

minds will finally be directed by God toward “heavenly things”, things that are true...noble...right...pure...lovely...admirable...excellent (see Phil. 2:8), and where honor and stability and purity and love will occupy our thoughts and lives. This is the time when we will truly let our “light shine before men”, and a time when God will be glorified through us.

Surrender is illustrated in Scripture as a kind of “rest”. We saw this earlier in reference to “entering His rest”, something the Jews in the desert refused to do, but an option that is still open to us. We enter His rest by building our faith (Heb. 3:18-19), and then we stop the labor that WE design, and JOIN GOD IN HIS. Heb. 4:10-11a describes it this way: “...for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...” The work we are to do is to “believe” more and more, which is not “work” at all, but a matter of learning to entrust divine work to the Divine Being. When we believe *enough*, we will surrender.

In Matt. 11:28-30, Jesus advanced the idea of “resting” in Him, saying this:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

This is a picture of surrender. When we surrender, He takes it from there. He Himself walked in the power of the Holy Spirit (not His own), as described in Luke 4:14-15, which says, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” He rested in the power of the Spirit, and now invites us to do the same...to come to Him to “find rest” by “taking on His yoke”, which is resting in His power as He does His work within us.

Another illustration of surrender is seen in our entering the Most Holy Place, which is closely connected with fellowship. We are in and out of fellowship, based on our condition as “clean” or “unclean”. When we have confessed and are *in* fellowship, we enter the Most Holy Place. But we do not stay there...we do not “rest” there, because we are overpowered by the world, the devil, and our sinful nature. When we surrender from a place of super-maturity, we can occupy the Most Holy Place as our regular place of residence. There we will have the potential to live in ongoing cleanliness, resulting in God’s perpetual expression of mercy, which then culminates as the provision of amplified grace.

This surrender can happen to *any* believer who reaches super-maturity. Such growth is the result of 1) concentrated study of God’s principles for living, and 2) endurance of God’s training through tests, isolation, dead-ends, losses, pain, and all kinds of suffering. Growth is no cake-walk, and maturity is not “automatic”, or just a “matter of time”. The requirements are specific and rigorous, as we have seen many times before. But when we mature, surrender becomes possible at last, because we grow our faith enough to trust God to make it happen. Even this last giant step by a super-mature believer is something that requires divine empowerment...something God does

according to our faith.

Surrender is a strong commitment derived from *great* faith and *ongoing* fellowship, which seems to imply a condition of life-long, uninterrupted holiness. Permanence seems promising. With the victory inherent in our surrender, it may be hard to imagine returning to carnal ways; but now the caveat: Slippage is possible. When we reach the level of growth that Job did, and Paul did, and Peter did, and David did...we enter a deep level of spirituality that is hard to shake. This is a time of constant trusting, walking in the Spirit, prayer, and reverence. BUT...we can still choose to turn back and go our own way, in which case we will lose what we gained until we recover it the same way that we acquired it initially...through dedicated growth. It seems clear that this “restoration to surrender” will not take as long as the initial “effort” that got us there, but we will have to return to the Lord completely before we re-enter a surrendered state.

Surrender, then, is *not* a “once-for-all” experience, the way salvation is. There is no question that surrendering is a great triumph. It entails a deep level of spirituality, and is a time of great trust, wisdom, prayer, and reverence. But we can go backward in a heartbeat. We need to note this: We must not stop progressing, just because we have surrendered. The path of growth and greater service lies ahead of us, and we cannot slow down or look away from the path God has shown us. Also, we must always remember mercy and grace: If we DO slide back, we can still *recover* and *come back* to our commitment to God. But while we are in the surrendered state, we must *never* let our guard down or relax our training and alertness. Anyone can slip...anytime...even surrendered believers.

Getting the Fullness of God at Surrender. Back to the upside: When we surrender, we get the fullness of God. This is the part of our discussion where we link our act of surrendering with the special provision that God makes after that time. Surrender is the crowning *technique*; the fullness of God is the *outcome*. This highest of all Christian experiences is available to all who have signed up for—and fulfilled all requirements pertaining to—maximum growth.

When we get the fullness of God, what do we get? Eph. 3:17b-21a answers this question with the following:

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. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory...

The reason it is hard for us to describe what we get with the fullness of God is that it is “beyond imagination”. It is within reach, however, even though we can’t fathom what it will include. When we are “rooted”, meaning *mature*...and “established in love”, meaning *walking in the Spirit*, we will “have power”. This power can acquaint us with knowledge of the multi-dimensional love of Christ, which GOES BEYOND normal understanding. It is this special knowledge that opens us to the “fullness of God”. The word translated “knowledge” in Eph. 3:19, means “absolute knowledge”, which will come

only with super-growth and highly-advanced maturity. This complete understanding of the grace, mercy, and love of Christ is the key to our final surrender to God, and our becoming recipients of the fullness of God.

When the fullness of God comes to us, we are set up to receive special treatment and supplies from God. In our discussion of the “fullness of God”, in a recent article by that name, we stated the following, repeated here for emphasis:

We believe that the attainment of the fullness of God is the time when God’s immeasurable benefits and blessings surge forward in ways that cannot be envisioned. It is a time when Satan finally “flees from us”, and a time when we experience the complete peace and joy that God makes available. This is the true “rest” which God offers, and the great deliverance He promises.

We will say more about Satan’s “flight” shortly, but first we want to establish that the fullness of God is a time of unprecedented blessing. Psalm 91 seems to be a description of the blessings that come to the surrendered believer. In this psalm we see a surrendered believer as one who fulfills the following:

“dwells in the shelter of the Most High”
“makes the Most High his “dwelling”
says of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress”
says God is “my God, in whom I trust”
about whom God says, “...he loves me”, and “he acknowledges my name”.

This is the surrendered believer, who will see the fullness of God in His life. And here is what God promises the believer who has surrendered to Him, based on Psalm 91:

He will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
He will be saved from the hunter’s trap and from disease.
He will be covered with God’s “feathers” and find refuge under God’s wings.
He will not be afraid of night terrors, arrows of the daytime, nor any disease or plague.
Though a thousand or ten thousand fall around him, injury will not come close to him.
No harm will come to him and no disaster will come near his home.
Angels will guard him wherever he goes.
They will lift him up in their hands, so that he will not “strike his foot against a stone”.
He will walk among the lions and cobras of life, and trample them.
God will always rescue him and protect him.
God will answer his prayers and be with him when trouble comes.

God will deliver him from troubles and honor him.

God will give him a long and satisfying life.

God will teach him about grace and show him divine deliverance.

These marvelous blessings and provisions are reserved for the believer who has reached super-maturity and has surrendered to God. Along the path toward maturity, any of these benefits can be seen in some form and to some degree, but not the way they will be seen when the ultimate surrender has taken place. When we surrender at the end of the “highway of holiness” (Is. 35:8), training will have been completed, and we will become “graduates”. Growth itself is worth any commitment of body and soul to achieve it, because it leads to the fulfillment and Christian success that comes from advanced maturity and surrender.

But be warned: WE MUST NOT FORGET GOD when we have arrived! After we have gone through training, and have surrendered, and are enjoying the fullness of God, we must not *forget* God. Deut. 8:10-11a depicts this, saying, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God...” We must not become self-satisfied and complacent, but must continue our pattern of devotion and growth. We must not forget the One who brought us to the party. Solution: REMEMBER GOD!

When we reach the place of surrender, dwelling with the Most High, living in the Most Holy Place, and living in the fullness of God, we will attain the equivalent of entering the Promised Land. Deut. 8:2-3 gives a picture of what we have been through to reach this point, saying this:

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

When we go through God’s training with endurance and faith, we become prepared to enter the Promised Land, where blessings abound. I believe the benefits that will come to a believer who enters the Promised Land will be similar to those described in Deuteronomy 28:3-8, which were designated for Jews who obeyed God. Here is what they were promised, and what we imagine will be a minimum for any believer who has surrendered:

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 who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but fled 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.

I have studied this passage before, and have seen it as part of growth and fellowship, but now I see the “immeasurably-more” aspect of this flood of blessings as the privileged provision of the *surrendered* believer. What a day that will be when all we touch will prosper, when we will encounter blessings coming and going. This is what we look forward to, and—if we persevere in our pattern of faith-progression and spiritual increase—it will come.

Surrender Leads to More Grace. We surrender, because we have reached a level of faith that we recognize God for who He is. We get the fullness of God, because we have attained “absolute knowledge” of His love. And when we acquire the fullness of God, we get “additional grace” in the form of great blessings. To understand “more grace”, we want to look at James 4:6-10, which encapsulates the process for maturing and surrendering, and depicts the results, which feature “more grace”. We will quote this passage, and then we will analyze it. Here is what it says:

But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. (v. 6) Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (v. 7). Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (v. 8). Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up (v. 9).”

Prior to this passage, James had been discussing the issue of selfish motives, the results of self-seeking pursuits, and the outcome of worldly attachments. Now, he contrasts attempts to *satisfy ourselves*...with the *satisfaction that comes from God's grace*. This is seen in his statement, “...he gives us more grace” (v. 6). But super-grace is not for just any believer; it is reserved for the surrendered believer. As we look more closely at this passage, this will become clear.

In the verse announcing “more grace”, James declares that God “opposes” the proud, but “gives grace” (“more” grace) to the humble. Humility is one of the early signs of a mature view of our place before God. This includes recognition of God's absolute supremacy in and above His creation, and His grace toward His creatures. Humility is a major gateway to God's fullness, and this fullness can be seen as “more grace”. Humility leads to more grace. On the other hand, we will find resistance from God as long as we persist in a self-centered pattern. This is “pre-maturity” and/or “mid-carnality” behavior, against which God will bring opposition. Self-absorption, or “pride”, is the origin and foundation for all sin, and will prevent the provision and operation of “more grace”.

So how do we get the “advanced” level of grace, which goes beyond discipline, training, and having certain basic needs met, to a plane of “greater” provision? James answers this in his next statement in verse 7: “Submit yourselves, then, to God.” Submission is a preliminary form of surrender, wherein we step forward, ready to enter the place of “more grace”. Submission leads quickly to surrender, and when we do surrender, we enter something “new”, and “new benefits” begin to flow in ways we never imagined. Our not expecting such blessing is not a matter of small faith, but an abiding humility, and the “surprise” of the new benefits is part of the blessing. Whatever these assets are, we had not thought about them, or “imagined” them, which probably means that they are *spiritual* in nature, more-so than

material. But I also believe that the blessings of surrendering are inclusive and wide-ranging. Whatever the blessings, I believe they will be totally satisfying, because we will be viewing them from God's view-point!

Resisting the Devil after Surrender. The next statement in verse 7 has some surprising implications. James calls on us to do this: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." To get the meaning of this verse, we must understand the usage of the word "resist" in the original language. "Resisting" is not limited to a present, in-the-moment occurrence, but is seen as a protracted process of "resisting and resisting and resisting". What is going on when we keep on "resisting" the devil? Well, we are not "casting him out" or "binding him" or trying to engage him in combat. Satan likes nothing better. We are simply *standing fast in faith* and enduring the "trials" and "tests" that God allows or brings, as these give us an opportunity to demonstrate our faith under fire. Get this: Trusting God is resisting Satan! Our willingness to trust shows Satan and all other fallen and elect angels that acceptance of God's way is a matter of choice, and that we are responsible for accepting or rejecting God's plan. (See *God's Training Program for Believers*, the chapter titled, "The War Against God", for a complete discussion on this seminal doctrine.)

Resisting the devil is trusting God, who alone has the power to fight Satan. This is not a single event of trusting, or "resisting", but an ongoing condition, a sustained attitude of reliance on God. And what happens if we keep on trusting, hence "resisting"? Satan will "flee" from us! This means that, if we will keep on growing and maturing, at some point, Satan will give up and LEAVE US ALONE! I believe this takes place at the time of our surrender. When we reach super-maturity and surrender to God, and are basking in the fullness of God's love and grace, I think we become so full of God that Satan sees that further machinations against us are a waste of his resources, so he moves on to other more achievable projects. This is one reason why life is so much easier when we have reached the time of surrender.

The Growth Routine that Led us to Surrender. Verses 8-10 (still in James 4) give the back-story regarding growth leading to surrender and greater grace. James works backwards through the sequence of events, as follows:

"Come near to God and he will come near to you." The last thing we do before we surrender is to get closer to God, who gives us the resources to take the final step.

"Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." This is clearly a reference to confession of our sins, whereby we are forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness. This is what we do in order to approach God, as the Levite priests did before they entered the Most Holy Place.

"Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom..." This state of our hearts is the result of our personal awareness of our sin and failure prior to confession. This condition of sorrow should last ONLY UNTIL we confess, after which time we can trust in God's promise to forgive, thus removing all need for guilt and remorse.

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” This is the pre-confession state of mind that leads to sorrow and confession. Humility will be followed by confession, resulting in forgiveness and restoration of fellowship, or being “lifted up”.

Tracing the sequence in correct order, we see the following progression: 1) humbling ourselves, 2) recognizing our failure, and 3) confessing our sins, thus enabling us to 4) come closer to God. This pattern of cleansing and humility makes us eligible to receive God’s truth and training, which will advance us toward maturity, culminating at some point in surrender, which yields the fullness of God, and greater grace. That’s a mouthful! We see, then, the high peak we are climbing toward, but we see intermittent peaks between us and this final one, and we have learned enough to know that there are many valleys we will have to go through to reach the last peak. Fortunately, God is willing to go with us every step of the way. We are not alone.

The Act of Surrendering, or Giving up our Lives. When we face the act of actually surrendering, we must understand what we are “giving up”. We have talked about the *gains* of surrendering, but what will we be *sacrificing* when we surrender? Christ is our model, when it comes to sacrifice, and His sacrifice gives us some idea of what we must give up. Eph. 5:1-2 says, “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Christ gave “himself”, suggesting that the first thing we can expect to yield in surrendering is our “self”. This involves surrendering at our core level, where our innermost being resides. Christ gave “Himself”, and we are to give “ourselves”. But what does this look like?

We *sacrifice* ourselves, as “dearly loved children”. This description speaks of those who are surrendering and are becoming “imitators of God”, who will now live “lives of love”. Those who have surrendered will live in God’s power and the love He brings to them. And what do surrendered believers do with this love? They express it through their gifts, not once a week, but *constantly*. The “sacrifice” is to give up whatever we must to exercise the gifts we have been granted for the service and edification of other believers...anytime they need it! There are no “breaks”, or vacations, or leaves of absence; we are *on* all the time. This is our labor of love, which becomes a “fragrant offering and sacrifice” to God.

Another aspect of surrender is losing our “life”. Matt. 10:39 says, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” We are to “lose our lives”, but does this mean we have to go out and die for the cause of Christ in order to “find” our lives? No. I believe it means to find the life of love and service that we saw in Eph. 5:2. It means to give up self-centered living as the core and purpose of all we do, and to turn our lives over to the service of Christ. The life we are *already living* is not the focal point of the life we *must live*. We give up our purposes, aspirations, needs, wants, comforts, pleasures, and—yes—even our possessions, if need be. For us, living is Christ, WHATEVER THAT REQUIRES. But will life be better? Yes. Blessed? Yes. Productive? Yes. Because it is the life of Christ...and that’s the best life!

Gal. 2:20 bolsters this notion, saying, “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.” I believe this verse gives a picture of the surrendered life. For the “average” Christian, life has not yet become “Christ living”, or a “life of faith”, as these are the marks of a *mature believer*. It is clear that—for those who mature and live “by faith in the Son of God”—advanced growth will be evident, leading to surrender. And when we do surrender our lives to Christ, it is no longer we that live, but the Spirit of Christ that is living in us. To surrender is to abandon *our* cause, allowing God to direct us into *His*.

We saw Matt. 10:39, which told us that we must “lose” our lives to find them. The background for this verse in vv. 34-38 amplifies its meaning for us, and helps us conceive what it means to give up our lives to God. Verse 34 quotes Jesus, who said, “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” There are going to be divisions along the way when we surrender everything to Jesus...often there are painful separations. Look at verses 35-38, which adds this:

...a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

This passage begins by citing the people we value most, and ends with the requirement that we must not value *anything* or *anyone* more than God. This is the sacrifice we must be willing to make. This is no small task; there is no pain greater than being ostracized and shunned by one’s own family, because of one’s doctrine and faith. And it is little better to lose friends on the same basis, as per Ps. 55:12-14a, which says this:

If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship...

This is the potential loss of the surrendered life: loss of family and friends, and even complete isolation. But this loss is not all it seems. There is *much* to be gained through perseverance in the faith and loyalty to the truth; and no *loss* can compare to it. But this is what we gamble: that we will lose everything we have and everyone we know when we enter a life of complete surrender to God. Nonetheless, I am totally convinced that the benefits gained when we surrender are infinitely greater than any cost we might pay to cross this Rubicon. (When Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, it was to declare himself and to claim power.) Why do we GAIN when we surrender? Because on the other side of this river is the Promised Land and endless power. For us, we will not be surrendering to a hostile enemy, but to the Almighty God, who guarantees that He will protect us and bless us in every way.

Becoming Like Little Children. It is ironic that—the more mature we get—the more childlike our

faith becomes. Maturity does not produce giants with great muscles, but helpless children with great faith. In Matt. 18:1-3, Jesus addressed this paradox, as follows:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

The kingdom of heaven is an internal place, as per Luke 17:21, where Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come. He replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." Without question, there are times in the Bible when the kingdom of God has millennial or celestial connections, but it can also be the place and process of Christian living, both internally and externally, as it is here.

The "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus had in mind when he said in Matthew, "whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven", is a place of spirituality and divine operation. This kingdom is the sphere within which growth and divine production take place. Internally, this is a place of fellowship and wisdom. Outside of this, there is a "place" called the "kingdom of heaven", where we represent God before angels and the world. The internal condition must be in good repair before the external manifestation can be seen. Ideally, our internal condition will become one of surrender, with the result that we experience the "fullness of God", so we can show "the light of Christ".

Our main point, however, is not how important it is that we live properly "in the kingdom", but that we must become "like little children" before any good thing can happen. A child does not have the strength to do much, and must depend on others to accomplish complex or difficult tasks. The irony is that we become more "productive" as we become more "helpless", more childlike. Why? Because we stop analyzing and reasoning and scheming...and just TRUST! Paul understood that he had to remove himself and his great education and eloquence to preach a simple message of faith that all could understand, a message delivered through the power of the Spirit and not through human competence or sophistication. Here is what he said:

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Cor. 2:2-5)

When we mature, we do not become stronger, but more faithful. Maturity leads, not to complexity, sagacity, and self-sufficiency, but to simplicity, and a kind of "foolishness" for God. We learn so much that we come to "know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified". Our faith will become simpler

and more unquestioning, more “childlike”, in the face of whatever odds the world gives us. When we surrender, we do not become forceful and dynamic; we become helpless and dependent...which calls up God’s infinite power to enable us to move and live in His grace and majesty.

We Are Nothing. We are reminded that we are “nothing” before God. This is not only accurate; it is also appropriate. Andrew Murray summarized our true condition, as follows:

Apart from Me—you nothing. Lord, I gladly accept the arrangement: I nothing—Thou all. My nothingness is my highest blessing, because Thou art the Vine, that givest and workest all. So be it, Lord! I, nothing, ever waiting on Thy fullness. Lord, reveal to me the glory of this blessed life. (Endnote 27)

Growth leads to nothingness. This sounds a little like “reverse growth” (Benjamin Button comes to mind). But the more childlike our faith, the more single-pointed and uncluttered our trust, the more God will become everything within us, as we become nothing. This is when the fullness of God replaces the emptiness of our soul. This is the time when we no longer puff ourselves up as our own reason for living...and a time when each step *down* from our “self” is a step *up* toward God.

We Will Fail, but We Must Grow. So, you get it now, and you want to surrender, to reach this place of ultimate blessing and output. And maybe you’ve tried to surrender, but have failed again and again. We must understand this: True surrender will come only after many false starts and aborted attempts, because we must reach a certain level of maturity before it happens for real. We will inevitably fail along the way, and if we admit our failures to God, He will convert them into growth, and we will move higher on the scale toward full surrender. We must persevere, through great set-backs and reversals, and never give up or be discouraged. We are on a road with many U-turn lanes, but we must never turn back or slow down.

The process is simple. Failure is inevitable, but success builds on failure. When one reaches a level of maturity that readiness for surrender is indicated, it is certain that many *failed surrenders* will litter the trail of his or her past. Abraham, like so many, failed miserably over and over. We cited earlier his desperation to have a progeny, and his misguided attempt to give himself one. Prior to this attempt (remember Hagar), he complained for years that God was not fulfilling His promise. Yet his times of moaning were interspersed with times of prayer and listening and faith. He was failing repeatedly, yet he was growing. He even, at one point, lost faith and became rattled and fearful. This was while he and Sarah were in Egypt, when the following happened: To protect his own life, he passed off his beautiful wife Sarah as his sister, so that he would be “favored” by Egyptian royalty, who would see Abraham as a potential kinsman and ally...someone to protect...not kill. So his faith was lacking on this occasion, and he failed. And yet he went on after this and kept growing.

Abraham Surrendered and So Must We. We will omit details of Abraham’s story of failures and successes, cited in Genesis 12 through 21, and come to the time of his surrender in Gen. 22, when he followed God’s instructions to offer up his son Isaac, even though Isaac was his only shot at continued progeny. When God called, Abraham stepped up after many years filled with both failure and growth,

and said, “Here I am” (Gen. 22:1b). God gave him orders to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham did not hesitate, but proceeded to trust God and follow His command. This act of faith demonstrated the great growth that had taken place. Of course, we know that God was “testing” Abraham, a test he passed, which qualified him to move at last into the sparse ranks of surrendered believers. His son Isaac was spared, and Abraham’s faith was vindicated. He became a surrendered man.

As evidence of Abraham’s continued faith after that time, we see him near the end of his life operating by faith and not by sight. He sent a servant to get a wife for Isaac from Abraham’s homeland and clan, rather than from the land of Canaan. He trusted God to identify the woman and bring her back to Isaac, sight unseen, as a willing participant in the wedding which was, at that point, only a “prayer”. The servant found Rebekah. She fulfilled all requirements and conditions, and *agreed* to return with the servant to the place where Isaac was. She declared unequivocally, “I will go” (Gen. 24:58b). She was readily accepted by Isaac, as she was beautiful and resourceful, so Abraham’s plan to perpetuate his progeny was successful. Why did it work this time and not before? Because it was couched in Abraham’s faith and God’s will, unlike the event with Hagar much earlier.

The difference was surrender. In fact, everything that happened to Abraham after his surrender was characterized by blessing and prosperity. His servant said this about Abraham...to Rebekah: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master” (Gen. 24:27a). Abraham was the non-stop recipient of grace and favorable attention from God. Abraham had failed, stepped up, failed, stepped up, and failed again and again. And all that time, he continued to search for God and to grow. Finally, he stepped up and *surrendered*, and moved into the fullness of God.

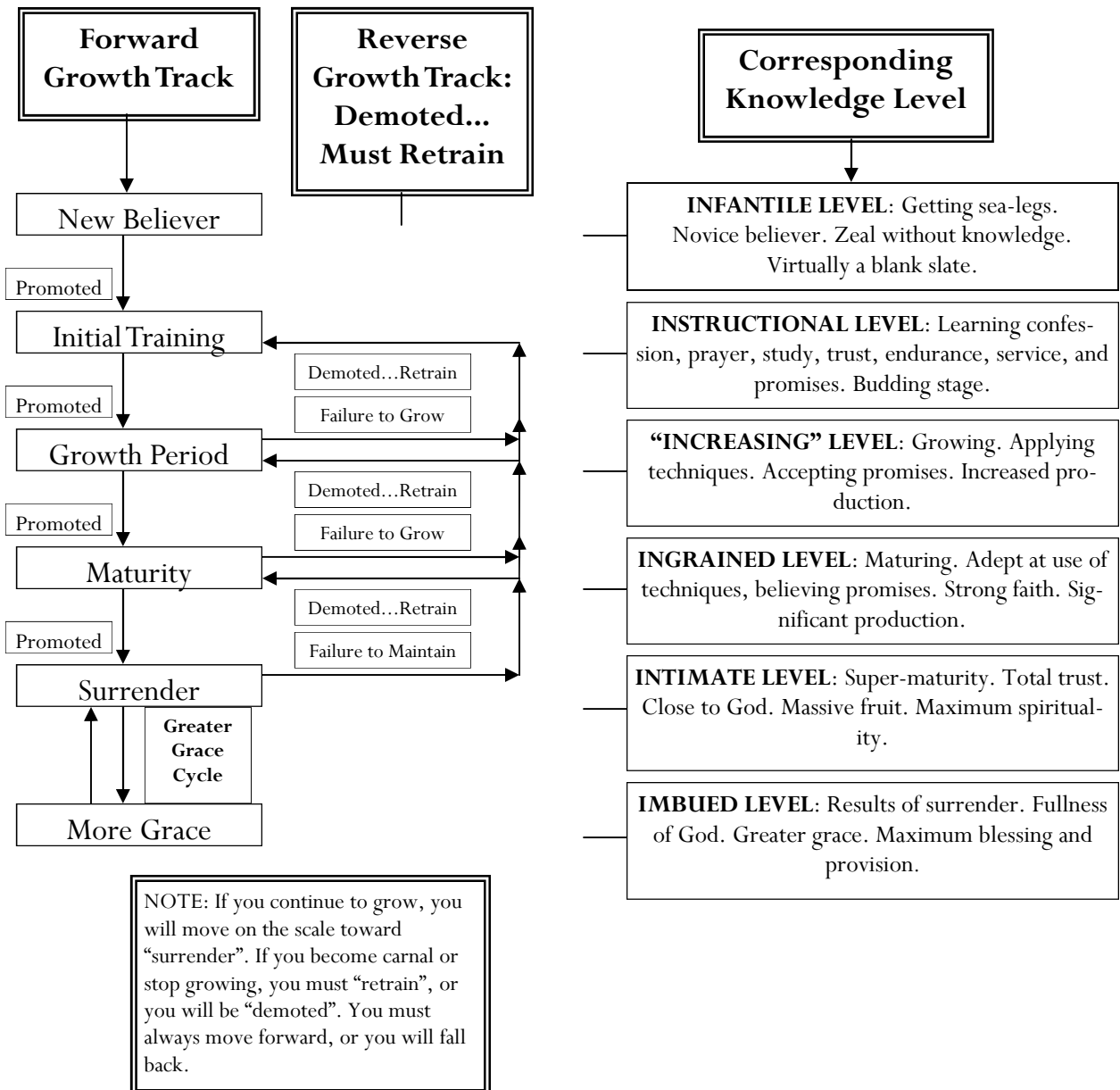
We can do this, as well. We can say, “Here I am,” after many failures and reversals; we can step up, and we can surrender. Isaiah said something similar, when he surrendered. He asserted to the Lord, “Here am I. Send me!” How many times we must say this before we will be ready to be sent, we cannot say, but we know that a life of seeking and praying and learning and trusting and growing and serving will lead us at some point to the time when we can surrender to Him, and allow His Spirit not only to “help” us live, but to live through us. We are surrendering our life in exchange for His. Not a bad deal.

A Believer’s Prayer of Surrender

Father, I have failed many times, and in so many ways that I can’t name them. I come once again, with markings of my failure trailing behind, to surrender to you. I have searched for you in your Truth, but have equally chased my own self-satisfaction, comfort, and pleasure. I acknowledge now my helplessness to be righteous...to be filled with love for you and to sustain trust in you, and I ask that you take me by my hand and pull me up from the sewer of myself. Cleanse me, for I am offering each member of my body, and all the parts of my heart...to you. I give all that I am and all that I have to your service, and pray that you will receive me and fill me with the complete measure of your fullness. Place me on your highway of holiness. And if I fail again because I am not prepared to consummate this submission, be patient with me. I want only you. Lead me to surrender.

SEE “GROWTH/GRACE” CHART ON NEXT PAGE.

GROWTH/GRACE CONTINUUM: Growth Potential for Every Believer



Endnotes for “Surrendering to Our God”

Endnote 1. Andrew Murray was born in 1828 and died in 1917. He pastored a number of churches in South Africa and founded organizations supporting evangelism. He wrote 240 books and numerous articles, almost all of which are in the public domain.

Any references to Andrew Murray in this study were taken from his books and articles, which are available at the following sites:

Books—Books are from Christian Classics Ethereal Library, www.ccel.org

Articles—Articles are available at www.biblestudytools.com

Endnotes 2-4. See Endnote 1.

Endnote 5. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 523. Biblical Studies Press, 1996-2002. This book is available at www.bible.org.

Endnote 6. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 524.

Endnote 7. NOTE: All books by William D. Gibbs cited in this article are available for free download at the following: www.biblestudiesforchristiangrowth.com, or as a purchase option at Amazon.com.

Endnote 8. See Endnote 1.

Endnote 9. *He that is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, p. 97. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1918.

Endnote 10. *He that is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, p. 97.

Endnote 11. See Endnote 1.

Endnote 12. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 185.

Endnote 13. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, p. 185.

Endnote 14-17. See Endnote 1.

Endnote 18. “Paramount Issues in Life”, an article by J. Hampton Keathley, III, p. 24. This article is available at www.bible.org.

Endnote 19-25. See Endnote 1.

Endnote 26. *ABC's for Christian Growth: Laying the Foundation*, pp. 135-136. This is a citation of notes from William Lawrence, based on a transcript from a lecture by Lewis Sperry Chafer at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Endnote 27. See Endnote 1.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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 reflects 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 nor deserving of the privilege of explaining God's truths, so I offer this treatise only with great deference and trepidation. If you do not find the truth here, keep searching. I am confident God will reward your quest for wisdom and His fullness.

My name is William "Dick" Gibbs, and I am a retired educator living in Dallas, Texas.