

SALVATION IS FREE, BUT
**DISCIPLESHIP
IS NOT!**

WEIGHING THE COST OF
NOT SERVING GOD

DR. LAURA HENRY HARRIS

Exulon
ELITE

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Weighing the Cost of NOT serving God
by Dr. Laura Henry Harris

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PROLOGUE



What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roof. (Matthew 10:27)

Holy Spirit awakening and revival has been my heartfelt prayer for many years. My spiritual journey has been filled with the precious words, dreams, and visions of God about church revival and awakening. We are living in a *kairos* time—a God-appointed time—to seek revival. The Lord wants to pour out his Spirit upon the flesh of all people. However, I also believe there must be preparation of the earthen vessels of humanity in order to receive the gracious gift of the manifest presence of God in that way.

The Lord prompted, moved, and guided me to visit the Cane Ridge Meeting House in Paris, Kentucky, the site of the Cane Ridge Camp Meeting in 1801. It has been reported that as many as 30,000 people attended a meeting that was punctuated by a world-renowned Holy Spirit manifestation and outpouring at that time. It was a flame of revival on the frontier of America that sparked many other fires of awakening throughout the nation.

Even though I invited many prayer partners to make the journey with me, no one was available to make the trip. I made the journey to Cane Ridge by myself, knowing in my heart that

I was supposed to go alone anyway. In the spring and summer months, the Cane Ridge Meeting House is open to the public. Therefore, it was no surprise that when I arrived at the shrine there were people visiting, milling about, looking at the historic displays, and talking about little league sports and other mundane topics. Quite honestly, Cane Ridge did not seem to be a holy place at that moment. It was very difficult to be in prayer and to hear God due to all of the distractions going on around me. While the world was trying to press in, I decided I would press into God all the more. So I prayed and asked the Lord to clear the area. Soon enough, the Meeting House cleared, and I was alone. I settled in with the Lord and wrote these words in my journal: “Lord, I have come here to re-dig the wells of revival. How do I do that? What do you want me to know?”

I was engaged in prayer, listening to meditative music, with a journal in hand. I was waiting and ready to receive from the Lord. As I was looking for something in the concordance of my Bible, the word *wait* jumped off the page—it was a *rhema* word, an utterance from God, for me. In essence, God was saying, “Peace, be still; just wait on me.” I turned off the music, closed my Bible, and I put aside my journal so that I could simply wait on him, listening to what he would say to me.

I sat for about two minutes in complete silence, trying not to fidget or squirm. But waiting is hard work. Keeping a peaceful mind while trying not to think about anything at all is a difficult task. “This is hard,” I told the Lord, trying not to complain but sounding a bit whiny anyway. I felt as if I should kneel before the Lord, and so I did. On my knees I felt that the Lord was saying, “You are not low enough.” I felt drawn to prostrate myself before God, so right there on the old rustic floors of the Cane Ridge Meeting House I laid facedown before God. I said, “Lord, I wait . . .” What happened next resulted in the book you are now reading.

After I had lain there for what seemed like only a few seconds, the Lord said, “Get up and write.” I knew when I wrote

the first words on the page that there were going to be seven messages about preparation for re-digging the ancient wells of revival. The words of the actual journal that I wrote on April 26, 2013, are included at the beginning of the next eight chapters. At times the words are in dialogue form because I asked the Lord for clarification on specific things he said to me. As the Lord was giving the message, at times I was writing as fast as I could. Often, however, I would not even know the next word until the previous word was written down. I have not edited those journal entries, except to add a missing word here or there and only when absolutely necessary. The sentences and thoughts are often choppy and staccato. Even though they are often not grammatically correct, I chose to present them just as I wrote them down that memorable day.

Even though there were many people around when I arrived that day, I was alone at the Cane Ridge Meeting House for the next two and a half hours without a single person coming into that building. It was God's grace that prepared the way for a divine appointment with him. The curator of the museum told me that a bus of schoolchildren was expected to arrive at any time, but the bus never showed up. I later learned that it broke down and was delayed.

What is really interesting to me is that I cannot account for the passage of the amount of time that occurred while I was there. Only a few minutes had passed after arriving before I lay on the floor before the Lord, listening to what he had to say. It seemed that as soon as I laid down, the Lord said to me, "Get up and write." This happened in rapid succession, time and again. As soon as I finished writing, I would lie down to wait on the Lord again. And as soon as I would lie down, he would tell me to get up and write again. All in all, the journal entries only took up a few pages, which could have easily been written in less than an hour.

When I arrived home, I set the journal on the shelf and did not really think about it. After about two weeks, however, the

Holy Spirit prompted me to read it again. When I reread the pages that had been written that day, I knew I had a treasure that needed to be shared. I have preached the Cane Ridge revelation on a few occasions since that memorable day. The first time I did, I proclaimed, “This needs to be heard by the body of Christ. It will be a book someday.” It was news to me! However, even as the words came out of my mouth, I knew that it was true—that it would become the book you now hold in your hands.

Not too long after this, the Lord inspired me to read through the Gospels, and as I did, a deeper understanding of both the Gospels and the words he gave me at Cane Ridge began to emerge. I could hardly read a passage from the Gospels without gaining insight into this download. These chapters are my understanding and interpretation of what the Lord showed me at Cane Ridge that day.

I know this is a rhema word that the Lord wants released at this time. Jesus said in Matthew 10:27, “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” This passage is my reason to proclaim what the Holy Spirit revealed to me in order to build up the body of Christ. The Lord has continued to prompt me, and, in fact, he even disciplined me for being dilatory in finishing this project in a rapid fashion. So I yield and submit to the Lord, and I pray for God’s blessings on you and for great discernment as you read this work. I pray,

Lord, I bless your holy name. Please open the eyes and ears of the brothers and sisters who read this work. Show each one that which is important to you. Impart a hunger for revival in each and every individual believer. Let the cry arise, “Please, Lord, revival in *my* heart!” Cry holy! Cry lovely! Cry Lord! Amen.

~ Dr. Laura Henry Harris

Chapter 1

GOD'S CALL FOR REPENTANCE



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I love my people, but they have not followed my ways. I am hurt, and I want my people to turn to me. I love my people. They need me; they do not know how much they need me. Time is short. I hurt for them. Tell them my Word. Tell them of my love for them. Tell them they need me. Tell them to call on me and I will answer them.

The thing you saw was indeed a throne of iniquity.¹ It has been built by generations of sinful behavior. Call the people to repentance. They must repent. The spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth. Those who do not repent will be hardened and may be lost forever. My heart cries for the lost ones. Time is short. Call for

¹ When the Lord spoke to me, he referenced a vision that I had shortly before the Cane Ridge experience. The concept of thrones of iniquity will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

repentance. Call for brokenness and contrite spirits and hearts. The hearts of the people are haughty. Even my servants are haughty. Avoid religious pride. Do not be prideful that I have used you and those like you. You have asked for more love, and with that comes brokenness for my lost ones. Hurt for them. Cry for them. Repent for them. Pray for their eyes, even the eyes of their hearts, to be opened. Time is short. Work in the harvest field.

“Lord, how?” I asked and he said,

Do what you are doing. I will provide ways, means, and places. Do not turn down opportunities to glorify my name. Use the power of my name. Use the power of my blood. Cry out for them. Cry deliverance. Cry healing. Cry freedom. Rejoice in the little lambs that are loosed from the wolves’ mouths. Cry holy! Cry lovely! Cry Lord!

“Lord, you are Lord! I love you, Lord. I praise you, Lord! You are awesome and wonderful.”²

I Am the Lord

The first thing that the Lord said to me as I rose and sat before him was, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac,

² When the Lord started on the first download at Cane Ridge about repentance, I thought, “Lord, please, I do not want to be a repentance preacher.” Those called by the Lord with a message of repentance often had hard lives and were usually not well received. In his mercy, the Lord showed me that there were going to be seven messages to the church. The first message had a very definite theme of repentance, which takes up chapters 1 and 2 because of its length. It is a call of John the Baptist in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord for Jesus’ second coming.

and Jacob.” Though we have heard that title before, it was a crucial place to start. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God often revealed himself to his people in various ways. When he came to the prophets of old, or to the disciples, “I Am” was a very important way for the Lord to identify himself. I immediately understood the significance of his self-identification when I realized he was saying to me, “Make no mistake about who is talking to you: I am God. Listen to me and heed my words!”

Jesus is both Lord and King. He is Creator, Redeemer, and Guide. He is the Judge, and he is the Maker of all things. With a word he created the universe and flung the stars into the sky. He holds the oceans of the world in the palm of his hand. He knows the width and breadth and height of all the universes and galaxies, which is minute in comparison to his greatness. Yet, in Luke 12:7, the Lord tells us that he knows the number of the hairs on our heads, which may change in the next minute or two. Not only that, but he even knows every thought we have.

God is merciful and just. He will judge the living and the dead. “I am the Lord,” speaks volumes about who he is and how we should respond to him. It is not uncommon to hear the name of the Lord taken in vain, or to even hear church people talk about telling God a thing or two. But we somehow forget that our very breath is a gift of the Creator and that our lives are hanging by a mere thread of grace. He is worthy of our awe and our fear. He is worthy of reverence, which often he does not receive even from those who proclaim to be his followers, much less the rest of the world.

The Word of God says that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. The Amplified Bible says it this way:

Work out (cultivate, carry out to the goal,
and fully complete) your own salvation with

reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ). (Phil. 2:12)

When we realize God is saying, “I am the Lord,” fear and trembling should cause us to shrink away from whatever might offend him and discredit the name of Jesus, and instead embrace everything that honors him.

The Lord knows our deeds and even the motives behind each one of our deeds. He is intimately aware of the good, the bad, and the ugly about us and in us. He knows when we hurt, and he knows when we laugh and cry with joy. And he knows when we expose our minds to polluted images or thoughts. He is the God who brought judgment on Adam and Eve, Sodom and Gomorrah, and Ananias and Sapphira, not to mention countless others in Scripture. God is aware of all things, and he calls us to stand in awe of him.

Many of us do not worry too much about what might offend God, but we are very concerned about what may offend our friends or acquaintances. Dear people, we have that backward. We fail to consider that we hang in the balance, with the Judge of the earth giving us life and breath. We fail to consider that the power of God could annihilate us in a mere second. When the Lord says, “I am the Lord,” it is worthy to note. We are called to fear him and tremble at his Word.

Our Disobedience

What is disobedience? What did it mean when the Lord said to me at Cane Ridge, “I love my people, but they have not followed my ways”? In the words God spoke to me, I believe the current generation is equated with the nation of

Israel in the Old Testament. How often do we smugly look back at the pages of Scripture and say, “Couldn’t they see that they were disobedient to God?” The answer is “Probably not,” and neither can we.

Because of disobedience, the Lord refused to let Moses enter the Promised Land. He put Jonah in the belly of a fish but had mercy on him when he repented, causing the fish to vomit him out on dry land. He is not a God to be taken lightly. Somewhere along the way, we have lost the blessed understanding of the fear of the Lord. Do not get me wrong here: I know that the Lord is a loving and compassionate God, but he also demonstrated his wrath when people refused to listen to him and obey him. He did not only do this in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. I love God too much to disobey him, but I also fear him enough to respect that he is a God who must be taken seriously.

I am reminded of Jonathan Edwards’s sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” Edwards illustrated the realities of hell in graphic terms but ended the sermon with one final imploration: “Therefore let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come.”³ Edwards showed hope to those who were away from Christ. He masterfully illustrated that only by returning to Christ can a person escape the gruesome reality of hell. Hearing his words that day caused people to literally run to the altar in repentance for their past contempt of the power of God!

God is fierce in anger; God is just. But never forget that God is also love. He loves us, but he requires something of us. We have responsibilities to our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. He loves humility but hates pride; he loves obedience but abhors rebellion, and he will not tolerate disobedience.

³ **Wilson H. Kinnach, ed.,** *Jonathan Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”: A Casebook* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 50.

God required one thing of Adam and Eve, and that was not to eat of a certain tree in the midst of the garden. Their act of rebellion changed the course of human history forever. Make no mistake about it: our disobedience can be as equally devastating.

The reason God hates disobedience is because Scripture tells us that we show our love for God by following his commands: “In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). When we fail to follow his commands, we are showing utter contempt for God. Jesus says in John 14:23–24,

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. *He who does not love me will not obey my teaching.* These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

The purpose of humanity is to love God and to be loved by him. The only things we can ultimately give God that he does not already have is our love, devotion, and obedience. We show love by following his Word and by obeying what he has taught us. Isaiah 2:11–12, 17 paints a graphic picture of the results of unresolved sin and pride:

The haughty eyes of people shall be brought low, and the pride of everyone shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted on that day. For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high ... The haughtiness of people shall be humbled, and the pride of everyone shall be brought low; and the LORD alone will be exalted on that day.

The bottom line is that God loves us, and when we do not follow his commands, it hurts us, too. He loves us beyond measure, and he does not want to see us hurt by our enemy, Satan. This is why it is so crucial that we obey him and live in awe of him.

God's Love

Though God is a God to be feared and a God who requires obedience, the Lord told me at Cane Ridge that he loves his people. He hurts for them because they do not realize the depth of their need for him. I do not know what will happen at the end, but the Lord indicated that "time is short." Because he loves us so much, he hurts for us. He specifically said, "Tell them my Word. Tell them of my love for them. Tell them they need me. Tell them to call on me and I will answer them."

Our disobedience is devastating to humanity, because disobedience puts us in the hands of the accuser of the brethren, Satan himself. Furthermore, it hurts God's heart to see his children in bondage and to see their possible eternal separation from him.

God loves us even in our disobedience, but he is faithful to his Word. He loved the prodigal son when he left his father's house by his own choosing to go to the pigpen of sin. The father did not prevent his departure but eagerly longed for his return. He loved his son in his sin, and he loved him when he returned. The father longingly waited and watched for the son to return; when he saw him coming home in the distance, he made preparation for his homecoming. The son had prepared a three-part speech, repenting, acknowledging his unworthiness to be called a son, and his willingness to be a servant. The son prepared by saying, "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” (Luke 15:18–19).

He was not able to utter his whole speech before the father received him back as a beloved son: “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son’” (Luke 15:21). The father began ordering the servants to serve his long-awaited son with a robe, sandals, and a ring, and to prepare for a wonderful feast. He said, “‘For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:24).

God is love, and he loves us beyond our measure of understanding! There is nothing that we can do to make God love us more, and there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. He is love, and his love does not change in the face of rebellion or disobedience. His love is not conditional upon our obedience. God is faithful regardless of how much we thumb our noses at his love and power.

But God is also truth. He may be brokenhearted while doing it, but he will judge us because he is truth, and truth must be obeyed. We are to view God with a dual understanding: love and truth. If we lean too far to the idea of love, we will not fear God enough to be obedient to his commandments; if we lean too far on the idea that God is a truthful judge, we may have too harsh a view of God and never approach him in our weakness. A proper understanding of God comes when we understand the tension of God as the lover of our souls yet the fierce King of the universe.

The Hurting Heart of a Savior

Jesus said, “I am hurt, and I want my people to turn to me,” and again, “I hurt for them.” He said, “My heart cries for the lost ones.” Have you ever wondered what was so painful in Jesus’ life that he was moved to tears and could not

contain his emotions? In Scripture, Jesus wept for those who simply did not understand what was going on. Jesus cried at Lazarus' tomb, and he cried before going into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, just days before his crucifixion. These episodes happened only days apart toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. There is something to be learned about the heart of Jesus by studying these two passages of Scripture.

Jesus Wept at Lazarus' Tomb

The Scripture of Lazarus' death and Jesus weeping at his tomb is one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible. Jesus was not weeping because Lazarus was dead; he was weeping because the disciples did not "get it." He was a scant few days away from his death, and thus his earthly ministry, and his time of daily contact with the disciples was almost over. Even so, they still did not understand the essence of his power, his love, and his compassion. They did not understand the kingdom of God. Allow me to explain.

Jesus was not brokenhearted over a man he was going to raise from the dead in the next ten minutes. He knew that Lazarus was dead before he ever arrived on the scene. Jesus actually even delayed going to Lazarus' house so that he would be "thoroughly dead" by the time he arrived. Just listen to what Jesus said to his disciples: "This sickness will not end in death," and "It happened for the glory of God" (John 11:4). Jesus lingered two more days where he was; if he had been that concerned about Lazarus, he would have rushed to his side (John 11:6).

Before Jesus went to Lazarus, and before he ever got the official word that Lazarus was dead, he said to his disciples, "Lazarus is dead" (John 11:14). Jesus was glad that he was not there so that the disciples could "really believe" (John 11:15). He was making it abundantly clear to the disciples (and thereby to us) that Lazarus was not in a coma; he

was actually dead. Jesus told Martha after he arrived, “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:23) and then declared that he was the resurrection and the life (John 11:25). Mary said, “If you had only been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:32). When he saw the people weeping and wailing because of Lazarus being dead, “deep anger” arose within him and he was “deeply troubled” (John 11:33). After all of that, the Bible records that “Jesus wept.” Why?

Jesus was crying because of the lack of understanding of the people involved in the process. He was probably thinking, “After all this, and they still don’t get it.” Jesus delayed coming to Bethany and knew that Lazarus was already in the grave. But he also knew that Lazarus was not going to stay in the grave very long. Just before he called Lazarus forth, he said, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:40). It makes absolutely no sense to assume that Jesus was grief-stricken over Lazarus’s death if he was going to use it for God’s glory. Besides, if Lazarus were to stay dead, Paul reminds us “to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). Lazarus died in Christ; his status in death would have ultimately been better than his status after being restored to life. Jesus knew that.

In fact, after Lazarus was raised from the dead, he was a man with an assassin’s target on his back: “The chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and believing in him” (John 12:10–11). Jesus was weeping because the people did not understand him, his mission, or his love and compassion. His weeping was out of concern that the people were still so far from understanding when his time was short.

Jesus Weeping upon His Entry into Jerusalem

The second time Jesus cried was upon his entry into Jerusalem. He was on the Mount of Olives, looking across

the Kidron Valley, and he saw the beautiful city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Jesus paused as he approached: “As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, ‘If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes’” (Luke 19:41–42 NRSV).

Jerusalem, the chosen city—the City of David, the city of the Temple of God, the same location at which Abraham offered his son, just as Jesus was about to be offered—was not aware of what was about to take place. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, but Jerusalem did not have the understanding of what makes for peace. It missed the hour of visitation of the long-awaited Messiah. Jesus hurt for the people there because the gospel message had been presented for all to see, and most did not see it. The people of Jerusalem, specifically the Jewish leaders, were so busy appearing to be righteous that they missed the righteousness of Jesus. He wept bitterly for the lack of understanding of what was happening in her midst. His heart was breaking for their loss, not for his own.

The Nature of Jesus' Weeping

The Greek words used to describe Jesus' weeping give further insight into his heart and mind in these two instances. In John 11, in the story of the death of Lazarus, weeping was described with *dakruó*, a word that was only used this one time in Scripture.⁴ It has its roots in the same word we get *teardrop* from, and it means to weep silently or to shed quiet tears.

In Luke 19, when Jesus entered Jerusalem just before his final Passover, the word used illustrates a different

⁴ This definition is taken from <http://biblesuite.com/greek/1145.htm> (accessed June 25, 2013).

connotation. In Luke 19 the word used was *klaió*,⁵ which means weeping out loud or expressing uncontrollable grief. This word is used many times in the New Testament in passages such as Rachel weeping for her children to describe the unimaginable grief after King Herod ordered all baby boys to be slaughtered in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill King Jesus as a small child (Matt. 2:16–18). This word further expressed the grief of Peter as he was going out to weep bitterly after realization of his denial of Christ (Matt. 26:75). This kind of weeping was seen as the people were bitterly crying at the death of the synagogue ruler's daughter before Jesus raised her from the dead (Mark 5:35–43) and the women weeping at the tomb of Jesus before entering (John 20:11). This weeping signifies deep anguish and a forlorn heart.

That which moved Jesus to tears during his earthly life was a lack of understanding in the hearts of the people he was ministering to. I believe that which moves Jesus to hurt and anguish now is the lack of people's understanding. Parents, think about it for a moment: what is the level of broken-hearted concern we have when we see our children making wrong decisions, knowing that they are at the point in their lives where they have to find their own way? We have put the teaching before them, but they must adopt it for themselves. They must choose. I often wonder if Jesus is crying for us even now in a similar way.

God delights in our comprehension, for understanding comes straight from the mouth of God (Prov. 2:6). We are admonished to ask for understanding (Prov. 2:30). Solomon asked God for understanding and it pleased him greatly (1 Kgs. 3:9–10). God gives comprehension to those who seek it; those who listen to the teaching of Jesus gain more discernment into the things of the Spirit (Matt. 13:12). Understanding

⁵ This definition is taken from <http://biblesuite.com/greek/2799.htm> (accessed June 25, 2013).

is spiritual insight into the kingdom of God that is waiting to be sought if we are to receive more. If you want more understanding, seek it. Watch as God opens it up to you because to see and hear is to be blessed (Matt. 13:16), and to truly understand is to produce fruit (Matt. 13:23). Understanding changes lives and brings transformation (Col. 1:6), and it is useful only if it is accompanied with love (1 Cor. 13:2, 8). Love makes understanding complete.

The real issue here is this: does Jesus weep when his people do not have understanding about his mission and ministry? I believe so. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf” (Heb. 7:25 NLT). This is a cry for repentance. We must not let a lack of understanding separate us from Jesus.

People in Need

Jesus is crying out, “They need me; they do not know how much they need me. Time is short. I hurt for them. Tell them my Word. Tell them of my love for them. Tell them they need me.” The body of Christ is called to seek after those who are lost, especially the ones who do not know how much they need the Lord. Specifically, to have the eternal presence of God, we must *believe in him* and *believe him*. Hell is not just outer darkness so extreme that one’s hand cannot be seen mere millimeters in front of his or her face (Matt. 22:13, Jude 13). It is so much more horrific than that—but that alone is enough to cause terror in the hearts of people.

I live in central Kentucky, about an hour from Mammoth Cave, which is the largest cave system in the world. Anyone who has ever been in the bowels of Mammoth Cave has experienced such utter darkness (but without the terror that accompanies hell). On every tour, the park rangers turn off the lights for a few seconds to let visitors experience the

complete lack of light. It truly is darkness without one iota of light. Imagine that complete, prevailing, overwhelming darkness for a day ... a week ... a decade ... a century ... a millennium. Then multiply millennia times infinity.

Hell is eternal separation from God. It is complete separation from all light that is emitted from the Father. It is hard to imagine how excruciatingly horrible that would be. I am not even talking about the torment that will be present there; I am only speaking about separation from the true, pure, unadulterated, passionate, all-consuming love of God. Unfortunately, the English language, or any other earthly language for that matter, is completely and totally inadequate for describing the presence and love of God. People who have experienced the true and full manifest presence of God grapple to describe something so wonderfully indescribable. It is frustrating that human expression cannot begin to do it justice.

John 3:16 is possibly the best-known Bible verse in the world, but there are also many other treasures to be mined out of that chapter. Look at John 3:16–21, for example:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the

light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. (NKJV)

A person must first believe in order to come into a relationship with God. Upon belief, there is life. Failure to believe results in death. John 3:15 says, "Whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Hell is for those who perish. We do not perish when we believe in him. I hear people say all the time, "I am a good person, I don't cheat, steal, or kill. Why would God do that to me? I don't hurt anyone." I have also heard people say that they could not believe in a God so vengeful that he would condemn people to hell. Are you ready for some hard truth? God does not condemn anyone to hell; humanity condemns itself by failing to believe in the only begotten Son of God. Those failing to believe are condemned already.

The truth is in John 3:18: "Those who believe in him are not condemned; *but those who do not believe are condemned already*, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (emphasis added). We come into the world condemned, being born in a sinful condition. We are born separated from God because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, who let Satan have the keys to the kingdom of God and who opened the door to let sin and death rule the world. We enter life "condemned already," and the only way that our condemnation can be abated is by believing in Jesus Christ. In essence, we are a people in need.

For a person to rely on his or her personal goodness for salvation, they must assume that people are born into life as a citizen of heaven, and all they have to do is maintain the status quo. Unfortunately, however, people begin life as citizens of the kingdom of Satan because of the Fall of Adam and Eve.

We only change our kingdom citizenship by believing in Jesus. Humanity chooses hell by not choosing Jesus or by a failure to choose anything at all. If people begin as one thing and do not change, they remain as that same thing. In other words, if people begin as citizens of the kingdom of darkness and do not change citizenship by believing in Jesus, they remain citizens of hell, no matter how good they are.⁶

We cannot earn our salvation by good behavior. We cannot be good enough to gain entry into heaven. If we could earn our salvation by good behavior, we would in essence be purchasing salvation with our goodness. To say that a person can be good enough to get to an eternal relationship with God is to diminish the work of Jesus on the cross. In other words, if we could be good enough to get into a relationship with Jesus, we would not need grace, which is the free gift of God to allow us to come to him without any effort or worth or merit on our own behalf. If that were the case, the work of Jesus on the cross would have been unnecessary because we could be perfect worker-bees and earn our way into a relationship with him. When people say, “I am a good person, and God would not send me to hell because I help people and do good things,” they are sorely deceived. We cannot buy salvation by good works.

One thing I often say is that salvation is free. There is nothing we must do to obtain salvation except to receive a free gift offered by Jesus. The truth is this: salvation is free, but discipleship is not. It costs us something. There is a place for good works when a person has citizenship in the kingdom

⁶ I believe people who die before understanding the need for salvation by reason of age or disability are given grace in this area. The Lord Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:14).

of God, but good works alone will not gain citizenship into God's kingdom.⁷

Conclusion

God is the God of everything—*everything!* Glib understanding of him and his power may be the breaking point and downfall of many people. When the Lord began speaking to me at Cane Ridge, he rightly identified himself to me. He said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” If you believe that this revelation is true, everything that comes after should be taken to heart with great seriousness. The initial words of the Lord at Cane Ridge were a warning and a call for the body of believers to repent. If you do not think that what transpired at Cane Ridge was real, you should put this book aside now and not read another page.

God has a word for his people, and it is a warning that we must not fall asleep before the Bridegroom returns. He loves us, but we have not followed his ways. Too often we have been lazy and halfhearted toward our relationship with him. He said, “I am hurt, and I want my people to turn to me. I love my people. They need me; they do not know how much they need me.”

Please understand that God's call for repentance is born out of his love for humanity. The plea for his people to be brokenhearted before his throne is because of his unsurpassed love for us. God wants his absolute best for us, and he knows that we cannot have it without walking in holiness and purity. The message of repentance was punctuated as a warning, but the warning was also a love song to his children.

⁷ I will address the place of required works in a later chapter about bearing fruit.

Chapter 2

REPENTANCE: THE BATTLE FOR SUPREMACY



(The Cane Ridge revelation, continued from chapter 1)

The thing you saw was indeed a throne of iniquity. It has been built by generations of sinful behavior. Call the people to repentance. They must repent. The spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth. Those who do not repent will be hardened and may be lost forever. My heart cries for the lost ones. Time is short. Call for repentance. Call for brokenness and contrite spirits and hearts. The hearts of the people are haughty. Even my servants are haughty. Avoid religious pride. Do not be prideful that I have used you and those like you. You have asked for more love and with that comes brokenness for my lost ones. Hurt for them. Cry for them. Repent for them. Pray for their eyes, even the eyes of their hearts, to be opened. Time is short. Work in the harvest field.

“Lord, how?” I asked and he said,

Do what you are doing. I will provide ways, means, and places. Do not turn down opportunities to glorify my name. Use the power of my name. Use the power of my blood. Cry out for them. Cry deliverance. Cry healing. Cry freedom. Rejoice in the little lambs that are loosed from the wolves' mouths. Cry holy! Cry lovely! Cry Lord!

“Lord, you are Lord! I love you, Lord. I praise you, Lord! You are awesome and wonderful.”

The Throne of Iniquity

At Cane Ridge the Lord explained a previous vision that I had when he said, “The thing you saw was indeed a throne of iniquity. It has been built by generations of sinful behavior. Call the people to repentance. They must repent.”

A few days before going to Cane Ridge, a team of people with a heart for revival made the decision to have an evangelistic healing crusade in a neighboring community. After we had contracted for the venue of the crusade, I asked the Lord in prayer how I should pray for the revival/healing crusade. The Lord answered me with a vision. I saw angels standing at attention to the left-hand side of the throne of God. They were prepared to be sent, almost tense with eagerness, ready for their assignment. I asked God to dispatch them, and they peeled off one at a time in rapid cadence as they took flight.

Then I saw a huge dark structure that looked like it was constructed out of solid black riveted metal or possibly hard leather. It was strong, ugly, and harsh. It could not be described as a fortress per se, but made me think of one. The top of the structure was hidden in the clouds. I saw the angels hanging on the side of the structure with their swords flashing. The angels were hacking and flailing at the structure,

but they were making almost no impact on it at all. I felt that the Lord was telling me to pray for the constant refreshing and replenishing of the angels. Then angels who had been refreshed by being in the presence of God would come and relieve angels who had been warring. The embattled angels would then go back to the throne room to be empowered by God's presence. I further felt compelled to attack the thing with a constant barrage of prayer and by requesting angelic warfare. I constantly prayed against the structure even though I did not know what it was.

A few weeks later I was at a peer meeting with an academic and spiritual mentor, Dr. Gary Greig. When I told Dr. Greig about my vision, this is what he said:

I hear the Lord telling me it is a “throne of iniquity” (Ps. 94:20, Rev. 18:5). Sins and iniquity are piled high and act as a platform for principalities to rule over the area. It is resisting angelic swords that are fighting it. Angels cannot break down and overcome the throne of iniquity until there is repentance. The people must stand and repent for the Church, for their land, and for their families as intercessors. They must seek forgiveness for all sins related to slavery, racism, prohibition, and lawlessness. During the Prohibition years in this area people lost their lives. Plead the blood of Jesus over the area. There has been darkness and illicit trade.

Greig also quoted Isaiah 60:1–5, and said to prophesy it over the land:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. (Isa. 60:1–5 NRSV)

Dr. Greig talked about the revival at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, which was another prompt for me to seek out the old Cane Ridge Meeting House. Dr. Greig said, “God will send his glory to shine on his people. The principalities are fighting because the Lord wants to do another Cane Ridge. Go and repent of sin and ask God to re-dig the wells of Cane Ridge.”

The concept of “thrones of iniquity” is not new to Scripture. Even as early as Genesis 11 the tower of Babel began to emerge. The people said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves” (Gen. 11:4). Even though this was a physical structure that was being built, it illustrated rebellion and pride against God. Ezra 9:6 also speaks of the sins and iniquities being piled up to the heavens: “O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our *iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens*” (NKJV, emphasis added). Revelation also speaks of the sins and iniquities being piled up to heaven when it says, “Come out of [Babylon the Great], my people, so that you do not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are

piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes” (Rev. 18:4–5).

In the larger context, both Ezra and Revelation reference the sins of the current generation and their ancestors as being piled up to heaven. These sins, the iniquities of the people, form a platform for the thrones of demonic principalities. Even the book of Revelation talks about the throne of Satan: “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: I know your works, and *where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is ... where Satan dwells*” (Rev. 2:12–13 NKJV). The throne of iniquity is established where the people allow it by sin. It is a welcoming platform for the enemy to be enthroned in their midst. For revival to come, the thrones of iniquity must be toppled by repentance.

This is important for reconciliation with the Lord because he confirmed at Cane Ridge that the vision I previously had was that of a throne of iniquity. As I prayed for an outpouring of Holy Spirit revival fires, he said, “The thing you saw was indeed a throne of iniquity. It has been built by generations of sinful behavior. Call the people to repentance. They must repent.” The Lord was gracious enough to show us what we were fighting against in the heavenly realms, but we also knew that we must topple the thing with a spirit of repentance. For there to be true revival, repentance must prevail in the hearts of the people. True repentance in the natural realm will bring victory in the heavenly realms.

After a time of preparation, we had the crusade. By natural understanding, the two-week crusade would have been considered a colossal failure. The event had been advertised with ten radio ads per day on two different radio stations for about a month, which means that the event was advertised about six hundred times. However, some nights only the team members were present, with the biggest crowd that attended was about thirty-five in a stadium that held fifteen hundred

people. However, in the eyes of the team, the event was a resounding success.

Every team member was fully committed to seeing the crusade through to the end. Each night we worshiped, we prayed, we praised God, we repented, and we proclaimed the Word of God over the loudspeakers into the community. Sometimes, we took Holy Communion and offered it for the land. Even though it was not our community, we cried out in repentance for the location. We battled for the destruction of the throne of iniquity. It may have not looked like much, but in the heavenly realms we were battling with intensity to take ground for the kingdom of heaven.

Several times during the crusade, over the stadium I saw a dragon serpent in the clouds. Each time I saw it, it was well formed with intricate detail. It was a clear vision, a wonder in the sky as God revealed some things to me. On the last night of the crusade, I saw the image of the dragon intact, but later that night when I looked back, its head had been separated from its body. It was a word from God telling us that even though nothing appeared to be happening in the natural, a great victory in the heavenly realm had been won.

The heavenly victory was won for the kingdom of God. After that the people had two choices. Either there would be a distinct change in the hearts and lives of the people, or the people would re-enthroned the enemy. The breaking of the platform of sin could allow the gospel to flourish like never before in that area.

Thrones on the Earth

Understanding the scriptural concept of thrones of iniquity brought understanding to another vision I had a few months before the Cane Ridge experience and before the crusade in the adjoining community. In the vision, I saw the world, and on it were pyramid-type platforms. Each one was distinctly

made up of one of two colors, either radiant gold or black. I knew in the vision that the gold pyramids represented the thrones of God on the earth, who is enthroned on the praises of his people (Ps. 22:3). The black pyramids were thrones of the enemy, who is enthroned on the sins and iniquities of the people, as seen in the Ezra and Revelation passages.

The platform thrones were all over the world—some were large, and some were small. In some instances the gold thrones and the black thrones were in close proximity with each other, while in other instances only one throne would be visible, depending on who was reigning in that specific location. The size depended on how dedicated the following was in that particular area. When believers were dedicated to repentance, God was enthroned on the praises of his people, which displaced the thrones of the enemy.

When repentance occurs, the platform of iniquity is knocked out from under the throne. The angelic forces can be effective in battle when there is a spirit of repentance. We can only topple the thrones of the enemy when repentance covers the land, for it removes the legal authority from the enemy who has taken up residence in an area. When repentance occurs, the enemy can be cast out of an area—we knock over the demonic thrones with our confessions, prayers, and broken and contrite hearts.

God wants to topple the thrones of the enemy, but as is his way, he will not force his will on the people. We have a choice, and if we desire to enthrone evil principalities, he will allow it to happen. If the people rise up against the thrones, repent and confess, and have broken and contrite hearts before God, the enemy will be removed. Undoubtedly, the enemy will fight back, but frequent repentance will keep the area clear from demonic thrones.

It is urgent that we repent and confess our sins and iniquities. In fact, I would invite you to pause from reading right now and go before God with confession and repentance not

only for personal sins but for ancestral sins as well. Also, pray for the refreshing and replenishing of the angels as they go back to the throne room for renewal in the presence of God.

Identificational Repentance

The concept of repenting for the sins of others is thoroughly biblical; Daniel, Nehemiah, Moses, and Paul did it, and if they did it, then we should do it, too. Repenting for the sins of others has been called Identificational Repentance, which “is a term referring to a type of prayer which identifies with and confesses before God the corporate or communal sins of one’s nation, people, church, or family.”⁸

It is true that the sin of an individual may have corporate consequences for a particular area, city, region, or nation. For example, in Joshua 7, Achan sinned against God by taking things that had been devoted to the worship of false gods from fallen Jericho against God’s direct command. In the next battle, the nation of Israel was soundly defeated at Ai. The Lord told Joshua that Israel (not just Achan but the whole nation) had transgressed against God. The Lord said, “*Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions*” (Josh. 7:11). There was sin in the camp even though one man, Achan, initiated that sin.

One person had sinned, but there was a corporate defeat in which there were many casualties. Thirty-six members of the community were killed because of the sin of one man.

⁸ John Dawson, *Healing America’s Wounds* (Ventura: Regal, 1994), 15. See also Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy* (Tarrytown, NY: Revel, 1991), 192ff, 236ff; *The Voice of God* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), 237ff; and C. Peter Wagner, *Praying with Power* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 95ff.

The Lord said, “That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction” (Josh. 7:12). If we think that sin in our midst does not have larger consequences than just for the person sinning, we are sadly mistaken.

Ezra also repented for others as he prayed, “O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for *our iniquities* have risen higher than our heads, and *our guilt* is grown up to the heavens ... For *we have forsaken your commandments*” (Ezra 9:6, 10 NKJV). While in exile, Nehemiah heard of the disgrace of Jerusalem. He wept and mourned, and he fasted and prayed (Neh. 1:3–4). In Nehemiah 9, Israel corporately confessed their national sins before the Lord. Nehemiah prayed,

LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments ... I pray before You now ... *and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You. Both my father’s house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded.* (Neh. 1:5–7 NKJV)

Jeremiah also confessed the sins of his people and the past generations: “For *we have sinned* against the LORD our God, *we and our fathers*, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of our God” (Jer. 3:25 NKJV). He also prayed, “O LORD, *though our iniquities testify against us*, do it for Your name’s sake; for our backslidings are many. *We have sinned against You*” (Jer. 14:7 NKJV). Furthermore,

Jeremiah said, “We acknowledge, O LORD, *our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers*, for *we have sinned* against you” (Jer. 14:20 NKJV).

The prophet Daniel also prayed a prayer of repentance on behalf of his people, confessing sins of which it appears he was not personally guilty:

O LORD, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him and with those who keep His commandments, *we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even departing from Your precepts and Your judgments*. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets who spoke in Your Name ... O LORD, to us belong shame of face, to our kings, our princes and our fathers, because we have sinned against You ... Let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; *because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers*, Jerusalem and Your people are a reproach to all those around us ... O LORD, hear! O LORD, forgive! O LORD, listen and act! (Dan. 9:4–6, 8, 16, 19 NKJV)

The Scripture records that Daniel’s vicarious prayer of repentance for the sins of the people and the ancestors led to a dramatic revival in the land. In that same chapter, the angel Gabriel appeared to him with instructions from the Lord (Dan. 9:20–23). In Daniel 10 we learn about the tremendous conflict that went on in the heavenly realms for supremacy of the kingdoms (Dan. 10:13). Daniel prayed for twenty-one days before the angel appeared with his answer, but the answer was actually sent from the throne room of heaven on the first day that he prayed. When we engage in

corporate, national, and generational repentance, we are involved in spiritual warfare (Dan. 10:20). We are helping to topple the thrones of iniquity.

These visions help us to see into the spiritual realm so that we can understand how to battle more effectively for the supremacy of God in our communities and in our personal lives. This is why personal and corporate repentance is so important.

The Spirit of Elijah Is Loosed

The next thing the Lord told me at Cane Ridge was, “The spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth.” He also said, “Those who do not repent will be hardened and may be lost forever.” The spirit of Elijah is important because Jesus said Elijah has the purpose of bringing restoration to all things before the end (Matt. 17:11). This is critical for the preparation for the return of Messiah to the earth. There are several key scriptural passages that bring this to light. We will discuss those passages, and then draw some conclusions at the end.

The Lord told me that the “Spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth.” I confess that I had no idea what he meant until I began to study and read the Scriptures concerning this. To understand the spirit of Elijah, it is important to understand the prophet Elijah himself. Elijah came in the midst of a kingdom that was more corrupt and did more to provoke God to anger than any other kingdom in Israel before that time. The first time Elijah appeared on the pages of Scripture, he brazenly declared that there would be no rain or dew for years except at *his* command (1 Kgs. 17:2). As we watch the scenario unfold, Elijah called the people to repentance and back into a relationship with God. This culminated in a showdown between Elijah, God’s prophet, and the evil King Ahab and his false prophets. It was like the gunfight at the OK Corral, but on steroids. The prophet Elijah called all of the

shots. At his demand, Ahab called together all the prophets of Baal, all the prophets of Asherah, and all the people of Israel (1 Kgs. 18:19–20).

When all the people were assembled, Elijah said, “‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing” (1 Kgs. 18:21). The people were in mind-numbing bondage and did not respond to Elijah. They were in a spiritual stupor, and they did not take a position or make a commitment for God.

Elijah called for the false prophets to prepare a sacrifice and call for fire from their god to come down and consume it. Elijah would also prepare a sacrifice for God. The one who answered with fire was the true God! The showdown actually began as the prophets of Baal called out for a response from their god from morning until the time of the evening sacrifice, but to no avail.

After hours of the false prophets calling on Baal to answer them, Elijah called the people near (1 Kgs. 18:26–29). One can almost imagine the people watching with rapt attention as Elijah prepared the offering for the Lord. He honored God by carefully re-laying the altar stones, carefully arranging the wood, and cutting and perfectly arranging the sacrifice. Then he called out, “‘Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood. Do it again,’ he said, and they did it again. ‘Do it a third time,’ he ordered, and they did it the third time” (1 Kgs. 18:33–34). Elijah prepared the sacrifice by offering God the most precious thing that he could: gallons upon gallons of water from twelve jars. This was at the end of three and a half years of drought! How priceless was that offering to God? It was life itself.

Elijah began by identifying the Lord as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He implored, “Let it be known this day that you are God in Israel” (1 Kgs. 18:36). Then he prayed a very simple prayer: “Hear me, O LORD, hear

me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that *You have turned their hearts back to You again*” (1 Kgs. 18:37 NKJV). Elijah had the ear of God. The fire of the all-powerful God consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the altar stones, and licked up the water that was in the trench. As if that was not amazing enough, what happened next was absolutely stunning.

The stone-cold people, who were stupefied and noncommittal, were propelled by the very presence of God. They were overcome, not only from the visual display of the power of God that had just occurred, but even more so because of the manifest presence of God in their midst. The people fell on their faces, and cried, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!” (1 Kgs. 18:39 NKJV). Then this group, who had previously acted as automatons, were thrust into the decisive action of seizing the prophets of Baal and participating in their annihilation (1 Kgs. 18:40). The power of Satan was broken by the fearless obedience of one man, and, in so doing, he prepared the way for the outpouring of the blessing of God.

Another curious thing happened. Elijah told the wicked King Ahab to go celebrate because he heard the sound of abundant rain coming (1 Kgs. 18:41). The false prophets had just been slaughtered, and Ahab went to celebrate. It was a post-powerful outpouring, post-massacre, pre-torrential-downpour celebration event. The prophet Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and bowed down to seek the Lord for rain. He prayed seven times for the rain to come. When his servant saw a small cloud, Elijah believed that rain was on the way. He was propelled by superhuman strength under the power of God to outrun a chariot pulled by horses. Dark clouds gathered, the rain poured, and the drought was finally over. It nourished the ground, and it is argued that the people were nourished by the Spirit as well. There was a moment of hope, a small glimpse of revival in which God poured out the rain.

Although seething with anger about the death of the false prophets, Queen Jezebel (King Ahab's controlling and evil wife) showed no remorse for their deaths. She was consumed with fury against Elijah. After one of the greatest victories in Scripture, Elijah fled again into the wilderness to hide under a tree. The control of Jezebel was not broken but hardened. The people did not rise up against a distorted, polluted king and queen. Jezebel became even more determined to eliminate Elijah, the prophet of God. The level of her wrath only accelerated.

It did not appear that the repentance of the people on Mount Carmel was a lasting transformation. The kingdom of Israel was later taken into captivity by Assyria, never to be heard from again. Israel, known as the northern kingdom in Scripture, also became known as the lost tribes of Israel. Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria, and they never came back. They were never redeemed from the bondage that they found themselves in for the rebellion that they had shown to God.

God, through Elijah, poured everything into reform to bring the nation of Israel back to God. In the end, there was no lasting reform, and the kingdom of Israel was lost forever.⁹ This is a picture of what happens when God turns the

⁹ There were only three kings of the United Kingdom of Israel in the Old Testament: Saul, David, and Solomon. After the death of King Solomon, civil discord resulted in Israel being divided into two kingdoms. Assyria conquered and later deported the Northern Kingdom, also known as Israel. Israel was taken to Nineveh and assimilated into the Assyrian culture there, losing all national identity. The Assyrian captivity was very cruel, and the tribes did not survive intact and never came back. (It is important to note, however, that some of the poorest and weakest of Israel were left, were mixed with Assyrians, and became known as the Samaritans. That is why the Jews in Jesus's day hated the Samaritans.) About one hundred fifty years later, Babylon attacked the Southern Kingdom, also known as Judah. Jeremiah told the people to live their

hearts of the people to himself, but the people do not sustain the relationship. God is God, and he will not be trifled with.

Understanding Elijah in the Old Testament

Other Old Testament references to Elijah point to a New Testament understanding of his purpose as well. Malachi was the last prophet in the Old Testament to speak. After his prophetic word was brought forth, there was no prophetic word from God for over four hundred years. It was a time of silence and anticipation of what was to come between the Old Testament era and the New Testament era. The words of Malachi and other Old Testament prophets point the way to the coming of the Messiah, as well as to those things that must happen before the Messiah would come a second time.

Malachi prophesied about the messenger who would come before the great and terrible day of the Lord, which is the Day of Judgment. Most believers understand that there will be a day of judgment for all people. It is referred to as a great or terrible day, depending on the perspective of the one being judged. The messenger before the second coming of Jesus is the Spirit of Elijah. Malachi 3:1 says, “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the LORD you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

Also, Malachi 4:5–6 proclaims,

Behold, I will send you *Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD*. And he will turn the hearts

lives and continue on in national identity even in the Babylonian captivity. After seventy years of captivity, the tribes of the Southern Kingdom were allowed to return under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse. (NKJV)

Malachi is clearly talking about the coming of the spirit of Elijah before the Day of Judgment. This is why the Lord told me at Cane Ridge that the spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth now.

John the Baptist as the Spirit of Elijah

Coming to the New Testament, we see the spirit of Elijah renewed in John the Baptist. John came into an atmosphere of religious arrogance after four hundred years of silence. He was the last prophet of the Old Covenant. John the Baptist came to lead the people to repentance and into an understanding of the kingdom of God. The angel Gabriel foretold of John's miraculous birth to his father, Zechariah, and revealed the connection with Elijah:

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. *He will also go before [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah,* “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. (Luke 1:16 NKJV)

In the days before the ministry of Jesus on the earth, John came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” John the Baptist, as a forerunner for Jesus, knew his place in the kingdom plan. He was not the main attraction; he was the opening act to get the crowd ready for the one who was coming. He said,

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt. 3:11–13)

John was not the light, but he came to bear witness to the light (John 1:8). Jesus also told the disciples that John the Baptist was Elijah who was expected to come before the Messiah came. In the Gospels, John clearly identified himself with the prophesied messenger who was to come before the Messiah. Matthew 3:3 says, “This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: ‘A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” And Mark 1:1–3 says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the Prophets, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight’”” (NKJV). Matthew 11:10 says, “This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’” Additionally, in John 1:23 John the Baptist said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

John the Baptist came to bring many people of Israel back to the Lord, which is exactly what Elijah did. He gave the people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. *Salvation* means the saving grace of God in every area of life—healing from physical ailments, deliverance from demons, and salvation from eternal condemnation. John’s main objective was to point the way to the realization of God’s kingdom on earth.

Jesus and the Spirit of Elijah

After the death of John the Baptist, Jesus also clarified that the spirit of Elijah would come again. He told the disciples after the beheading of John that the spirit of Elijah *is* coming. Looking at the context of the full statement, we can see that Jesus distinguishes between the spirit of Elijah that came in the form of John the Baptist and another coming of the spirit of Elijah at a future time.

The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus replied, “To be sure, *Elijah comes and will restore all things*. But I tell you, *Elijah has already come*, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” *Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.* (Matt. 17:10–13)

At Cane Ridge, Jesus said that the spirit of Elijah has been loosed to make the paths straight. He will restore all things. Other versions of Matthew 17:11 say, “Elijah is indeed coming first to get everything ready” (NLT), or “Elijah is coming and will restore all things” (NASB). In the last days, we are looking for the restoration of the body of Christ as we are seeking and searching for a great awakening revival. The restoration is to point to the coming kingdom of God on earth as revealed and manifested in the hearts and lives of people.

Significance of the Spirit of Elijah

To gain a clear kingdom understanding of what it means that the spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth now, we glean

from the lives and times of Elijah and John the Baptist. It could be argued that what transpired with Elijah on Mount Carmel was actually a revival of the people in their love and devotion to God, who had shown himself with great power. Unfortunately, the revival was apparently not sustained. Jezebel, an emissary of Satan who wanted to silence the prophetic voice, reared her ugly head. Obviously, the monarchy and religious systems of Israel were not repentant. The people who had been awakened from the stupor seemed to be a nonentity in the events of the continuing showdown of Elijah with Jezebel and Ahab.

Elijah came to wake the people out of a stupor and prepare them for what the Lord had for them. That happened temporarily, and even though they responded with great fervor against the prophets of Baal, they were never heard from again in the Elijah saga. There was no lasting revival and devotion to God, which is shown because the people were taken into captivity as God's rod of judgment. This is a type of the final judgment that will come in the "great and terrible day of the Lord" that is discussed in Malachi. God will redeem repentant people. The fact that Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was not redeemed is a sign that they had turned their backs on God.

Conversely, with John the Baptist, the people repented, and the Messiah came and the kingdom of God with him. The kingdom broke through into the lives of humanity every time someone was healed, miraculously fed, experienced a miracle, was transported to another location, or walked through a crowd of people without being seen. The reality of the kingdom was loosed into the hearts and lives of the people.

John the Baptist, the carrier of Elijah's spirit, said deliberately that Jesus must increase while he must decrease (John 3:30). The spirit of Elijah is one that allows the believer to decrease so that the Spirit of God may increase. The will of the believer yields to the will of the Holy Spirit when

the believer decreases and the Spirit increases. That is the nature of true repentance. John the Baptist paved the way for the ministry of the first coming of the Messiah. He turned the hearts of many people back to God the Father through his preaching about repentance. John preached a single message as illustrated in Matthew 3:1-2: “In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ²and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

The spirit of Elijah is a forerunner spirit. It is a preparatory spirit. When Jesus said at Cane Ridge, “The spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth,” I did not understand at the time, but later learned that the spirit of Elijah is loosed to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ. The spirit of Elijah is here—*now*—to bear witness to the Lord and call the people to repentance. This should be a huge wake-up call.

We learn another very important point in James 5:17: Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, who prayed earnestly. When we pray, we should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. These prayers are powerful and effective. James 5:16–20 states,

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. *Elijah was a man just like us.* He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: *Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

Could it be that the spirit of Elijah is loosed into the hearts of men and women who have a heart for people to come to the Lord and repent? Could it be that there are many carriers of Elijah's spirit, and not just one as in the case of John the Baptist? I believe that it is true that the Elijah spirit is loosed in many people today, not just one person.

The bottom line is this: the spirit of Elijah has been loosed once again. Jesus talked about it in the Scriptures and said it to me again at Cane Ridge; therefore, I believe it. We have a choice to make today: we can repent and be saved, or we can harden our hearts and be forever lost. What happened to the kingdom of Israel is a picture of what happens when God sends a forerunning spirit to call the people out of the lull of oblivion into a relationship with him. People who harden their hearts to God will be taken away into eternal captivity and bondage, just like Israel.¹⁰

With John the Baptist we see different results. Some of the people came to repentance, although the religious leaders did not. By the manifestation of the kingdom of God through Jesus, people were transformed, healed, fed, and experienced the kingdom of God in many ways. The kingdom manifestation in power in the hearts and lives of the people came forth because the people were repentant and prepared to receive it.

With both Elijah and John, the religious establishments refused to be restored, but the populace was moved toward God. In Elijah's case, the populace did not press through to overcome false, distorted religious leaders. At the end of that era, they were ultimately lost and carried into captivity and bondage that was never overcome. In the case of John the Baptist, the people did press through. The wilderness was important because the people were out from under the

¹⁰ I want to clarify that any reference to Israel is talking about the historic Northern Kingdom and not about the Hebrew people generically. See prior footnote.

watchful eye of the religious leaders who were not willing to seek the way to the Messiah. They had freedom to respond and repent, and the way of the Lord was prepared. With John, the religious leaders—the Pharisees—came out into the wilderness because of fear of losing their authority and because of jealousy. John was very bold with them and even called them a brood of vipers (Matt. 3:7).

The work of the spirit of Elijah will be the most effective outside of the places where a spirit of religion rules or places with a controlling Jezebel spirit. The Lord is calling for people to minister outside of the church.¹¹ The spirit of Elijah will be the forerunner to a great soul harvest, and the worker of a great wake-up call to beckon the hearts of the people back to God. The coming of this era will not look like any revival that has come before. It will not be the same as any other great historic outpouring. Many will not see it and will miss it because they have preconceived ideas of what the next great awakening will look like. People must be flexible to understand and see. Remember, Jesus said that some will see but not perceive, and some will hear but not understand (Mark 4:12).

The true call of those following God is to worship and serve him. Somehow, we have mistaken serving the people for serving God. (Sometimes serving God will look like serving the people, but that is not the primary focus of our relationship with the Lord. The Lord will always be the focus

¹¹ The Feast of Tabernacles is a prototype of the last days soul harvest. In that festival in ancient Israel, the people went into the harvest field and celebrated the harvest in temporary structures and then had a great feast. This represents the final soul harvest in the *harvest field in temporary structures* followed by the wedding feast of the Lamb. This is biblically why it appears that the final soul harvest will not take place within the church walls. Believers who are tied to the structure of the church may miss the final soul harvest.

of true worship. People can never be the focus, but serving people may be the by-product of our love of God!)

The control of many churches is in the hands of people with the Jezebel spirit. Often pastors are impotent to bring the change, revival, restoration, or even issue a wake-up call because Jezebel is so active within the structure of the church. Pastors must not tolerate the Jezebel spirit to be consistent with following God because Jezebel is against God in every way. In Elijah's day, Jezebel was a control freak who did all she could to silence the voice of God to the people by eliminating the prophetic word. She massacred as many true prophets of God as she possibly could. Elijah and Jezebel are enemies in the kingdom of God for Jezebel promotes false worship and prevents the people from coming to God.

Conclusion

The Lord is calling his children to be repentant so that the kingdom of God may be fully established on the earth. Thrones of the enemy are established on the sins of the people for which there has been no repentance. The sins are platforms that lift high the thrones of the enemy, while the praises of God are the platforms that lift high the Lord's glorious throne. The Lord calls his people to respond to the call for repentance so that principalities and thrones of Satan may be toppled. The call for repentance is really a battle for supremacy in the hearts of humanity.

In keeping with many prophetic words of Scripture, the Lord has loosed the spirit of Elijah on the world to bring the people to repentance. Just as John the Baptist prepared the people and made the way of the Lord straight, so too will the spirit of Elijah prepare the way for the second coming of Christ. The Lord Jesus is THE King of kings. He is victorious, but the battle is still raging for the hearts of people. The Lord loves his creatures enough to warn us to bend our

knees and come to him in humility and in truth. Those who repent enthrone the Lord. Those who do not repent enthrone the enemy of God. There are only two kingdoms—there is no middle ground. We must choose this day whom we will serve. We know the final Victor, but the battle rages on.

It seems that a critical time is on the horizon ahead of us. Time is short. I do not pretend to fully understand what that means, but it is time for the body of believers to wake up and realize our part in the kingdom plan. I really believe that the Lord Jesus is hurting for his children, as any loving parent would. I also think that he may bring discipline soon, as any loving parent would. He said to tell his people his Word and about his love. The world needs his love and his Word. In fact, people perish for a lack of knowledge. I fear there are a high percentage of biblically illiterate people in the world today.

I pray for more love to be loosed on the body of Christ and, with that, brokenness for the lost ones. We are called to hurt for them. We are called to cry for them. We are called to repent for them and pray for their eyes, even the eyes of their hearts, to be opened. This is not a substitution for personal repentance, but corporate identificational repentance removes the barriers that allow Satan's principalities to be enthroned among us. It prepares the harvest field to be easy pickings by limiting the hindrances and empowerment of the enemy in our midst. Work in the harvest field and seek to live in wholehearted devotion to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3

WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

I love my people. They need to love me with wholehearted devotion. They do not know what it means to be wholehearted. There are so many pulls and distractions that my people cannot be wholehearted about anything. Call the people to a life of simplicity. Teach them to get back to the heart of worship. Call them to repent for busyness in their daily lives. Conveniences of modern life are not used for the greater good. The enemy uses things to distract my people. Tell my people to watch for distractions. They must see me and only me. They must want me with their whole heart. Time is short; many will be deceived.

Seeking Him with Our Whole Heart

Do we really understand what it means to offer the Lord wholehearted worship? It is a very simple concept to grasp yet extremely difficult to implement in our day-to-day

lives. When a believer comes to a place of wholeheartedness, it leads to extreme usefulness for the kingdom of God. Wholeheartedness simply means that we do what we can do for Jesus—we set aside the desires of the flesh and come to Jesus with all we have.

In Luke 7, there was a woman who brought expensive perfume to anoint Jesus. She washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. She had a big tally on her list of sins and regrets. The most telling part of the story is that the sins of the woman, designated as “many,” were forgiven by her actions. We never read that she actually said anything to Jesus; she merely came to bow at his feet and love him with all she had. She was a woman of terrible reputation; she was that manner of woman who was known in the city by her questionable morals. She was breaking the Law of Moses—she was an unclean woman who came uninvited and was touching a Jewish man, a teacher no less. She brought her offering to Jesus, an offering of love and devotion, and she showered him with an embarrassing display of affection that may have made those present squirm with discomfort.

On the other hand, this was taking place in the home of a Pharisee, known as Simon the leper. Few people noticed that he was an unclean man himself. He asked Jesus to come to his house, and Jesus did. Under the Law of Moses (his controlling creed of life as a Pharisee) he should have been banned from society because of his leprosy (Lev. 13:45–46). We are only left to assume one of two things: first, that his position as a Pharisee allowed him to remain in his home and not be banished to a leper colony, or second, that his name, Simon the leper, referred to his nature more than his physical condition. Either way, he was actually no better than the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus. Even though Simon invited Jesus into his house, a clean Jewish man to come into the presence of an unclean Jewish man, he did not even take

care of the basic requirement of a host: to offer to have his servants wash Jesus' feet.

As I contemplated this passage of Scripture, I could not help but think about the beauty of Jesus' feet. Isaiah 52:7 says, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" The sinful woman fully understood the message that he carried; however, Simon did not—he offered no water to wash the feet that brought the gospel of peace.

The thing that makes the act of the woman one of whole-hearted devotion is the attitude of her heart. It shows that she completely realized that she was a terrible sinner who was in need of grace. She came to Jesus with a complete understanding of her unworthiness and lack, bringing nothing to the table but a heart of gratitude for Jesus' mercy. Performing an act of kindness, Jesus said, "She did what she could" (Mark 14:8). Showering tears on him, she came in complete humility as she approached from behind. She was not a guest that day; she was not invited to the table with these important men. But her posture and attitude gained her more acceptance from Jesus than did the host of the meal.

Simon was full of pride and arrogance. He judged her, and he judged Jesus for allowing her display of devotion. Simon said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner" (Luke 7:39). It is interesting that Jesus asked Simon who was more grateful, the one who was forgiven much or one who was forgiven little (Luke 7:41–43). Simon said the one who had been forgiven much would be

more grateful. Jesus said (with a hint of sarcasm, perhaps), “You have rightly *judged*” (Luke 7:43), for indeed Simon was judging both Jesus and the woman.

Jesus went on to say to Simon, “He who is forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47). With a shallow reading of the passage, one might think that Simon had lived a purer life and therefore did not have as much to be forgiven. After all, he was a Pharisee. In other words, because he was not as sinful as this woman, he could not really appreciate what it meant to be restored from such a lowly position. I first thought that it was a matter of lack of empathy on Simon’s part. Perhaps he simply could not understand the measure of her gratitude because he had not walked a mile in her shoes; he had never been as low as she was. Following that line of reasoning to the final conclusion, thinking that because he could not fully empathize and realize the greatness of her restoration, he did not have the capacity to love as much as she did, as one who had been forgiven much.

However, there is a deeper understanding that must be explored in Jesus’ statement. In actuality, Simon the leper had just as much, if not more, to be forgiven of as the woman. He was a follower of the law, but he was a law-breaker. In the Bible, leprosy represented rebellion and disobedience. Such were the cases of Miriam, Naaman, and Gehazi (Ex. 4:6; Num. 12:10; 2 Kgs. 5:1, 27). Miriam, the sister of Moses, was covered with leprosy when she was filled with pride and rebellion against the chosen leader, Moses (Num. 12:1–2, 6–8). Gehazi was covered with leprosy when he lied to Elisha and took items that he was not entitled to receive (2 Kgs. 5:22, 27).

Simon was prideful (refused to show common courtesy to Jesus), judgmental (judged the woman and Jesus), and guilty under the law (a leprous man who refused to follow the law of Moses). I came to the realization that Simon had not been forgiven much, not because he was less sinful than the woman, but because he had not loved much. The truth of the matter

is that he had not been forgiven much because he had loved little. His pride stood in the way of his forgiveness. Out of his arrogance, Simon loved little. Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:47 NKJV). She loved and was forgiven; he was not forgiven, and thus he did not have the capacity to love much.

Jesus was saying that if you are prideful, you are too arrogant to love like one who realizes the depth of despair and brokenness and who appreciates the magnitude of restoration. Jesus is also saying that her love for him brought her to the place of forgiveness. Pride kept Simon from loving Jesus like the woman did in her humility.

This is reminiscent of King David, who is defined as a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). He was also a sinful man: a lying, conniving, murdering adulterer. How could a man like that be a person God said was “a man after his own heart”? David may have sinned abundantly, but he was quick to come back to the heart of worship, repenting and seeking forgiveness. David may not have always controlled his flesh, but he loved God through the process! Because he loved much, he was also a man who was forgiven much.

Distractions

We live in a time where we can have almost anything we want at our disposal in a matter of minutes. Most people have abundance or excess of material possessions, but with conveniences and “stuff” also come distractions. There are so many pulls and distractions in the world that Jesus’ people may find it difficult to be wholehearted about anything, especially keeping their focus on him. Jesus said, “Call the people to a life of simplicity.”

In Mark 10, the story of the rich young ruler further illustrates what a lack of relationship with God means to an

individual. The young man asked what he had to do in order to have eternal life. Jesus gave him the basic answer: “You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother’” (Mark 10:19). The things that Jesus told him to do were all external. They were about relationships with other people. The rich young man said that he was indeed following these commandments. In fact, the man had done all these things since his youth. Then Jesus upped the ante: “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). The man’s face fell as he turned away sad because he would not part with his possessions.

All of the remaining commandments were wrapped up in Jesus’s one statement: “Come, follow me.” What Jesus was calling him to was more than his relationship with the world and other people. Jesus was calling him to a deeper relationship with God. The call was to cut the connection with the things he idolized or coveted. He was called to separate himself from the things that kept him from having a deep relationship with and following Jesus. Jesus was asking for more than rote adherence to the commandments; he was asking for a relationship. The thing the rich young ruler lacked was loving God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Unfortunately, he loved his stuff and status more than he wanted a relationship with the Lord. I once heard it said that the rich young ruler was the only person in Scripture who left an encounter with Jesus worse than when he came. He came running to Jesus and knelt before him (Mark 10:17), but he went away sorrowful (Mark 10:22).

This story could reflect the life of many believers in our own day and age. Some come with great joy but ultimately go away sorrowful because a relationship with Jesus would cost them more than they are willing to pay. The truth is that they

are working to gain that which they cannot keep and, in so doing, give up greater riches that far surpass everything they could gain in the world. A relationship with Jesus would cost them more than they want to pay in terms of worldly costs and in terms of commitment to the risen Lord.

Do not overlook the fact that Jesus was speaking to him out of love—Jesus was not being harsh or setting a standard the man could never attain. Mark 10:21 says, “Jesus looked at him and *loved him*.” He was calling him to move beyond the surface of following God into a deeper relationship with him. Jesus was looking for wholehearted devotion, not devotion for the sake of appearances alone. He wanted the rich young ruler to have a relationship with him because of Jesus’ love for him.

The context clarifies the end result of wholehearted devotion: “Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me’” (Mark 10:21). Jesus knew what outward, external adherence to the Scriptures would do to him if there were no relationship with God. The simple call of Jesus is to follow him. He is calling us to come to a life of wholehearted devotion. We cannot truly come to Jesus unless we eliminate the worldly things we desire more than we desire him.

Distortion of Gifts

Wholeheartedness for God means that we put aside every tool of the flesh that the enemy would use to tear down our relationship with Jesus—pride, disunity, and offense. It means that we allow ourselves to be ruled by the Spirit and not by the flesh. God reminds us through Jeremiah, “You will seek me and find me *when you seek me with all your heart*” (Jer. 29:13). I hear many people say that they cannot hear Jesus speak to them. I often ask those same people, “What

kind of relationship do you have with him?” Many people want to hear him but may not want to pay the cost of seeking Jesus with all of their heart. The Word of God says that if we seek him with our whole heart, then we will find him. God wants to be found!

Why is wholehearted devotion so important? When we are wholeheartedly for God, we seek Christlikeness, which in turn leads us to purity. Purity is a necessity for God to trust us with his plan and his work. The Lord will not gift us beyond our ability to manage and cope with that which he has given us. Romans 11:29 tells us, “The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” Once God gives a gift, it is irrevocable, and God will never reclaim it. It is a precious thing to be entrusted with a gift from God, which is not to be taken lightly.

I want to clarify that we are not working to be good enough for God to gift us or use us. As I have said before, we do not earn the gifting of God, which is why it is called a gift. By our way of thinking, God selected some highly unlikely people throughout the Bible to use for his purposes. God’s grace is his unmerited, unearned favor. However, I believe that God does not gift lightly, without due consideration of the ability of the one receiving the gift to be able to manage it without becoming distorted by the enemy.

To be fully useful to the Lord, we must purge ourselves of the flesh, which will hinder the use of the gifts of God. To be the best servants of God that we can possibly be, we must prune that which would hinder us from being wholehearted. In our weakness, his strength is revealed. God’s gifting is based on his knowing that we are ready and can handle that which he gives us. His gifting does not take away our free will to choose to distort it or the enemy’s fight to trick us to distort our use of the gifts of God for his purposes. Sometimes we are tested to see if we are ready to be advanced in kingdom warfare. The Lord may test our purity of heart to see what we can handle.

Have you ever wondered why God did not just annihilate Satan? For one reason, the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable. God gifted him for throne-room service. Satan did not yield the self-desire of advancement and promotion. When he became distorted, God had already gifted him with power. Similarly, Saul in the Old Testament was the Lord's anointed. Even when he was rebellious and did not listen to God, even when he was tormented by the enemy and was moved by fear, anxiety, and paranoia, he was still the Lord's anointed. David had ample opportunities to eliminate Saul, but he chose not to because God had anointed Saul (1 Sam. 24:6-7). Vengeance belonged to the Lord, not to David. The Lord anointed Saul, and the Lord would have to deal with his rebellious and polluted nature in his timing, not in David's timing (1 Sam. 24).

Another question is if the success of a ministry will change a person from a humble servant to a self-centered egomaniac, but the Lord gifts us anyway. God's plan is to use humanity, and sometimes that goes horribly wrong, but God continues to stick to the plan to use people as his divine instruments. Humanity is the interaction of the spiritual world with the natural world. We are the hands and feet of the spirit world, for both good and for bad. God has ordained that he works significantly through human actors—that is his way of doing things. Satan works significantly through human actors, too. This is not to say that God cannot move without people, but he chooses to use people to do his work on the earth. We pray, and he moves. We submit to obedience, and he takes ground for the kingdom of God.

Wholeheartedness, then, demands that there is need for constant contact with the Lord, as is seen in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10:

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there

was given me a thorn in my flesh, *a messenger of Satan, to torment me*. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, *so that Christ’s power may rest on me*. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The thorn in Paul’s flesh was a messenger of Satan—not one sent from God. God allowed the affliction to buffet Paul because of the greatness of the revelations Paul received from God. He allowed it, essentially, because of Paul’s incredible gifting. The anointing of God often rests on those who are weak. God’s power is made perfect in our weakness.¹²

¹² I interject here that 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 is often used as an excuse of people who *do not seek healing*. People who say the Lord gave them a thorn in the flesh argue that it is somehow the will of God to keep people in bondage to physical affliction. The overarching message of Scripture, however, is freedom from the tyranny of Satan, including physical or emotional affliction. I have also heard people say that God gave them a thorn in the flesh to keep them humble. I would respectfully disagree with this for three reasons: First, Scripture tells us that the thorn in the flesh was not from God, but it was a messenger from Satan. Second, the only reason given for God allowing the thorn in the flesh was because of the nature of the incredible gifting of Paul. I am personally aware of only a few people who are walking in that level of revelation and anointing from God. Third, as is discussed herein, Paul uses “flesh” to mean not only the physical body but also negative human responses and many other things (Gal. 5). We do not know what his thorn was because it is never mentioned in Scripture. The totality of Scripture supports that Christ came to free humanity from the power

Mark 9:35 says, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” (NKJV). When there is a desire to be the first in the kingdom, it comes with the desire not of pride but with humility. If we want to be close to Jesus, we have to be last, least, and the most insignificant. Misty Edwards has a song titled “Servant of All” that talks about the upside-down kingdom. The lyrics are these:

I’m in love with a King who became a slave;
I’m in love with a God who is humble. You
gotta go down if you wanna go up and you’ve
gotta go lower if you wanna go higher and
higher. Well you’ve gotta hide and do it in
secret if you wanna be seen by God. Cause
it’s the inside, outside, upside-down kingdom,
where you lose to gain and you die to live.¹³

To be a servant of all, which is emulating Christlikeness, the believer must put everyone else’s needs above his or her own needs. We become servants by dying (figuratively) for all. In other words, dying to self-advancement or self-promotion, with no jockeying for position, causes us to be others-focused. If anyone pushes to be the first, he or she will actually become last. To be last, we give up getting our own way. We become yielded and pliable, not rigid. In other words, yield- edness means we love Jesus more than ourselves and we love others as much as ourselves. To find this kind of wholehearted devotion, the heart must be circumcised and the flesh cut away.

Some people throughout Scripture were severely tested, assumedly so God could see the status of their hearts. It often

of Satan, not subject us to it. First John 3:8 says, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

¹³ Misty Edwards, “Servant of All,” http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/m/misty_edwards/servant_of_all.html, accessed August 10, 2013.

looked like purification by fire. Gold is refined by fire so that the impurities may be brought up and eliminated. For example, Joseph was eventually elevated to position as prime minister of Egypt, but he did it by traveling on the pathway of unjust slavery and false imprisonment (Gen. 37-41). Could it be that Joseph's thirteen years in captivity was the purification that ensured his humility to take on the task that God had for him in Egypt, that is, increased power, authority, and position? He was certainly educated in the school of hard knocks. His task was to ensure the survival of Israel, God's chosen people, and in so doing the line of Jesus was also preserved.

Judah was among the brothers who were saved by being fed out of the breadbasket of Egypt. In saving Judah, God protected the family line of the Messiah. Had Joseph been less mature, his flesh might have distorted his call to be the administrator of food in Egypt that ultimately saved Israel. If he had been embittered instead of humble before God, he could have destroyed his brothers. He possessed the power to annihilate them, and no one would have questioned him because of his position of authority. He was yielded to God's greater plan and spoke with humility as he said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

In another example, Abraham experienced a twenty-five-year delay from the prophetic word announcing that he would have a son, which in turn would be the fulfillment of the prophecy that he would be the father of many nations (Rom. 4:17). Did God have to wear something out of Abraham before he could trust him? Did the impurities have to be brought up so that they could be skimmed off and discarded like dross, the scum that forms on the surface of molten metal? The ultimate test of his faith was trusting God enough to offer as a sacrifice the son for whom he had waited so long (Gen. 22). It truly was a case of walking by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) because he could not have possibly

known the implications for future believers when God asked him to take his son and offer him as a sacrifice. He acted in faith, however, and his faith was accounted to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:22).

Likewise, Paul was elevated quickly from a persecutor of God's kingdom to a persecutor of Satan's kingdom. Did he rapidly yield to God and voluntarily strip or prune everything from his life that would distort or distract? We never see so much as a wayward hiccup from Paul. Many times, believers talk about God pruning them, but we can also prune ourselves so that God does not have to prune us. I think it is easier on us when we voluntarily decide to cleanse and purify ourselves, rather than have the need for God to bring us into a season of pruning. Of course, when a believer exercises self-will to cleanse his or her life, it is an exercise in humility. When God prunes us, he may be eliminating pride out of our life. That is why it may be easier when the believer takes the steps to yield and get rid of junk on his or her own initiative.

The word *flesh* is often used to describe the desires of the sinful nature, not just the physical body. It is impossible to be wholehearted to God and be in the flesh at the same time. Galatians 5:19–21 says,

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. *I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

A life led by the Spirit and a life ruled by the flesh are inconsistent with one another. Life by the Spirit is submitted and yielded to God. When we walk by the Spirit, we are not gratifying our personal desires; rather, we give in to God. A

life lived by the Spirit sets the believer apart from the world. Galatians 5 says further,

So I say, *live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature*. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Gal. 5:16–17)

If we want to be Christ-like, we must be joined to Christ. The issue is one of control. When we abdicate the throne of our lives and give control to God, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are useful. Walking by the Spirit is when we want, beyond all measure, to crucify the desires of our sinful nature. We know that as long as we are controlled by sin, God cannot fully trust us with the gifting that he desires to give us. We do not sin against ourselves; we sin against God. We are the masters (or should be) of our flesh and our sinful impulses—those tricks and traps of Satan that seek to make us stumble before God. When we exercise mastery over the flesh, we are more useful to God.

There is a desire in my heart to master my flesh and sinful nature so that God can use me. There has been a necessary season in my life of purging, purifying, and preparation for God to gift me so that I can be more useful to his kingdom. I share this so that we can know what is at stake: we seek purity and wholehearted devotion not just for personal peace but also for the benefit of the kingdom of God. I declare:

- I choose the Lord!
- I choose to submit.
- I choose to crucify my flesh daily.
- I choose to love.
- I choose to love the Lord above everything else.

- I choose to love the Lord's children.
- I choose to love those who are not yet the Lord's children.
- I choose to love the unlovable.

Lamentations 3:40 says, "Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the LORD" (NKJV). God needs pure and trustworthy vessels, ready to be used for him. God needs *us* to master our flesh because to do so makes us a vessel worthy of carrying his anointing and doing his work. In other words, God will not master our flesh for us; it is up to us to do it. Until he knows our desire to be wholehearted for him, we cannot be fully trusted. We get promoted in the Spirit when God sees the renewed and increased desire to love, be submitted to, and yielded to him.

Our desire for promotion in the Spirit in and of itself will probably not impress God very much. A desire for self-advancement by increased giftedness is much different than a desire for a yielded heart, which leads to increased giftedness and promotion in the kingdom.

Eliminate the Excess

The Lord said to call the people to a life of simplicity and teach them to get back to the heart of worship. The Lord said to call them to repent for busyness in their daily lives. It is important to God that we are not burdened by or even drowned in the pace of life that we try to keep. We must be aware that the conveniences of life are often not used for the greater good but to steal our time. The enemy uses *things* to distract God's people. Believers must watch for distractions.

Busyness interferes with the work that the Lord has for us to do. The Lord said wholeheartedness and overwhelming busyness are not consistent with each other. I was looking back at a journal entry I had written a few years ago and was

bemoaning the fact that it had been a busy day preparing church reports. I was lamenting the use of time in a way that outwardly appeared to be *church work* but was not really productive for the kingdom of God. I really was not happy because I wanted to spend time in prayer and in communion with the Lord, but I did reports for a meeting the next day instead. I believed at the time that God was calling me to a deeper life of prayer and a deeper relationship with him.

Sometime later the Lord told me to eliminate the excess in my life. Since that journal entry, many things have changed. My life is nothing like it was a few years ago. I have given up a legal career. I have given up prestige and status. I have given up a substantial income. I want to be with the Lord more than I want to do most everything else. I have endeavored to eliminate excess from my life, those things that steal my time from being with the Lord and being fruitful for his kingdom. I rarely watch TV, and I vowed to God not to play computer games that steal my time. I still have to work on eliminating the excesses, but there has been a substantial amount of dead wood pruned from my life.

Elimination of things that squander time is a matter of taking affirmative steps to prioritize life's demands and put God first. Eliminating the excess may seem overwhelming at first, because in the North American culture we have so much excess in our lives. The best way to eliminate the excess is to do it one step at a time, unless the Lord requires a more radical pruning. The excesses of life can be too many clothes, too much stuff (the more stuff we have, the more time we have to devote to taking care of that stuff), too many demands on our time, and too many obligations and commitments.

It should also be considered that even *church work* can be excessive and distract us from a deeper relationship with the Lord. Too much serving and not enough devotion can make us a Martha instead of a Mary. Jesus was a guest in their home. Martha served while Mary spent her time at the

Master's feet. Martha was distracted from the main thing, which was a relationship with Jesus. The Lord confirmed that few things are needed; indeed, only a relationship with him is all we need.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

If all we do is serve and spend no time at all with the Lord, we are only going through the motions of relationship. This place of distraction is a very dangerous place for believers to be. People who are going through the motions may look good on the outside but may be dried up like a prune on the inside. Conversely, if all we do is spend time in devotion, seeking God, we are not being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. We may have faith but not works, which means our faith is dead (James 2:17). According to Jesus, the best course is devotion, but we are called to serve, too.

Desperation

When a person does not care what it takes, or what must be eliminated, and all that matters is spending time with Jesus,

one has arrived at desperation and working toward wholehearted devotion.¹⁴ The question is often pondered why some people around the world experience the presence of God with greater magnitude of manifestation than others. It may have to do with the desperation that some people have for Jesus, not for what Jesus can do for a person, but simply for *more of him*. There must be a real hunger and thirst for more of God before he may manifest himself in that way. God does not give such gracious gifts except as they are sincerely desired and deeply appreciated.¹⁵

Scripture reveals the blessing of hungering and thirsting for God: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6). John 7:37–38 also says, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” Jesus is looking for desperation that will not be denied, such as a thirsty deer panting for streams of water: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1–2).

¹⁴ Randy Clark, *There is More: Reclaiming the Power of Impartation* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Global Awakening, 2006), 186–189. Bill Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, California, tells of a powerful desperation and hunger for God before the Lord visited him and transformed his life. He had been crying out for more of God for months. When the visitation finally came at 3:00 A.M., it came with awareness that the Lord was asking him to make an exchange: his respectability in the eyes of men for more of the presence of God. Johnson gladly agreed to give up his respectability before men so that God could invade his life. Since that time, the ministry of God through him has been incredible. The very first thing that happened was that a thousand people promptly left his church. Johnson tells of the peace that overtook him in the event that could have normally brought despair or rejection.

¹⁵ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1983), 314.

Those who love God will point all their thoughts and desires to one aim: that God may be glorified and enjoyed. A. W. Pink writes, “It is the yearning of the new nature when one is in Christ Jesus to delight in God to the fullest measure and manner of its capacity.”¹⁶ This is the desperation that moves the heart of God and releases healing by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Eliminating the excess helps us avoid being halfhearted or coldhearted. The demands and pulls on our time distract us from God. After I go through a season of busyness, when I do finally think about the Lord again, the relationship feels dry and distant. It is work to get back to the heart of worship and back into the full relationship that the Lord wants us to have with him. The Lord warns us to watch for distractions, even though the enemy lies to us, telling us things are important when they are not.

The Heart of Worship

Another word the Lord said at Cane Ridge was, “Teach them to get back to the heart of worship.” Wholehearted devotion translates to wholehearted worship. God knows the true status of our worship. If believers do not worship in truth, the Lord will be worshiped anyway. When the disciples were crying out for Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke his disciples and keep them quiet. Jesus responded by saying that if the people did not worship, then even the stones would cry out (Luke 19:40). He is looking for total devotion and worship.

¹⁶ Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings from Paul Studies in the Prayers of the Apostle* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2005), <http://www.logos.com/product/8441/gleanings-from-paul-the-prayers-of-the-apostle>, 332. (Accessed May 12, 2012.)

The Lord tells us that the heart of worship really has more to do with the attitude of worship than the location of worship. It is worship that comes from the heart, the temple of God within, that matters most. When Jesus was talking to the woman at the well, she discussed with Jesus about the proper place to worship: on the mount in Samaria or in Jerusalem (John 4:20). Jesus told her, “The true worshipers will *worship the Father in the spirit and in truth*, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24). He told her that there was a time coming, and, in fact, it already was, that true worship was not at either physical location, but it would spring from the heart.

Getting back to the heart of worship is just that: worship from the heart. I can sing, shout, dance with joy, and never open my mouth or move a muscle. In worship services I have literally shouted with joy at the top of my lungs—all within—and no one around me ever knew it. It is heart worship—a total engagement of the heart. When we worship in Spirit and in truth, we worship with the heart. It is not even necessarily an outward manifestation of worship, although it can be outward.

Sometimes, when I am at church or in a crowd worshipping the Lord, I let the worship songs be my guide. I pray and adore the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit while a song is being sung. It is a total engagement of the heart. We can also sing and dance and worship with our total being. Conversely, there are times in the past where I have looked like I was worshipping with my body (my mouth and vocal cords, and even holding my hands in the air), but not with my spirit. I have gone through the motions by singing songs in rote remembrance, all the while thinking about the grocery list. Worship is not about location or outward engagement, although it can be, but it must always be about inward worship—worship in spirit and truth.

This kind of worship is life and invites life-giving waters. It comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. In the very same conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus offered her living water. He told the woman that if she would drink what he was giving to her, then she would never thirst again. He said his waters were living waters that would become a fountain of water springing up from within to everlasting life (John 4:13–14). What is the living water that Jesus was talking about? He was referring to the Holy Spirit. He gave more revelation about the nature of the living waters later in the passage:

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, *out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” *But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.* (John 7:37–39 NKJV)

The fountain begins within a believer, but what begins within cannot remain within. It bubbles up and overflows from a believer who is partaking of the living water. It cannot help but come out! When we worship in spirit and in truth, there is constant adoration and dialogue with the Holy Spirit going on within our hearts. When we believe and engage God in that way, rivers of living water begin to flow, and soon they cannot be contained. The waters overflow the vessel for “*out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*” We also learn in Scripture, “For out of the *fullness* (the overflow, the superabundance) of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34 AMP).

These rivers of living water are born out of the constant dialogue of the human spirit with the Spirit of God, which

directs the believer into life. What it really comes down to is that the sheep know the voice of the master and they listen to his voice. A sheep of the flock (a believer) knows the voice of the Shepherd (the Holy Spirit of God). This is really what this dialogue is all about: knowing the voice of the Spirit of God, following his guidance, which leads the believer to life. Not only will this give life to the believer but the overflow of the heart will influence others. The life-giving waters will come out of him or her, and others will have the opportunity to grow thereby.

Conclusion

The Lord loves us, but he abides in us only to the extent that we abide in him. If we are not devoted people, our relationship with God will grow cold. We must love the Lord Jesus with wholehearted devotion. Unfortunately, in our society, we have lost track of what it means to be wholehearted for Jesus. I could start listing things that steal our time and attention, and the list would be quite substantial. Each person should seek the Lord to find out what the things are that stand in the way of being fully devoted to him. I feel certain that if we ask with our whole hearts, he will tell us if excesses need to be eliminated in our lives.

In the message at Cane Ridge, the Lord spoke, “Call the people to a life of simplicity. Teach them to get back to the heart of worship.” I pray that as we stop, think, and listen, we will repent for what we have allowed to distract us from the love and relationship with God and what we have allowed our lives to become. I pray that we will become a people who realize the temporary nature of most of what we are striving for in life. We are such a busy people, but at the end, when the last breath comes, it will all be for naught unless we are building the kingdom of God. Let us endeavor to keep the main thing, the main thing.

We have more conveniences of life than any generation before us, yet it seems we are the busiest generation that has ever lived. Why do you suppose that is? One answer is that the enemy uses all the gadgets to distract people. In times past, we did not have a phone with us every minute of every day. If we turn off the phone to have a time of solitude, we feel guilty that someone may need us and not be able to get our attention instantaneously. My children have had cell phones since they were about twelve years old. It is hard for them to understand that I do not have to be available every minute of the day or night because that is how they have grown up.

In this era, there is usually some kind of noise in our ears at all times. How can we possibly listen to God when there is so much racket going on around us? The Lord said, "Tell my people to watch for distractions. They must see me and only me." If we really want a wholehearted relationship with the Lord, we are going to have to fight for it. He said, "Time is short; many will be deceived." Let us be people who eliminate the distractions from our lives, giving wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

Chapter 4

DO NOT BE DECEIVED



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

“Lord, I really do not mind waiting on you. I am willing and ready to wait longer than thirty seconds,” I said, feeling ashamed that I had whined about the difficulty of waiting on God when I first arrived at Cane Ridge.” The Lord said,

My people are good people but easily deceived. Do not put faith in church attendance or the badges of Christianity. Only those with a true heart relationship with me will enter my kingdom of glory. Many are deceived because they go through the motions outwardly. You did it ... you understand!

My people have confused church attendance with relationship. They have confused crosses with knowing the cross and what it stands for. The relationship that I want is more than salvation. Cry for ears to be opened that people will hear and understand. My people are deaf; they do not hear me. I called you

because you listen. Call for a people who will listen intently. Never stop listening and talking to me. It will increase: discern, judge, seek.

Going through the Motions

The Lord said to me, “Many are deceived because they go through the motions outwardly. You did it ... you understand!” When I told a friend what the Lord said at Cane Ridge, she said, “That sounds very harsh of the Lord.” However, she did not realize my history with the Lord. He and I both knew exactly what he was talking about: I *did* go through the motions outwardly.

The Lord called me when I was about nine years old, in an audible voice, just as he did with Samuel. He called me three different times, and each time I ran into my house to ask my mother if she had called for me. She had not, and we were the only ones who were home at the time. Neither my mother nor I recognized the spiritual significance of that moment. I also had many early prophetic experiences but did not recognize what they were. I prayed a confession of Jesus as Lord when I was about twelve, but there was no real heart change in my life.

Throughout my teen years, I continued to be dispassionate about church and had almost no relationship with the Lord into my young adult years. Basically, for thirty-eight years I was a nominal Christian at best, but probably not a Christian at all. I continued to be regular in church attendance, but, again, I did this more out of habit than out of a desire for a relationship with the Lord. It was just the thing to do. I eventually came to the point in my faith journey where I did not believe that the Lord existed. Ironically, even while I doubted the existence of the Lord, I was concerned about an eternity in hell should I die in that state of unbelief. I believed the few prayers I offered were no more than speaking to the air.

All the while, I was doing a great job of looking like a good Christian. Outwardly, to the world, I looked great. I had presented a great façade of the Christian faith. I often surmised that if I had died, people would have said over my casket that I was a great worker for the Lord in those years. I attended church every week, taught Sunday school, and even held nearly every church office at one time or another. I had the form of Christianity without the substance of faith residing in my heart. I was spiritually dead. No one could judge this book by the cover, except the Lord. I was a master of disguise.

I eventually confided to my pastor that I doubted the existence of Jesus. He asked if I would attend a Christian renewal weekend called Walk to Emmaus. The lame prayer in my agitated state before leaving for the Emmaus weekend was, “God, *if you are there*, I need something.” I would not fully acknowledge the existence of God but prayed a hedge prayer just in case. In other words, “I don’t even really believe in you, but just in case you are there, something has to give!” I really did not want to be bothered at the moment I uttered that pathetic but heartfelt prayer in a half-gruff voice. It was a sad little prayer, but it was authentic—and the Lord responded to truthful authenticity.

Over the weekend the Holy Spirit began to stir within me. At one point I simply prayed, “Jesus, help me.” With that simple prayer, the undeniable presence of the Holy Spirit came upon me. I received cleansing from within. I felt the presence of the Spirit in my body. There was a churning within, and I instinctively knew that the Holy Spirit was delivering me from the grip of the enemy and the disbelief and blindness that had held me captive for so many years.

In the words of John Wesley, “I felt my heart strangely warmed.”¹⁷ Hard tears welled up from within, and a flood

¹⁷ Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.vi.ii.xvi.html>, accessed November 29, 2014.

came bursting forth from my heart. There was an instantaneous understanding that the Holy Spirit had touched me even though I had not previously understood the ways of the Holy Spirit. I unequivocally knew for the first time in my life that Jesus was real. I grasped how the Holy Spirit operated in the life of a person. From that moment on, I realized the love of Christ.

I had not responded to the calls of the Lord in the first years of life, but the sleeper had finally been awakened. I came home from that weekend and, in the solitude of a quiet house on Monday morning, I laid down on the living room floor and cried out to God. I prayed, “I submit to you, Lord. I give you my life; do with me whatever you want. I am yours.” I meant it with everything within me. That weekend undoubtedly changed my life—I have never been the same since. I started pouring over the Bible and learning everything I possibly could about God and what his Word had to say. It was a time of great spiritual growth and discipleship.

I give this testimony to illustrate why the Lord said to me at Cane Ridge, “Many are deceived because they go through the motions outwardly. *You did it . . . you understand!*” I really do understand. I fully understand what it means to go through the motions of a life of faith without any heart involvement. I did it for many years, and I was good at convincing people. I have seen others do it, too. It scares me to think that there are many people who look good on the outside but who are dried up on the inside.

The reason people do not realize the status of their condition before the Lord is because of the deception of the enemy. Many are deceived to think that church attendance and looking good are all it takes to be in relationship with the Lord. It is not so much that people are trying to be manipulative and trying to appear as one thing, when actually they may be something else entirely. They simply do not know better

because of deception. Church attendance without relationship is simply not enough.

If the enemy can keep us from moving our citizenship from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God, then he has succeeded in his first plan. However, if people have confessed Jesus as their Savior, then if Satan can deceive them into believing that they have a relationship with Jesus when they really do not, that is his next best plan. Satan is the father of lies, and he comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus warned that people are easily deceived. The truth of the matter is that people are easily deceived because they do not know the Word of God.

Deception

Deception is a tool used by the enemy to mislead believers, to make believers think that a lie is the truth, or, even worse, to get believers to not care if something is a lie or the truth in the first place. This is so dangerous because of the very nature of deceit. An outright, far-fetched lie is often very easy to spot. However, the most cunning deception is the one that is closest to the truth but off just a little bit: a half-truth or masked untruth. This is easy to see with the encounters between Satan and Eve in the garden and between Satan and Jesus in the wilderness. Satan was cunning enough in both instances to closely repeat the Word of God, either spoken or written, but changed it materially enough so as to make it a lie.

The temptations Satan presented to Jesus and to Eve are of the same nature. Both Jesus and Eve were tempted with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Satan first tempted Christ to make the stones into bread, which is the lust of the flesh, after he had been fasting forty days and was hungry. Next, Satan showed Jesus the kingdoms of the world and offered to give him authority over them, which was the lust of the eyes. Finally, Satan took

Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple and told him to throw himself off because the angels would not let him dash his foot on a stone, which was the pride of life. The temptations of Eve fit the same mold and method. Satan challenged her with the lust of the flesh because the fruit was good for food, the lust of the eyes because the fruit was pleasing to gaze upon, and the pride of life because the fruit would make her wise and give her the knowledge of God.

First John 2:15–17 teaches the nature of the temptations of Jesus and Eve by Satan. John writes,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

In both instances Satan distorted the written or spoken Word of God. If Satan can convince a believer that the Word of God says something other than what it actually says, he has deceived the believer. Eve was deceived and did not overcome the temptation of Satan. Jesus overcame Satan because he had a command of the Scriptures. Eve was easily deceived because she let Satan twist the words of God and did not stand on the conviction that God is truth and every man a liar (Rom. 3:4). The way to overcome Satan is by the Word of the Lord. We overcome Satan by the Word of God that we know, not the Word of God that we wish we knew.

Ephesians gives us the armor of God in order to stand against the enemy. When we don the armor of God, the only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:10–18). Every other piece of armor is

for defense. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one, or the helmet of salvation, are all for defense. The defensive weapons are for protection from the attacks of the enemy. They also offer us protection from wandering into personal sin. They prevent us from opening a door and allowing Satan legal access to our lives. However, when we want to be on the offensive against the kingdom of darkness, and eliminate the weapons of Satan's warfare, we do it with the Word of God.

What specifically is the Word of God that is the sword of the Spirit? It may surprise most believers that in the original Greek language of Ephesians 6:17, the sword of the Spirit is a *rhema* word, meaning the uttered word of God. Most believers assume that the sword of the Spirit is *logos*, the written word of God. Although many believers may not be familiar with the Greek concept of uttered words versus written words, the understanding of both is vitally important because God is still speaking today. Therefore when we don the armor of God, and take into battle the sword of the Spirit, we take with us the utterance of God for divine strategy against the enemy. Even so, We must guard that every utterance that we *think* we hear lines up with Scripture.

There is a difference between offense and defense: defense is to give no ground, hunker down, and protect what is already possessed; offense is to take ground and be a commanding force in the battle. Those on offense control the battle. The reason that the only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit is because it is the weapon of our warfare against the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus warns believers that deception will arise and even believers will be deceived. In Matthew 24:4–5, Jesus said, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” He gives us fair warning that there are those who will seek

to lie and deceive, and even false messiahs will arise in the last days. But we are to watch out for that day, so that we will be alert: “Because of the increase of wickedness, *the love of most will grow cold*, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24:12–13). Of course many will be carried away with wickedness and will lose the love of Christ within them. But those who stand firm on what God’s Word says will be saved.

Matthew illustrates that many plans of deception will arise in the last days—it will be hard even for the believer to distinguish between them all. But Scripture is very clear: God is *in* us, and we do not have to go anywhere to see him. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit will speak to us if we will only listen to him. The protection is for believers to know the Word, which will prevent us from growing cold in our hearts.

Jesus does not want the body of Christ to fall away, but sadly there will be those who will not stay connected to Jesus until the end because their love will grow cold from lack of consuming the Word of God. Jesus goes on to say,

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive *even the elect*—if that were possible. *See, I have told you ahead of time.*

So if anyone tells you, “There he is, out in the desert,” do not go out; or, “Here he is, in the inner rooms,” do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. (Matt. 24:24–28)

Lawlessness in ancient Israel occurred because the people did not keep the Book of the Law before their eyes. Jesus was referring to it here in the same way. Lawlessness occurs

when people do not know the Word. No one knows the hour or day when Jesus will return, but I can safely say that it is now closer than at any point in history. With each passing day, we get closer and closer to the second coming of Christ. With each prophecy that is fulfilled, we are that much closer.

Many people think that believers will be raptured before the tribulation. However, a careful reading of Scripture does not give a clear answer. After having studied the Scriptures about the tribulation and millennial reign of Jesus, from my understanding it is as clear as mud. Sorry to burst the bubble, but I say that to let those who are hanging on to someone else's statement of the rapture know that it may not be as clear as some make it out to be. If you are in doubt, check it out for yourself. Dig into it and see if you are convinced one way or the other.

There are Scriptures that support all theories of the rapture, whether pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation. Pre-tribulation rapture theories suggest that the church will be raptured before any tribulation events occur, meaning that the Christians will completely avoid the hardships of the tribulation. Mid-tribulation rapture theories suggest that Christians will endure three and a half years of tribulation but will be raptured before the three and a half years of the great tribulation. Post-tribulation theories suggest the rapture of the church will occur at the end of the seven-year-tribulation/great tribulation period.

Many suggest that Christians will not have to suffer anything in the end times and will be raptured before the tribulation, but I tend to think that Christians will be in for some rough times. There are too many Scriptures to alert the believers to be prepared for what may come and to avoid deception. One thing I do not know, however, is when Jesus will return: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Matt. 24:44).

Keep Watch

It is easy to become complacent in our walk of faith. Before we know it, we have wandered away from the relationship that we have had with Jesus and become dull in the spirit. Falling into sleepiness can be very dangerous. No one knows when the Lord will return, but it is apparent from Scripture that many will fall into sleepiness before that time. Believers are cautioned to watch and be ready for the return of the Lord. Jesus tells his disciples,

Therefore, *keep awake*—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: *Keep awake*. (Mark 13:35–37 NRSV)

Our command is very simple: keep awake.

Matthew 25:1–13 tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like ten virgins who went to meet the bridegroom. The virginal description indicates that they were all pure, and all were invited to the wedding. Referring to the bride of Christ, this parable was talking about the status of the church just before the return of the Groom, Jesus Christ. The bride of Christ consists of those who received Jesus as Lord and have been invited to the wedding of the Lamb.

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was

a long time in coming, and *they all became drowsy* and fell asleep.

At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.” “No,” they replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.”

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. “Sir! Sir!” they said. “Open the door for us!” But he replied, “I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.” Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

All the people were pure and cleansed, indicating they were part of the body of believers. There were ten in all, five who were wise and five who were described as being foolish. The foolish ones took no extra oil, which often represented the Holy Spirit throughout Scripture. The oil is the fuel that keeps the light burning; it is the anointing of God. The wise virgins took oil in the vessel (we are the vessels). Sincere believers who have worked to keep their relationship with Jesus alive are the wise ones with oil in their lamps, while lazy believers who go through the motions and have no heart relationship with Jesus are the foolish virgins with no oil in their lamps. When the bridegroom was delayed, *all* the virgins slumbered, both wise and foolish alike. Many in the body are sleeping without any care for the lost, hurting world around them.

The wise virgins did not lack the will to give oil to the others; rather, they lacked the ability. The relationship that one has with the Lord is not transferable to another. I have often said that God has no grandchildren—he only has children who have been adopted into the family by proclaiming that Jesus is their Savior and Lord. My parents' relationship with Jesus did not give me any oil in my lamp, and my relationship with Jesus will not give my children any oil in their lamps. Relationship is not transferable.

I heard Bill Johnson say in a sermon that he may pray to impart to people the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to Scripture; however, what cannot be given by impartation is his personal history with God. My history, my relationship with God, is not transferable to another person. I often hear people say they wish that they had the relationship that “so-and-so” had with the Lord. In reality, the reason that a person may not have the relationship that he or she desires is that they may not have invested the time and effort into building that type of relationship with Jesus.

One more troubling aspect of the parable of the virgins is that the five who went to get oil came back when the door was already shut and locked. They were invited into the feast but came too late! Matthew 25:11 says, “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’” The Lord will tell some who are expecting entry, after the door is already shut and it is too late, that he does not know them. He will tell them there is no opportunity to repent, there is no opportunity to be devoted, and there is no opportunity to make sure that there is no deception that will steal them away from the Lord.

It breaks my heart that in this passage there are 50 percent of the virgins, pure and invited to the wedding feast, who were denied entrance. Imagine if you went to church next Sunday morning, and the congregation was equally divided on both sides of the church. Also imagine if the Lord walked

in and said, “Everyone on the right side, come with me,” and he turned to everyone on the left side and said, “To tell you the truth, I do not know you.” It may be easy to be unconcerned when it is not personal. But it is personal. It becomes very personal when I realize that could be me, my loved one, my child, my spouse, or my friend! Look at your church on Sunday and imagine if that were to happen.

Church Is Not Enough

Jesus said to me at Cane Ridge that people have been deceived because they have put faith in church attendance. He said, “Do not put your faith in church attendance or the badges of Christianity.” Time and again, it is evident in Scripture that the *outward appearance* of relationship is not the same thing as the relationship itself. The badges of Christianity are those things that we wear on our chest like scouts who have passed a merit badge test. For example, not missing Sunday school for twenty years is a wonderful accomplishment to be sure, but it does not by itself indicate a true relationship with Jesus. Only those with a true heart relationship with Jesus will enter the kingdom of glory. The Pharisees were notorious for looking holy on the outside but having their cups dirty on the inside (Matt. 23:26).

A mere verbal profession of the lordship of Jesus without obedience to the will of God will lead many astray, and it is nothing more than self-deception. We see in Matthew that many people may exercise spectacular prophetic and miracle ministries without walking in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. They may find themselves on the outside of a locked door when the groom comes back. Not only are they separated from Christ, but the Lord also calls them “evildoers.” Look at Matthew 7:21–23:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “*I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*”

At the return of Jesus it will be too late to call on him. Sincere Christians are wise while hypocrites are foolish. I am sure that some who may end up being hypocrites never intended to be hypocrites when they genuinely gave their hearts to Jesus in the first place. The enemy is crafty and cunning, however, and he will try to trip us up so that we separate ourselves from Christ. It may come in many different forms, whether by busyness, deception, or outright laziness.

Wise and foolish behaviors are reflected in our spiritual condition. Having made a profession of faith without acting on it will lead us to separation from God. Even the wise virgins kept their lamps burning but got sleepy with the others. Too many dedicated Christians grow weary of doing good and keeping watch over their souls. This is an alarming thought for those of us who want to remain in a loving relationship with the Lord, because we are all subject to being overcome by the effort of keeping the light burning strong.

The midnight cry is a call to judgment. The groom who is coming will awaken everyone; even those who are ready will have to trim their wicks. An outward profession without a heart relationship will carry a person along in this world—but only so far. Vain outward appearance or even the joy of the accolades of humanity will soon be realized as fleeting. We are charged to attend to the business of making sure that we are ready to meet the one who created us. Not one of us

will stand with a companion on the day of our judgment. We will all stand alone, for we bear the responsibility of our own actions as we stand before the Judge of all the earth. We bear the responsibility of our own heart as God judges us.

The truth of this parable should stand as a shocking reality that there are many good, dirt-free, decent people in the church who are completely lost. Through negligence and neglect, many of those previously redeemed of Christ will fail to enter into the kingdom of God. The foolish virgins are the saved individuals who failed to make it in the doorway to eternity with God because they wandered away. They were looking for that which they could only get from Christ but failed to recognize that fact. Please, I beg you, do not give yourself over to idleness or neglect of the matters of the Spirit. The foolish virgins could have had the oil, but they did not. They had been wealthy in the Spirit, but in the end they found themselves spiritually bankrupt. The writer of Hebrews said,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us *run with perseverance the race marked out for us*. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, *so that you will not grow weary and lose heart*. (Heb. 12:1–3)

We must keep in relationship with Christ and keep doing what he asks of us for the kingdom of God. Even Paul talked about being disqualified in the end: “No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I

myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:27). We all must continue to work out our salvation:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Phil. 2:12–13)

We even see that the inner circle of Jesus fell asleep at the most critical moment of his ministry. Peter, James, and John slept in the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus poured out his heart to the Father in prayer. Jesus confirmed that the spirit was indeed willing but the flesh was weak. We might think that they would have sensed some electricity in the atmosphere, but Matthew 26:36–45 tells us that they gave in to the fatigue of the flesh:

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. *“Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?”* he asked Peter. *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* He went away a second time and prayed, *“My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.* So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing. Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, *“Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands*

of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

The spirit may have been willing, but the flesh was weak. Just think of it for a moment. They had worked all day preparing for the Passover, their bellies were full from the meal, then they finally stopped moving and had some downtime. Before they knew it, blissful snores were coming from the three devoted followers of Jesus—and they *were* devoted to him, make no mistake about it.

We had better watch out. Our spirits may be willing, too, but our flesh is weak, just like theirs. If those who were with Jesus every day could stumble, so can those of us who believe in him today. In both of the biblical stories mentioned above, the virgins and the disciples in the garden, the sleepers were devout followers of Jesus.

The Risk of a Greater Condemnation

When we go through the motions and appear outwardly righteous and holy but are barren of the things of the Spirit, we actually risk a greater condemnation and judgment. Those who uphold self more than God, for the notion of keeping a good appearance, will receive a greater condemnation. Condemnation is bad enough, but greater condemnation—no thank you! Mark 12:38–40 says,

As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. *They will receive the greater condemnation.*”

More than Salvation

Jesus said the relationship he wants with believers is more than salvation only. He told me at Cane Ridge to cry out to the body of Christ that the ears of believers would be opened and that people would hear and understand. He said, “My people are deaf; they do not hear me.”

There is more to Christianity than salvation and having a “golden ticket” to get in the pearly gates of heaven and walk on streets of gold. There is more to Christianity than a Sunday morning and Wednesday evening faith. There is more to kingdom citizenship on earth than salvation. Do not get me wrong—we must have salvation—but we cannot stop there.

Most Protestant theology stresses repentance as the means of coming into relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. After salvation, discipleship should grow in importance so as to further the relationship with the Lord. Jesus told the apostles in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18–20 to make disciples, *not converts*. Making disciples is a whole different process than making converts. Christians can be very numbers-oriented, and if there is a certain quota of salvations for the year, it has been a good year of ministry. I say that as a confession because I have personally walked in that fallacy as a pastor. Sometimes God does not want numbers. David was repentant before God for taking a count when God told him not to (2 Sam. 24:10). Jesus wants a relationship that is more than salvation. The question is, what is the *more* that Jesus wants in a relationship with a believer, over and above salvation? What is overlooked in the church is that God wants his children to hear directly from him and test with the Word?

The totality of the crucifixion story is foreshadowing the totality of Christian experience. The scourging of Jesus was for our healing (Isa. 53:4; 1 Pet. 2:24), the death of Jesus was to atone for our sins (Rom. 6:23; 2 Cor. 5:21), and the resurrection of Jesus is about Jesus taking back the authority

over the world that had been given to Satan by Adam and Eve in the garden (John 10:18; 11:25; Rom. 6:4). The whole story of the torture (healing), death (atonement), and resurrection (power and authority) reflects the life of a believer. If a believer stops at the atonement for sin as obtained by Christ with his death, he or she misses the power of the resurrection and what that means for the believer's life and walk of faith. Jesus recaptured all authority that had been handed over to Satan in the Garden of Eden, which means that believers overcome the lies, tricks, deceptions, taunts, fears, and harassment of the enemy.

There is more to a relationship with the Lord than salvation. Failure to move beyond salvation is shortchanging the Lord, it is shortchanging the believer, and it is seriously dangerous to believers who do not bear fruit. The problem with making converts rather than disciples is that people do not grow and mature into kingdom understanding.

What in the relationship is the *more* than salvation that Jesus is interested in? Jesus is Lord, he is King, he has a kingdom, and he wants to build his kingdom in the hearts of people. Without discipleship and understanding, however, he cannot build his kingdom in the hearts of his people. When people understand that their relationship with Jesus is more than salvation, they begin to understand the authority they possess. If people believe that relationship with Jesus is only about salvation, they stop far short of the plan that God has for his people to co-rule with him. I talk to many people who still are in bondage to the enemy or who are fearful of what the enemy wants to do to them. They have no revelation that they are the possessors of power and authority of Jesus Christ. They have no revelation that by his grace they can defeat the enemy.

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus one night in John 3, he talked about seeing and entering the kingdom of heaven. Jesus did not talk about a future situation; he was talking about presently entering the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven

is within us, the kingdom of heaven is now, and the kingdom of heaven is for all believers. In God's kingdom, we walk in relationship with the Lord, and we walk in authority over the powers of darkness—there is no disease, and there is no lack.

Relationship more than salvation is a relationship of understanding. The kingdom of heaven is a spiritual realm that is going on all around us. Some people have the ability to perceive it while others do not. However, I do know this: God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). If some see, perceive, and experience the kingdom of God on earth, then everyone has the ability to see, perceive, and experience the kingdom of God on earth, as well.

Spiritual Ears Open

There is a cry for people to hear the word of the Lord. The way the Lord has always worked in humanity is for ears to be opened so that people will hear and understand. The message and goal of the Bible is to emphasize the process of the Spirit of God who reveals his will directly to the hearts of believers. An open, receptive relationship with the Holy Spirit enables believers to walk in intimacy with God. Most Protestant theology stresses repentance as the means of coming into a relationship with the Lord Jesus, and diminishes the importance of actually hearing from God. The Lord is a rewarder of those who seek him (Heb. 11:6). Throughout Scripture, the word of the Lord often came to his people, and they were directed by those words.

Throughout biblical history, likewise, the Lord has given revelation to the people he chose to be receptacles of that revelation. The prophet gave the message of God to the people, and the ones who were obedient responded to it. Jon Ruthven, a spiritual and academic mentor, stated that God's word came to the prophets in a dream or in an unspecified way, and

their faithfulness grew and was strengthened as that word was tested.¹⁸ This is seen with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Peter, Paul, Phillip, and John, to name only a few.

It also appears that in the covenant that was offered on Sinai, God gave the opportunity to the people to communicate directly with him. Ruthven suggests that this was God offering the Israelites what he later offered to believers in the New Covenant.¹⁹ Israel chose not to withstand the presence of God. They demanded mediated revelation through Moses rather than immediate or direct revelation by God to each individual.²⁰

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” 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.” The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was. (Ex. 20:18–20)

The New Testament understanding is that believers are not to refuse to listen when God speaks: “See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks” (Heb. 12:25). There is one mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus Christ (1

¹⁸ Jon Ruthven, *What’s Wrong with Protestant Theology: Traditional Theology vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2013), 29.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Tim. 2:5). According to Ruthven, the nature of the instruction from God is clear: our instruction is to learn how to hear the voice of God and respond to it appropriately.²¹ At Cane Ridge, Jesus said to me, “My people are deaf; they do not hear me. I called you because you listen. Call for a people who will listen intently. Never stop listening and talking to me.”

Believers who seek God will learn to recognize his voice and will be given specific instructions and commands, as well as guidance and ministry. Learning to hear the voice of God is a matter of revelation into the heart of a believer. Is it as simple as John 10:27: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” It is unlikely that the enemy will deceive a believer when he or she is hearing the word of God directly in their heart and testing it against the written Word of God. The revelation may come in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, hearing, mental impressions, dreams, visions, actually going into the presence of God, visitation by angels, or even by Jesus himself.

God will reveal his will and plan to believers. Amos 3:7 states, “Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.” It is the joy of Jesus that his people hear and know his voice. In Luke 10, after the seventy disciples returned from being sent out, Jesus praised Father God for the revelation that had been delivered to the disciples. God revealed hidden things to them—in other words, kingdom things. Many had desired to see what the disciples saw, but the disciples were blessed by God to be able to see and hear! Listen to the delight in Jesus as his disciples receive revelation from God:

²¹ Jon Ruthven, *What’s Wrong with Protestant Theology: Traditional Theology vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2013), 39.

In that hour *Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit* and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that *you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes*. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it.” (Luke 10:21–24 NKJV)

There is a word of caution in order here because Jesus gave a word of caution to the disciples. He told them not to be more thrilled that the demons were subject to them in the name of Jesus than they were that their names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.”

And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. *Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice*

because your names are written in heaven.”
(Luke 10:17–20 NKJV)

In other words, do not be more thrilled with the signs and wonders than with the *Giver* of the signs and wonders. Remember that not everyone who performs signs and wonders and says, “Lord, Lord!” will enter the kingdom of heaven. Everything, and I mean *everything*, comes down to a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Parables are the hidden treasures that show that the kingdom of heaven is here and now and is available to all believers. Jesus said, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matt. 13:11, 13 NKJV). There are those who hear but do not understand, and those who see but do not perceive. Matthew 13:14–15 quotes Isaiah, saying,

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, *lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.* (NKJV)

When people have the revelation of the kingdom in their hearts, they understand and realize the benefits of kingdom citizenship. When people perceive and hear in the spirit realm, healing becomes a reality. Jesus said in the above passage that when the revelation and perception of the kingdom comes to the believers, the result is that “I should heal them!” In other words, when we find what God has hidden, just waiting to be

discovered, we find the blessings and favor of God. It honors God that we seek out what he has left for us. Proverbs 25:2 says, “It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out” (NRSV). God hides it. When we find it, it is to our glory!

The War to Keep Us Deaf

The goal of the enemy is to keep us neutralized or in bondage so that we cannot have the revelation of the kingdom of God here and now. So many people say things like, “God does not talk to me like that.” The revelation is always there, but it is up to the believer to seek it out. Elisha’s servant could not see the things of the Spirit of God until Elisha prayed for his eyes to be opened. When his eyes were opened, he saw what was there all along. When we seek to know, we will see what is already happening in the spirit world.

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my lord, what shall we do?” the servant asked. “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “*O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.*” Then the LORD opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kgs. 6:15–17)

This is really talking about the gift of prophecy. If you think about what happened in the Old and New Testaments, Satan always tried to kill the prophets because they are the voice of God to the people. Biblical history is full of people like Pharaoh, Jezebel, Ahab, Herod, the Pharisees, and many

others who wanted to silence the word of God to the people through the prophets. The life of a biblical prophet was hard—they were beaten, starved, thrown into prison, hunted, tortured, ostracized by the community, and often gave their lives to proclaim the word of God.

Satan's intention is to keep the word of God from coming into the hearts of the people. There is a spirit in the kingdom of darkness whose primary job is to keep the people from hearing the voice of God and proclaiming it to the people—the deaf and dumb spirit. Mark 9:25 reveals this spirit: "When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: 'Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!'" (NKJV). The attack of this spirit includes physical deafness, but it is much more than that—it is spiritual deafness as well. This spirit tries to kill people. It is the will of God for people to hear, receive, and act on what he tells us. Press in, dear one, and hear the word of the Lord today. Do not let our enemy keep you deaf any longer!

Discern, Judge, and Seek

The Lord told me that revelation would increase and that I should discern, judge, and seek. This is a word for all believers. We are to test every spirit to make sure that revelation is from God. That means, first and foremost, every revelation must line up with the written Word of God in Scripture. The Bible tells us how to test revelation by testing the spirit to discern if it is from God:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ

has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; *for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.* They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:1–5 NRSV)

Once we hear the voice of God, it is the believer's job to follow the word of the Lord and to be radically obedient to what he is asking of us. The revelation of the kingdom into the hearts of people depends on it.

Conclusion

Beloved in the faith, I am concerned for the church. The Lord said, "My people are good people but are easily deceived." My mother, father, spouse, or child may be living a devoted life of faith, but if I am not doing anything for the kingdom in my own right, deception abounds for me to think all is well. Sometimes we can become lax and try to ride the coattails of another without even really thinking about it. Treasured one, there are no coattails to heaven. We cannot put faith in church attendance or the badges of Christianity—merely going through the motions. Only those with a true heart relationship with Jesus will enter the kingdom of God's glory. God does not have grandchildren. Even as much as my parents and grandparents loved and served the Lord, I cannot

be justified by their actions. When I stand before the Lord, I will stand alone.

Survey your personal devotion to the Lord. What are you personally doing for the Lord to advance the kingdom of God on the earth today? More importantly, what are you personally doing to have a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ? It will be a solitary place before the throne of judgment. Salvation is free but discipleship is not. Serving God costs us something. *Many are deceived because they go through the motions outwardly.*

I had many years of going through the motions of looking good on the outside but being spiritually dead on the inside. I went through a good portion of my adult life confusing church attendance with relationship with Jesus Christ. I did not even understand the salvation relationship, much less that the relationship Jesus wants is more than salvation. He wants us to have a kingdom-minded understanding of relationship. Christ is calling for his people to cry for ears to be opened so that people will hear and understand. People are deaf; they do not hear what he is saying. He is calling for a people who will listen intently. Discern, judge, and seek as we move onward to radical obedience.

Chapter 5

RADICAL OBEDIENCE



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

As I was pushing myself off the floor, I said, “Lord, I really do not understand. I do not mind waiting longer than thirty seconds.” He said,

I know you do not understand; you do not have to understand. Yours is to be obedient to whatever I tell you, even if you do not understand or it seems silly. You lie down because I tell you. You get up because I tell you. You are learning to follow every little command. Hear me. Follow me. Listen to me, for I will guide your every step. I will guide every step of those who listen and obey. This is why a simple, unencumbered life is so important. All those things that take attention prevent obedience. Complete obedience is necessary for one to be useful to me. Partial obedience is disobedience. Listen and obey!

I began singing, “Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

The Lord said, “Read the words to the song.”

What Is Radical Obedience?

The term *radical obedience* often rolls off of our tongues with great ease, but actual radical obedience is much harder to do than it sounds. The only difference between the extraordinary men and women of Scripture and those who were ordinary is the radical obedience to follow the will and Word of God. Make no doubt about it: radical obedience comes with some personal costs.

The Cross: The Arthur Blessit Story is a documentary about the life of a man who carried a twelve-foot wooden cross in *every* nation in the world.²² Blessit literally walked over 40,000 miles and suffered untold hardships over a forty-year period. Undoubtedly, he had the greatest measure of joy, along with the hardships he endured. There were times when he was certain that death was imminent. He walked through war zones and in hostile territories. He walked through an impenetrable jungle, so dense and harsh that no one had made it through before. He walked because God did not tell him to take a boat—he told him to walk. He made a very simple but profound statement about the radical and even dangerous things that he did: “The safest place to be is in the will of God!” Sometimes doing the will of God can be difficult and extremely challenging. Sometimes we do not understand, but we do not have to understand what God calls us to do. And sometimes others do not understand, but they do not have to understand, either. I agree with Arthur Blessit: the place I want to be is in the will of God—it does not matter where that is.

I think that there are two basic paths where we can engage in radical obedience. The first is to follow the Word of God as closely as possible. In other words, we are to follow the

²² Arthur Blessit, *The Cross: The Arthur Blessit Story*, special ed. DVD, directed and produced by Matthew Crouch, Gener8Xion Entertainment.

commands of God as outlined in the Bible. The second is hearing God and acting on his given direction for the moment. This is more thought-provoking because it not only involves following the scriptural Word of God but also hearing from God and doing what he says, even if it is uncomfortable. Receiving a word of knowledge or having discernment in the moment must always line up with the written Word of God. God will never tell his people to do something that goes against the teaching of Scripture.

Lord, I Do Not Understand

When I first arrived at Cane Ridge and was trying to silently wait before the Lord, I was having a hard time sitting still. After sitting for about two minutes, I said, “Lord, this is hard.” When I started to lie down before the Lord, I thought that I would have to wait on him. Every time I would lie down, the Lord would quickly tell me to get up and write. When I was done writing, I would lie down on the floor again. As I was pushing myself off the floor for the fourth time, I remember being up on my hands and knees saying, “Lord, I really do not understand. I do not mind waiting longer than thirty seconds.” That was when the Lord told me that my job was not to understand; my job was simply to obey — immediately. He said, “Yours is to be obedient to whatever I tell you, even if you do not understand or it seems silly.”

Sometimes we do not understand what the Lord is telling us to do or why he is telling us to do it. It may seem nonsensical to us to act in a certain way. For the believer the question becomes: am I willing to do whatever it takes to be obedient to God? I have been tested on this many times.

A dear friend told me a story about difficult obedience. While she was in prayer one day, God asked her, “Are you willing to look like a fool for me?” She answered affirmatively. Later that day, she went to a graduate-level masters of

theology class where she was the only woman in the class in a university with Cessationist beliefs, meaning that the basic belief was that the Holy Spirit ceased to operate after the New Testament was written. The theology of the men in the class was that the Holy Spirit does not speak in the current age, but that the dispensation of the Holy Spirit was for the New Testament era only.

Knowing that it would be difficult, she told them about a dream she had from the Lord. At first she was hesitant to go against the crowd until she remembered what God had asked of her. Strengthened by the resolve that she had received earlier, she continued to tell the dream. The men in the class began to snicker at her and make fun of her. The professor stopped them all. He chastised the men and began to teach them about dreams from God in Scripture and throughout church history. As a result of her telling about the dream, ministries opened for her. Some in the class even received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Kingdom work was done because she was willing to look foolish in the eyes of men. When God calls us to radical obedience, we never know how it is going to turn out, but we have to be willing to look like fools for Jesus. My friend was eventually vindicated in the end, but it could have turned out that she was not. She did not know the outcome when she started, but she was willing to risk looking foolish for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Many times I have experienced the quandary of looking good before humanity or being willing to look like a fool for the sake of the kingdom of God. The Lord put me in an uncomfortable situation when he asked me to do something that I knew would be hard for a particular body of believers to understand. I asked for permission, and I was obedient to the will of God, as I knew it to be.

A few weeks later, I woke up in the wee hours of a Sunday morning with some agitation that the Lord would again ask

me to do something uncomfortable like that again. In a semi-sleep state of consciousness, I feared that the Lord would give me a hard assignment. After a few minutes of worrying about how I would handle the situation, I had an epiphany—the light bulb suddenly came on. I realized I was not totally sold out to God. I was standing on pride, fear of being rejected, and the fear of being misunderstood. We may be uncomfortable, but we have to decide if we are willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of God’s kingdom. Do I want to be obedient to God more than I want to avoid an uncomfortable situation? I realized that eternity is a long time, and I wanted to live my life fully for eternity more than for the temporary satisfaction of not stepping on the toes of others, or of avoiding what some would call embarrassment.

I do not think that Jesus is going to unnecessarily put us in awkward situations or cause us to do things that are outside of our comfort zone for no reason at all. The difference is that Jesus knows the full story, whereas we only know what we can see. We are called to “walk by faith, and not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). He knows what is best for us, and he knows what is best for the kingdom of God. In the Cane Ridge Meeting House, it was one thing to pop up and down on a rustic wood floor in an empty ancient log cabin when no one was there, but it is something altogether different to be willing to look foolish in front of people. When I told one friend about the Cane Ridge experience, she joked, “You know, they probably have a security camera.” At that point I did not care. I was so thankful to hear what Jesus had to say to me. But even if they did have a camera, it is still easier to be obedient when it does not involve looking idiotic in front of family, friends, or a large congregation.

Even Jesus was willing to take ridicule for the sake of love. People did not understand him, and that was just fine with him. When we are willing to do something radically obedient for the sake of the kingdom of God, it really gets

down to what resides in our heart—love. Do we love God more than we love our appearance before others? Do we love people enough to do something uncharacteristic of us for the sake of the kingdom of God? If we love people and we love God, we will do whatever he asks of us—no matter how silly or strange it may seem at the time.

Some of the more strange commands in the Bible included the taking of Jericho (Josh. 6), going to wash in a pool after Jesus smeared a paste made out of dirt and spit (John 9), Naaman dipping seven times in the Jordan River to be cleansed of leprosy (2 Kgs. 5:14), or Ezekiel laying on his right side for three hundred and ninety days and his left side for forty (Ezek. 4). What about Abraham offering his promised son as a sacrifice to God? Do you think Peter's wife thought it was strange when he and his brother, Andrew, left their nets by the Sea of Galilee to follow Jesus? What about Papa Zebedee, when his sons, James and John, left him holding the nets? Do you think it is possible that he would have shaken his head and muttered something about his fool-hardy and rash sons? If someone did any of those things today, we would call them radical and sold out, and in reality that is what they were: radically obedient. The pages of Scripture are full of people who did whatever it took to present the message of God and be obedient to him.

If we are willing to look foolish by worldly standards, we will be in great company with a lot of noteworthy people. Put yourself in the place of a few people in the Bible and really stop to consider what they went through on a personal level. Imagine the ridicule that Noah received while building the ark for a hundred and twenty years. It had never rained on the earth before the ark was built (Gen. 6). People had to be thinking that Noah and his boys had gone around the loony bend. Do you think that Noah ever took ridicule to heart? Well, I suppose, that as a human being it would have been

difficult for him not to experience hardship on some level. Perhaps he was used to it after sixty or seventy years.

What about Joshua and the Israelites marching around Jericho? Can you imagine how that looked to the entrenched warriors within the fortified walls of the city? I can hear their mocking tone, “Stop, you’re scaring us,” as they laughed hysterically (Josh. 6). What about the woman gathering jars for oil? Elisha told her to gather as many jars as she could because the oil would flow out of her meager supply. But the oil flowed as long as there was a receptacle for it. When all containers were filled, however, the oil stopped flowing (2 Kgs. 4). Can you imagine the disbelieving looks as she tried to explain to her neighbors why she needed to borrow their jars?

Why Obedience Is Necessary?

Obedience for the sake of love is a common theme throughout Scripture. We show our love of God by following his commands, which would include his written Word and the *rhema* word that comes from hearing the voice of God. The Lord, through the Great Commission, directed the apostles to teach obedience to their disciples in Matthew 28:20: “Teach them to *obey everything* I have commanded you.” If a believer is not in obedience, he or she is in rebellion.

For a believer, the most important part of obeying God is that it shows God how much we love him. Scripture is very clear that love of God and disobedience are inconsistent with each other. In John 14:23–24 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he *will* obey my teaching ... He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.” The hard truth is that obedience is our expression of our love of the Lord. If we say that we love the Lord but fail to be obedient, our actions speak louder than our words and contradict our true relationship with him. The Bible also says,

The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:4–6)

Christlikeness is manifested in radical obedience.

The more an individual obeys God’s laws, the more truly and fully do they show their love for him. Obedience is the test of whether or not we live in God. We cannot live in God without obedience. Pride and radical obedience are mutually exclusive; it is an oxymoron to assume that a person could be pridefully rebellious and radically obedient at the same time.

Obedience and God’s Grace

Not only do we show our love for God by being obedient to what he commands, but we show our love for other people by being obedient to God, too. One of my favorite verses is 1 Peter 4:10, which says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (NKJV). The Amplified Version really illustrates what is being said here

As each of you has received a gift (a particular spiritual talent, a gracious divine endowment), employ it for one another as [befits] good trustees of God’s many-sided grace [faithful stewards of the extremely diverse powers and gifts granted to Christians by unmerited favor].

When a believer listens and does what God says, using the gifts of the Spirit, that person gets to co-administer the

very grace of God. This is not to say that is the only way that God's grace is given; it is just one way. God allows believers to minister to others, and God's grace is the result. We are (or at least can be) administrators of the grace of God.

Looking at the Gospels and the book of Acts, the works of Jesus and the apostles are done by and through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For example, when the adulterous woman was brought before Jesus, the Pharisees wanted to stone her. Jesus operated in the gift of wisdom, which is knowing a perfect solution to a troubling and difficult situation, thus forgiving her and reminding her to sin no more. He also operated in the gift of knowledge (knowing something that one could not have known without the direct intervention of the Spirit of God) with the woman at the well. He perceived by the power of the Spirit that she had five previous husbands and was not married at the time. Every time he perceived the thoughts of others, he was acting in knowledge or discernment. Jesus operated in miracles frequently when he overcame the weather, multiplied food, raised the dead, and so forth. The gifts of the Spirit are one of the ways that we show the love of God to others. If we are rebellious and fail or refuse to use our gifts for others, we may be withholding the grace of God from hurting people who are in need.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is by an example from a jail ministry in which I was involved. I received permission from the jailer to teach a series of four classes about the gifts of the Holy Spirit to female inmates. One day during class, the Lord gave me a word of knowledge to allow me to know that an inmate had a problem roughly in the area of her sinus region—her upper cheeks, across the bridge of her nose, and up to her eyebrows. Actually, I saw (in the Spirit) a dark shadow across that area, which I thought was a demonic presence. I had been with her two previous days, but I had not seen it until that very moment. I asked her if she had a problem in that area of her face, assuming a sinus problem.

She told me that she had suffered two black eyes a few weeks ago during an altercation with another inmate. The bruising was healed up, but she continued to have a lot of pain in her eyes. I told her that I wanted to pray for her when we finished the lesson. After the lesson was over, we prayed, but I forgot to pray about her eyes. When the Lord gives a word of knowledge, in my experience, it means that he wants to do a work of healing in that area at the particular time the word is given. The Holy Spirit is prepared to act, otherwise, why would he give revelation about the matter? The Lord wanted to do a work of healing in her eyes, but we did not press in for it. As soon as I left the jail, I remembered that I did not pray for her eyes.

The next time I went back (I was actually teaching on healing), I stopped the lesson and prayed for her to be healed as soon as I remembered the word of knowledge God had given me during the previous visit. When we finished the prayer, the young lady was blinking her eyes rapidly, testing them for pain. When asked what she was doing, she said that she had hardly been able to close her eyes in the few weeks since the injury because the pain was so severe, even making it hard to blink. She testified that before it felt like “shards of glass” were under her eyelid, but now she was pain free after prayer and she could hardly believe it.

I was not intentionally rebellious to the Lord by failing to act on the word of knowledge that he showed me. By failing to act on what the Lord showed me in that moment, I withheld what God wanted to do in that woman’s life. He wanted to use the gifts of the Spirit through me. Could God have healed her sovereignly? Absolutely! God does not need me (or anyone else) to do a work of healing, but in many instances he chooses to work through the vessels of willing people to minister to others. The young woman probably was not mature enough to know to ask for healing on her own or may not have had the faith to believe that it was even possible.

When we fail or refuse to do God's will, the object of God's grace (the hurting person) may not receive his grace. The inmate was eventually set free of pain and her eye healed, but she suffered with it for a few more days because I did not act immediately on what the Lord showed me. So in that case it was not grace withheld, it was grace delayed.

When we are obedient to God, we show him, not merely tell him, of our love. When we are obedient to God, we show love to other people and in so doing show love for God. Do you remember the separation of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31–46? Jesus divided those who had shown grace and mercy to others from those who had not. In showing love for others, they were showing love for Jesus. Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). The sheep fed, nurtured, invited, clothed, visited, and nursed those in need. The goats did not. The sheep went to eternal reward, but the goats went away into eternal damnation. Sometimes radical obedience does not look like some of the strange acts in the Bible, but it will stretch us out of our comfort zone.

Several years ago, we were having a revival in our church. To be frank, there was not a lot happening in the revival. It had gone on several nights, and there had not been one person to come to salvation. As we were singing the last song on the last night, the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask if the revival could go on for another night. I talked to the lady next to me in the pew. She agreed that would be great to continue, but she did not move. We sang another stanza and, when she did not move, I said, "Well, do something." She said, "*You* do something." I was a church member with no authority and a bit timid. I gulped and stepped out of the pew. I walked forward as if I were facing a firing squad. I whispered to the pastor to see if we could go on another night, and the evangelists agreed that we would continue on for another night.

The next night twelve people gave their lives to Jesus. My two daughters were among the twelve. The point is this: God gave me a task. I tried as best I could to pawn it off on someone else, but it was not her job to do. It was my job to do. I would never have known the blessing that I would have missed if I had not been obedient to what God said to me. I would never have known that my daughters and ten other people would come to know the Lord that night. I can only see what God knew while looking in the rearview mirror—we usually do not get to look at God’s plan through the windshield. It is only after we have done what he asked of us that we discover the plan he had all along.

Listen to Me

The Lord said, “Hear me. Follow me. Listen to me, for I will guide your every step. I will guide every step of those who listen and obey.” It is truly impossible to obey God if we cannot hear him. When God communicates with us, other than through the Word of God, we are dependent on how well we intercept the message and rightly judge its contents.

In Scripture, there are numerous instances in which God communicated his will directly to an individual. If God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, do we not believe that he is still communicating with people in that way now? When God has a job for us to do, he may speak directly to us. He may communicate with us through a mental impression, a thought in our minds or hearts, or sometimes he will even speak in an audible voice.

In John 12:28–29, Jesus prayed,

“Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The crowd there heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had

spoken to him. Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine.”

The people present that day heard different things, which seems to paint a picture that hearing the voice of God may be distorted. When our hearing is distorted and the message is not received, obedience cannot occur. Isaiah gives a wonderful understanding of restoration upon hearing the voice of God, where he shows that the blessing of God comes in hearing and discerning his voice. When a person listens and hears, life is released. God’s ways and thoughts are higher than our understanding (Isa. 55:9). When we discern and act on his ways and thoughts, a kingdom purpose is advanced:

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:2–3, 10–11)

We discern the voice of God by the Spirit of God within. Isaiah 42:1–2 proclaims, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; *I will put my Spirit on him* and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.”

In the New Testament God spoke audibly that believers should listen to the Son:

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him!*” (Matt. 17:5)

We do not always hear God audibly; sometimes the message may be in a small internal voice. The issue is one of hearing God’s still, small voice deep within our spirits. These leadings tell us what the Spirit wants us to do next. The Lord may tell us to give a message to a total stranger, or that we are to give \$100 to the lady in the next booth at the restaurant.

The important thing is that we have to learn to listen and discern the difference between the voice of our flesh, the voice of the enemy, and the voice of God. We are called to test every spirit to make sure what we are hearing is the Spirit of God. The believer has to be proactive in discerning the nudging inside of his or her head. Every thought we have that does not come from God must be demolished and taken captive. Paul admonishes us,

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish *arguments* and every *pretension* that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every *thought* to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3–5)

As we learn to hear God and are more obedient to act on the messages he gives us, he will tell us more and give us

more authority and responsibility in the kingdom. Obedience brings increase in our lives.

However, it is disobedience not to seek to hear the voice of God or understand his commands. Jeremiah said, “To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it” (Jer. 6:10). It is dangerous to refuse to listen to God. When we do not listen to God, he may not listen to us in our time of need. Look what Zechariah said about not paying attention to the voice of God:

But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen ... So the LORD Almighty was very angry. “When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,” says the LORD Almighty. (Zech. 7:11–13)

We are blessed when we hear with our spiritual ears and understand with our hearts. Matthew 13:17 talks about the blessedness of being able to hear from God: “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” The things of God are spiritually discerned, which means the person without the Spirit of God cannot hear or discern them. The things of God are foolishness to one without the Holy Spirit. Look at this passage about spiritual perception:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for

those who love him—but *God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 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. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:9–16)

Once we learn to hear the voice of God, obedience dictates that the conversation with the Spirit is an ongoing state of affairs. The Lord delights in our obedience more than he delights in our sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). He will tell us exactly what to do when we tune in and listen to his voice inside our hearts. Isaiah said,

Although the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear

a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.” (Isa. 30:20–21)

The sheep know the voice of the shepherd, just like the children of God recognize his voice. John perfectly describes what is it like to hear the voice of the Spirit inside our hearts:

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the *sheep listen to his voice*. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, *and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.* (John 10:2–5)

John 10 gives some assurances about knowing and hearing and discerning the voice of the Master. It also gives assurances that the sheep who know the Shepherd’s voice will not be led away because “they will never follow a stranger.” The real issue here is about the sheep knowing the Shepherd’s voice; there is protection from following the wrong voice when we know the voice of the Shepherd.

Hear Me

The day before I went to Cane Ridge, I wanted to spend dedicated time in prayer with the Lord all day. I battled (not very effectively) distraction after distraction and taking care of things that popped up and seemed like they needed to be dealt with. I had not been able to get time to pray, worship, and seek his face like I had wanted. After 2:00 p.m., it was time to drive to town to pick up my son from school. I prayed this prayer, “Lord, I just wanted to be with you all day. I just

wanted to get alone with you.” Almost immediately, the voice of the Lord said, “I am in you; I am with you always.” It was so real that I looked around to see who was talking to me.

I know exactly where I was on the road when this took place. As the Holy Spirit spoke those words to my heart, I had a new heart revelation about hearing the voice of the Shepherd. I started talking to him in a new conversational way. The revelation opened up a whole new way of hearing from the Lord and communicating with him often. I suddenly realized what it means to hear his voice and recognize it.

I instantly had the understanding of the Spirit living in me, which took on a whole new meaning in that moment. The idea of the Holy Spirit living within me moved from head knowledge to heart knowledge. I also had instantaneous understanding that every thought that crossed my mind, and that I grabbed hold of to chew on for a while, was a conversation the Holy Spirit was privy to. These revelations led me to an ongoing communication with the Holy Spirit and changed my daily walk and ministry.

I understand now in a more personal way what it means for the sheep to know the voice of the shepherd. I pray for every believer to know the voice of the Lord and to learn to act on it, discern it, and be obedient to it. Upon hearing the voice of God in that manner and being obedient, I have a new understanding of what it means to be a slave of Christ Jesus.

In Romans 1:1, and in other locations in Scripture, the apostle Paul describes himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. When we are called to that level of obedience and our life is no longer our own—we have died to personal desires—we are indeed servants of the Most High God. I can best describe this in a series of events that occurred when I was in Brazil.

I was on a prayer team on a foreign mission and healing crusade. A man with a terrible and debilitating skin disease was the first to come to my prayer line. His entire body was covered with heavy clothing, except for his face, neck, and

hands. Every portion of his exposed skin was white and scaly, and in addition his neck was covered with circular half-dollar-sized patches that were solid white and raised up. They were very distinct patterns of diseased skin. Even his lips and ears were afflicted. He raised his shirt to expose his belly, which was completely covered with the white affliction, but in some places his skin had turned black. I had never seen anything like it in my life. Every inch of his body was covered with the disease. He told me that he contracted it from other people, so I knew it could be contagious.

The Lord gave me compassion for him; I could see the devastation of having such a condition. I told him with complete sincerity that I loved him and that Jesus loved him, too. I talked to him and prayed to break off the shame and humiliation of his condition. He smiled and shook his head knowingly—he was precious. After I had prayed for him and he was getting ready to leave, the Lord told me to hug him. Up until that point, I had touched only his clothing and avoided touching his skin. I reached out to hug him, much to his surprise. I have to tell you it was not a full hug, but it was almost an “air hug,” a hug with a good distance of separation between us. (I reached in and he hesitated at first, so I hesitated. Then he reached in when I hesitated halfway through.) I repented almost immediately for not being wholehearted in my obedience.

As we were on the return bus trip later that night, a lady told me about Saint Francis of Assisi. He encountered a leper and was repulsed by him. However he wanted to be obedient to God, and he got off his horse so he could get close to the leper. The leper held out his hand to receive money, which he gave him, but Francis also kissed him. Saint Francis got on his horse to leave and looked back to find that the leper was gone.

Over the next two days, I could not get the man off my mind. I wanted to go back to the church so that I could see him again. I prayed for him several times over the next day or

two. My assigned group was going to a different church for ministry, but I asked if I could tag along with another group so that I could go back to that church two days later. During the long bus ride, I went to the back of the bus to be alone and pray for him and ask the Lord to show me about how to minister to him. The Lord spoke to me, and gave me two Scriptures to read. I did not know the content of the Scriptures until I opened my Bible. The first one was 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." And the second one the Lord showed me was in Matthew 8, where the leper came to Jesus for healing. Jesus was willing to heal the man, "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" (Matt. 8:3). I knew Jesus was telling me to love him, and that meant touching him as a direct act of obedience to Jesus.

When I arrived at the church, I saw the man right away. I went straight to him and told him that I loved him. I shook his hand and told him that I had been praying for him. When the time of ministry came, my prayer line was long from the beginning, but he waited in my prayer line for about forty-five minutes. When he finally got to the front of the line, I held his hands during prayer and loved him the best I knew how. When it was time to separate, he reached out to hug me and I went full in and gave him a bear hug from Jesus.

The power of the Lord was in the room that night. Earlier, there was a swell of worship and devotion that simply changed the atmosphere. He felt the power of God come on him earlier in the night. I believe that he was healed, even though I never saw him again and I do not know his name. The Lord obviously had the man on his mind, moving through me with compassion.

During the bus ride on the way to the meeting, the Lord taught me a few other things. I came to the realization that if I surrendered fully to Jesus, it really makes no difference what happens to my physical body. My body is the vessel for the

Holy Spirit, and God can use it any way he sees fit. He must increase, but I must decrease (John 3:30). If he gives me a job and my body becomes afflicted in doing his will, it is no matter to me. In other words, if I am totally yielded to him, I will do what he says without being overly concerned about what may happen to me. It was freeing to take on the role of a servant and do what he asked without question or concern for myself. I have given my life to Jesus, which means that he has full use of my body as well. I also had faith that he would protect me and he did. I hugged the man without fear. I did not experience any affliction of my skin.

This puts me in the mindset of John Wesley's Covenant Prayer. Wesley prayed to be used by God or to be set aside. It is a tough prayer to pray with conviction, because if we love the Lord with everything within us, it is hard to pray for the Lord to put us aside or empty us. However, when we truly love God, we want to do his will more than we want our will to be done. Wesley prayed:

I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by you, or laid aside by you, exalted by you or brought low by you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and heartily yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine, and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.²³

²³ This was taken from <http://www.trinityannapolis.org/john-wesleys-covenant-prayer>, accessed October 23, 2013.

The Cost of Radical Obedience

Radical obedience may be hard, and it may be costly. Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Many believers think that sounds too radical and that the Scripture really does not mean what it plainly says. But I want to assure you that it does. If a believer puts anything—and I mean *anything*—in front of following Jesus, he or she is not a true disciple.

Salvation is free, but discipleship is not. Discipleship costs us something. There is a very real cost to serving Jesus, and very few people ever consider what being a disciple of Jesus actually means. For some it means leaving home, family, careers, and so forth. Not many people realize that serving Jesus costs us—and it if does not cost something, it may not be worth much. Just ask Billy Graham, Ian McCormack, Randy Clark, or others, who are away from home more than they are there, if there was a personal cost to traveling so much to spread the gospel message. Of course there was and is—there has to be. Many great leaders of faith travel more than two-thirds of the year, and it costs them—not only them but their families as well. But the Lord tells us to count the costs of discipleship in Luke 14:25–33:

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. *Will he not first sit down and estimate*

the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

There is a cost to following the Lord. David in the Old Testament wanted to buy the threshing floor so that he could build an altar where he could pray to the Lord God. When Araunah found out David’s intentions, he offered to give him his threshing floor for free. David refused to take it for free, saying that he would not offer the Lord that which cost him nothing. King David said to Araunah:

“No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; *nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.*” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. And David built there an altar to the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. *So the LORD heeded the prayers for the land, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel.* (2 Sam. 24:24–25 NKJV)

Look what happened when David offered God that which cost him dearly. It moved the heart of God, and the Lord answered David's prayers. Verse 25 starts with the word "so," meaning that it is reflective of what happened before. It is like saying *because* or *on account of*. It states, "So the LORD heeded the prayers for the land." There was a connection between David offering something that cost him and God heeding the prayers for the land.

I was pastor at a small United Methodist Church. We started very humbly with about fifteen regular members in attendance. By the blessing of God, the church started growing and many people came into membership in the four years I was there. When people decided that they wanted to join the church, I notoriously told them that membership had responsibilities and it was not a free ride. In other words, I made plain that membership came with obligations to the body of Christ, and, in particular, to that specific group within the body. I often joked that I was not trying to talk people out of it or run them off. I never had anyone say they would not pay the cost of membership, and, in fact, people who joined the church wanted and expected to have responsibility. The same is true in the larger body of Christ. Sometimes those who are evangelizing feel that they cannot be open about the cost of discipleship or people will be frightened away and not want to get saved. That is actually not true at all. People want to be attached to something that is going to hold them accountable.

I had been ministering and witnessing to a lady who was interested in Christianity. As an eleven-year-old girl, she felt coerced into making a confession of faith. She said the pastor often told her when she came to church that she was going to hell. At that time in her life, she said that she really did not understand what she did in making a confession of faith in Jesus; she only did it because she was scared and wanted to get the pastor off her back. She confessed that she did not experience any inward change at that time. After forty years, she

considered herself not saved; she was curious about the faith, and we had some good discussions about the Bible and Jesus.

Over the course of a few weeks, I asked her if she wanted to receive the Lord as her personal Savior. The second time I asked her this question, she said that she was interested but she did not know what was required of her. She actually wanted to count the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ before committing to his ways. I complimented her on counting the cost of discipleship before jumping in. She told me she had no idea what she did when she was eleven, but this time she wanted to understand what she was doing. Thankfully, after hearing about Jesus a few more times, she gave her heart to the Lord, knowing that it was going to cost her something.

The terrible truth in the body of believers is that many Christians do not understand that discipleship is *supposed* to cost something. Christians do not know that they are supposed to love Jesus more than their children or their spouse or their _____ (you fill in the blank). Family cannot come first in the Christian life. Security cannot come first. People, things, and the paraphernalia of this life cannot come first. Unfortunately, many believers have molded a relationship with Jesus into the convenience of personal schedules. For example, we have services at many different times so that our weekend schedule will not be impeded by church attendance.

John Wesley said, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.”²⁴ People who fear sin and desire to follow God above all else are willing to do anything to spread the gospel message.

²⁴ Quoted in E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, available at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bounds/power.XVII.html>, accessed January 16, 2015.

It pleases God when we give him that which costs us something. He does not want empty worship, routine, or mindless sacrifices. The Lord told the Israelites that their worship and their sacrifices had become a burden to him. Can you imagine God being so weary with our worship that he is ready to throw up his hands in disgust? Even our worship should cost us heart involvement. In Isaiah 1:11–14, the Lord says,

“The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the LORD. “I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—*I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon feasts and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.*”

Partial (or Late) Obedience Is Disobedience

It is one thing to delay obedience for the purpose of seeking clarification from God; it is quite another to just refuse to do what God has asked us to do or to change the way he said to do it because we think we know better than God. A prime example of this is when God commanded Moses to strike the rock so water would flow out of it to the people in the middle of the desert (Ex. 17:6). Later on, God told Moses to *speak* to a rock, and promised to make water flow in the desert again (Num. 20:8–12). However, the second time,

Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it. The glory of God was not revealed in that instance because Moses chose to strike the rock instead of obeying God and speaking to it. How much more would it show the power of God for Moses to speak and for the water to flow? Because of that one act of disobedience, God did not allow Moses to go with the people into the Promised Land.

The issue that bothers me about Moses is that he had been obedient for forty years, and, in the end, through one act of disobedience, his status was changed. I know that Moses loved God and that he did the work of God. He bore unbelievable hardships and paid a dear cost for following God. However, his years of service did not give him a “get out of jail free card.” He bore the consequences like any other disobedient, rebellious person. Moses soon died and rested with God. We take comfort that Moses rested with God, but his rash actions still had some earthly consequences. He was not able to enter the Promised Land with the rest of the Israelites. We never get so far along in our relationship with God that complete obedience is no longer necessary.

Another example of delayed obedience is when Sarah tried to help God by leaning on her own understanding when God promised her a son. Sarah became impatient waiting for God’s plan to become a reality. Instead of waiting on God, she took matters into her own hands and gave her maid-servant Hagar to her husband Abraham. A child was born from that union. In so doing, Sarah changed the course of human history.

Out of the liaison between Abraham and Hagar, Ishmael was born and another branch of the line of Abraham was formed. Out of Ishmael, the Islamic nations came forth (Gen. 16). We may not think that our rash actions will cause a transition in human history, but it did in that case. There have been wars and discord between the two lines of Abraham throughout history because of one person’s disobedience.

Conclusion

“God is God and we are not” is the line in a song written by a promising young artist, Emily Ramage. God’s ways are higher than our ways; his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. As much as we want to be kept in the loop, and sometimes we are kept in the loop, it is not incumbent on God to make every detail of his strategy known to his people. The Lord said to me at Cane Ridge, “I know you do not understand; you do not have to understand. Yours is to be obedient to whatever I tell you, even if you do not understand or it seems silly.” Ordinary people did extraordinary things for the Lord because they immediately obeyed when God spoke. We may miss the opportunity when the Lord gives an assignment if we stop to engage in a huge debate about why we are being asked to do whatever it is that he has asked us to do.

My father, Dr. Charles Victor Henry, was a soldier in the Korean War in the early 1950s. He was in heavy combat for nine months, and many of his fellow soldiers perished. I learned some military information from him. One thing he taught me was that a soldier did not question the order of a superior officer; he just obeyed what was ordered. Lives were at stake. Believers are in a war, and we are subordinate to the Lord Jesus Christ. When a superior issues an order to us to do something, there should be enough trust to just do it. When believers learn to follow every little command of the Lord, we become better foot soldiers.

Jesus said, “Hear me. Follow me. Listen to me, for I will guide your every step. I will guide every step of those who listen and obey.” There is a difference in hearing and following. To hear means that we receive the message that comes from the mouth of God. He speaks, and we listen and understand because we hear his voice. To follow means that we act on what we receive. Complete obedience is necessary for believers to be fully useful to the Lord. Partial obedience is disobedience. Trust and obey him today.

Chapter 6

GLORIFY GOD WITH PURITY OF LIFE



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

“Glorify me!” he said.

“Yes, Lord.”

“No, I mean really glorify me!” he said again.

“How, Lord?” I asked.

Live a spotless life, repent often, and live in truth. You already understand—no guile, 100 percent honesty. Good yesterday. Keep thoughts pure. My Spirit is in you knowing every thought, every word, every ugly thing. Crush ugliness, crush rebellion, crush flesh out of you. I will help you. It will take daily effort to crush the flesh so that you can be fully useful to me. By this pure life, my light will shine through, and I will be glorified. Receive no hurt from those who reject you. Love them, pray for them, minister to them if they will let you. Know the Word. I will bring up the tools to fight the enemy. Battle, battle! Do

not let the enemy have you, your mind, your thinking. There is no place in my kingdom for foul thoughts or self-serving thoughts.

The Holy Spirit in Me

The day before I went to Cane Ridge, I wanted to be with the Lord all day, but one distraction after another thwarted the plan. As I was driving to pick up my son from school, I prayed and confessed my heart-felt desire to spend time with him. As I conveyed in the last chapter, the Lord spoke and shook me to the core. He said, “I am in you; I am with you always.” The voice of God was so real to me in that moment. I looked to the passenger seat and in the back seat of the car to see who had spoken to me. The reason that I repeat that story here is that I had an epiphany moment that I knew that the Holy Spirit lived in me and was intimately aware of my inward most thoughts and actions. It only took me about a second to begin recounting some of the things I had let roam through my mind. The reason the Lord brought it up in this download was because he was talking to me about personal purity. At Cane Ridge the Lord said, “Good yesterday.” I knew he was talking about the revelation and repentance that followed the event of hearing his voice with such clarity for the first time.

As the Holy Spirit spoke those words, I had a new heart revelation that everything I did or said was in his presence. Of course, I had known it in my head, but suddenly I *knew* it in my heart. The knowledge of the Holy Spirit being aware of my private thought life suddenly became very real to me. I was suddenly filled with shame at the things that I had allowed myself to think about. Every time I get frustrated and fuss in my mind, get aggravated at the dog, or show an ugly side on the inside, the precious Holy Spirit is right there, observing the whole thing.

This revelation led me to implement two changes in my life: the first one that I mentioned in the last chapter is that I now have an ongoing conversation with the Holy Spirit who leads me and guides me in my daily walk and ministry. He counsels me when I am about to mess up or tells me not to say a word when the end result would be an uncharitable comment. It is such a blessed relationship with a new best friend who can speak plainly to me, love me, correct me, and lead me. The revelation of the Spirit and knowing his voice in a whole new way has opened new avenues of seeking the counsel of God.

The second thing that changed that day is that I now rush to crush impure thoughts that want to apprehend my thinking. Since I have a heightened awareness of the Holy Spirit within me knowing when ugliness comes up, my desire is to refuse to give in to impure thinking and to choose to take every thought captive.

No Guile

The Lord calls us to live spotless lives, repent often, and live in the truth. We talked about repentance in chapters 1 and 2, and it cannot be overstated how critical it is to come clean when we have wandered into sin. As soon as we realize that we have opened a door to allow the demonic realm access into our lives, we must close it as soon as possible. Repent often with heartfelt searching of personal wrongdoing, most of which may be in your thoughts or through your words.

While I was at Cane Ridge, the Lord said, “You already understand—no guile, 100 percent honesty.” The Lord had taught me about guile some time ago. I knew generally what guile was, but I began to look it up anyway. Guile is “treacherous cunning; skillful deceit; clever or crafty character or behavior; insidious cunning in attaining a goal; or crafty deception.” It is shady behavior.

Some time ago, I was reading about Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and I realized they were practicing guile. They were acting in a way to make something appear one way when it was actually another way. They sold a piece of land and made an offering of part of the purchase money to the ministry of the disciples. The problem occurred when they acted with guile and presented the offering as if it were the full price for the land. It was a gift to the ministry of which they could have given all or none. They were under no obligation to give it all, but in lying about the price they lied to the Holy Spirit.

As I contemplated this, I realized that I might be guilty of guile in simple ways. For example, if I were late to an appointment, when I arrived I might complain about the slow traffic, knowing all along that if I had left when I should have left then I would have been on time. In reality, there may have been slow traffic, but the point is that by saying the traffic was slow, I insinuated and made the situation look one way (I was an innocent victim of slow traffic and not intentionally rude by being late) when it really was another way (I left late and did not want to take responsibility for my actions).

Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit—they really did not *have* to give the money for communal living. Anytime we present something as one way to make ourselves look better or for any other self-serving reason, we are practicing guile. In reality, it is a lie, a deception. There is no such thing as a “little white lie.” Any lie is cunning and deceptive.

A few years ago, when the Lord convicted me of being aware of guile, I adopted a policy of complete transparency. When I am late because I left late, I say that was the reason. Anytime the impulse arises to put a spin on something to make myself look better than I really am, I resist the urge because the Holy Spirit told me, “No guile.” (I also do not make myself look worse than I am either, for that would be false humility.) This is a call to the body of believers to be

completely transparent and not spin anything to appear to be anything other than what it is in actuality. God is looking for purity of life in the body of believers. The Lord is saying, “Live a spotless life and repent often.” Living in truth means that we do not fudge on anything, even if no one else will know, because the Holy Spirit will know. He is calling his people to total honesty because anything else puts us in league with the father of lies, and gives him a measure of control over us.

Crush the Flesh

The Lord told me to keep my thoughts pure. He said, “My Spirit is in you, knowing every thought, every word, every ugly thing. Crush ugliness, crush rebellion, and crush flesh out of you.” He also told me that he would help me to stay pure. He said, “It will take daily effort to crush the flesh so that you can be fully useful to me.” He was referring to the negative human responses and the uprising of our pride and ego that make us not useful to him.

First, I think it is important to take a closer look at what “flesh” means in the Word of God. The concept of the word *flesh* has been highly debated, and actually has several meanings in Scripture. In Paul’s writing, he used the Greek work *sarx* to refer not only to the human body but also to the rebellious human nature, the two primary meanings that we are interested in here. Paul used the word *flesh* to describe not only sin in the physical body but also the negative thoughts and attitudes of the heart. He described flesh in terms of anger, rage, jealousy, and so on, in addition to sins of the physical body, such as drunkenness, sexual immorality, and more (Gal. 5:19–21). Many believers confuse the term *flesh* to mean only the physical body, but Paul uses a more expansive understanding of the term. He also contrasts the flesh and spirit: “It is a dualism between flesh and spirit in the sense of flesh

as an independent reliance on one's own accomplishments over against a spirit of dependence on God and submission to his rule."²⁵

This became all too real to me some time ago, and I can only share a personal testimony so that you can see what happens if we do not crush the flesh. I noticed that I had been struggling with a lot of fleshly and impure thoughts, and I mean really struggling. The enemy was really working overtime on me. I wanted to put the thoughts aside, but they kept coming up. I was in a battle to take every thought captive. For a few days, I would wander into areas in my mind where I did not want to go. As soon as I would realize it, I would take the thought captive, confess it to the Lord, and then repent. I prayed and sought the Lord, but I was having trouble shaking the unholy thoughts that seemed to be invading my mind. In an effort to be completely transparent, I even told my husband because I wanted no secrecy to give a stronghold in my mind to the enemy. I wanted to be rid of the afflicting spirit that was harassing me. Ephesians 5:11 says, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them."

This battle with unholy thoughts had been going on for a few days when I noticed that the problem of critical, judgmental thoughts of others were also emerging. I was easily taking offense at a real or imagined insult. I was walking in a strong sense of justice. Negative human responses were rising up in me in little ways. I was critical; justice was a big issue for me in several instances. We should desire mercy and not justice, knowing that if we get justice we are bound for hell. Even so, I was responding in justice. This was strictly

²⁵ Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph Martin, and Daniel Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 1993), 306.

a thought problem because I was not acting on any of these unholy thoughts that seemed to be invading my mind.

After three or four days of living with the rising of the flesh, it culminated as I attended my daughter's high school graduation. My flesh rose up because I became irritated and angry in a way that was uncharacteristic for me. The high school gym was sure to be packed because there was never enough seating. A woman, whom I did not know, had a whole row of seats saved. This was during the pre-admission in which two guests of each student were allowed to come in and take a seat before the general admission, ensuring that each student would have at least two special people in the audience. I asked to sit in the row, and the lady told me that the seats were saved.

My flesh rose up, and I did something I usually never do. Instead of moving on, I told the lady that I was a mother and my companion was a grandmother and that we should be able to choose a seat before others were admitted. She told me that the seats were reserved for mothers and grandmothers who were coming in later. I did not press the issue further, and we moved back a couple of rows and found a seat. I sat and watched as people, who were obviously not mothers and grandmothers, later came in to claim the seats. I was irritated. I expressed negative human response about the woman who took the whole row of seats when two chosen guests of each graduate should have had preference. "It is a 'justice' issue," I told myself.

As I was leaving after the graduation, I walked out with one of my most trusted accountability and prayer partners. I was half-joking and half-serious as I told her I had to confess some fleshly thoughts. Actually, in that moment of still being consumed by the desires of my flesh, I probably just wanted to fuss about the uncharitable woman who saved a whole row of seats. Thankfully, we were interrupted, and I never did get to finish my gossip session with my prayer partner. In

all likelihood, she would have reined me in, but it saved me from yet another sin and another confession.

Later that night I was in earnest prayer, realizing that for some reason I was in a serious battle to control my flesh. In the quietness of my room, I confessed my thoughts and attitudes, and asked the Lord to teach me why I was having such a difficult problem with my negative and unholy thinking over the last few days. I went to sleep with no real resolution, though I was being serious about my desire to get to the bottom of the problem.

My husband woke up at 4:00 the next morning, which was a little earlier than normal. Our morning routine is that he usually wakes up first and starts stirring around, which then wakes me up. Usually the first thing we do is reach out, hold hands, and pray together. Sometimes they are lengthy prayers about family, or matters in the kingdom of God, accompanied with much thanksgiving. On that morning my husband prayed a very short, simple prayer, and I am not even sure that I prayed, still being half-asleep at 4:00 a.m.

I asked my husband to read some Scripture to me, something that has only rarely happened. He opened to Colossians 3 and read the whole chapter. In that one chapter, the Lord answered my questions about why I was having a battle controlling the attitudes of my flesh about the woman at the school and other irritating circumstances. He taught me many things about the struggle I had been having:

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

When my husband read this passage, I realized that I was supposed to have set my mind on things above. In reality that week my mind had not been set on things above; it had been set on earthly things, or, even worse yet, it had been set on unholy things that kept creeping into my thoughts. I was called to have died and to have been hidden in Christ. My flesh was supposed to have died, and I was to put all these things aside. I realized that maybe my flesh was not dead, but it should have been. Much more likely, my flesh attitude had been revived all over again.

Paul told the Colossians to put to death the earthly nature that dwelt within them. He was very specific that if we do not crush the earthly nature, the wrath of God will come upon us. By allowing unholy thoughts to continue for several days unchecked, it took a pretty good root. Paul wrote,

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Col. 3:5–10)

What was happening in my life illustrates why this passage is so important to crush the flesh on a daily basis. The incident of being angry with the woman about the graduation seating was really the culmination of some other unholy thoughts and evil desires, which is idolatry according to the above Scripture,

which had not been put to death. I was trying to put those things out of my mind, but I was still struggling with them. Because I had not effectively dealt with those issues, where my mind would wander where I did not want it to go, it allowed other things to take root. Paul said, “But now you must *also* rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips” (Col. 3:8).

The Scripture is plain that if we allow things to rise up, such as sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, two things will happen: first, the wrath of God will come; and second, we will also have to rid ourselves of such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from our lips. Because I was not effective in immediately ridding myself of unholy and impure thoughts, I then had to also rid myself of some other junk as well. This is why people who have unchecked immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed also often have anger, filthy language, rage, and malice issues.

If we grab the thoughts and chew on them for a while, they are no longer unholy thoughts; they become unholy thinking. There is a difference. In the flesh, we cannot help what pops into our minds, but we can control what we do about it. We are to take every thought captive, and, in so doing, “we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). When we do not take our thoughts captive, they can lead us to sin. I say this because I want nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness and because it is important that we illustrate complete transparency and confess all sin so that we do not give the enemy a foothold in our lives.

Many times ministry leaders fall into immorality because they have a huge target on their backs from the enemy. Proper boundaries are critical; immediate confidence in a spouse is critical. This is one of the ways Satan tricks people and draws them into sin. All sin starts as a simple thought—this is why

it is critical to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ. It is not the unholy thought that you confess that will be your downfall; it is the one that you do not confess and keep hidden that will cause your demise. The loving relationship and confidence that my husband and I share with each other allowed me to reveal the battle of all unholy and impure thoughts to him without fear of rejection. When there is that level of relationship, all conversation is safe. Because he knew my character and my love for the Lord, I could tell him of the battle I had, and he did not feel threatened in any way. He responded as my protector and shield with love and prayer. He became my advocate. He recognized the spiritual nature of the attack on my thinking.

In the whole scheme of things at my daughter's graduation, it made no difference if we sat on the row with the woman or moved back two rows. This was just one of several issues that had caused me irritation that week. I realized that I had a door open to the enemy, and I needed to discover its origins. The bottom line was that because my flesh had not been put to death in this issue of unholy thoughts, the door was open for other fleshly issues to enter in, that I then had to rid myself of as well. The only reason I do not add slander and gossip to the list is that my prayer partner was not available to hear my "confession." What started as uncrushed flesh in one area expanded to encompass another area of flesh to be overcome. It is also important to note that anger left unchecked leads to bitterness.

When the desires of a sinful nature are left unchecked, the wrath of God is sure to come, and yes, it is better to deal with the issues here and now for correction rather than later in the damnable fires for eternity for those who gratify the desires of a sinful nature. The hope comes in Colossians 3:9–10: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." We have taken off the old self with its practices and put on the new self;

the new self is being renewed in knowledge and the image of God. He does not want us to remain in flesh, brokenness, and rebellion but to be renewed in him. We are to clothe ourselves differently:

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. (Col. 3:12–14)

As the people of God, we are to act in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. My response to the woman at the graduation was not filled with these virtues. In fact, it was just the opposite. I knew my response was not a good one, but sometimes when our flesh is rising up we have a difficult time recognizing what is happening.

As I reflected on the events of the evening, I confessed and asked the Lord to teach me about it. He later prompted me to ask my husband to read to me. The Lord knew what Mike's Scripture reading would be for that day, or maybe he arranged it so Mike would read it. Praise God that he loves me, and, in fact, all of us, enough to not leave us in our brokenness and on our paths of destruction. He tells us to bear with each other and forgive all grievances against others. The true trump card is love. Love covers a multitude of sins. If I had been acting in love and not flesh at that moment, the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience would have ruled my actions instead.

As we seek to walk in the Spirit, then peace will rule in our hearts:

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. (Col. 3:15–17)

Peace should rule supreme in our hearts and in our lives. We are called to teach and admonish one another. This happens with the Word that dwells within us. The New King James Version says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (vs. 16). We are healed and set free by the Word of the Lord. That is why the Lord told me to “eat the Word.” Understanding this saves me over and over again, convicting me of things that Satan and his demons try to throw on me if I allow them to go unchecked.

The Word of God is like medicine—when we take it in, we will be cured: “He sent out his word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death” (Ps. 107:20 NLT). It is sharper than a two-edged sword: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Rejection Is Not an Option

The Lord directed me to receive no hurt from those who reject me. Not only are we not to receive rejection and hurt from those who are set against us but we are to love them, pray for them, and minister to their needs if they will allow us. Rejection is a huge battle for kingdom-minded people.

I see rejection in many Christians today. It goes something like this: someone offends a person, and they have a choice to either be offended and reject the other person (which may cause more rejection) or to let it go. Often, if people feel rejected, they respond by rejecting the person who rejected them, which creates an ugly cycle of hurt people hurting other people. They hurt the people who hurt them and cause more hurt and rejection in the process.

Jesus was rejected, but he did not give rejection for rejection. He gave love for rejection: “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34 KJV). He was willing to forgive even the ones who nailed him to the cross and mocked him. Jesus knew that it was part of the plan that he would be rejected: “but first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” (Luke 17:25).

Jesus was very clear with me. He said, “Receive no hurt from those who reject you.” The Lord did not say *if* people reject you, receive no hurt; but rather *when* they reject you, receive no hurt. I understood that to mean that I would be rejected, but, even so, I was not to take any pain from it. My husband, Mike, has the greatest gift of putting aside offense more than any other person I know. He says, “As Christians, we do not have the right to be offended by anyone or anything.” We really do not have the right to be hurt or to bear a grudge against anyone. Jesus did not, and neither should we. Mike’s attitude about overcoming offense and rejection may come from his favorite Bible verse. He often quotes the phrase, “Love, do good, bless, and pray for our enemies,” which is his abbreviated way of saying not to become offended based on the following passage:

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one

cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27–31)

Jesus told me at Cane Ridge, “Receive no hurt from those who reject you. Love them, pray for them, minister to them if they will let you.” When he said specifically to pray for them, he was quoting from Luke 6:27 where it says we are to pray for those who mistreat us. Jesus goes on to say that if we only love the loveable, then that is no credit at all to us. What separates believers from the rest of the world is that we treat our enemies, not just those we love, with love and goodness and without expectation. This will lead to great kingdom reward. This manner of dealing with people is so counter-cultural that it has a way of turning the tide of hate and unbelief. Luke continues,

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even “sinners” love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even “sinners” do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even “sinners” lend to “sinners,” expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:32–36)

John Bevere wrote a book that changed my thinking about offense and how we should deal with it, *The Bait of Satan: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense*.²⁶ Offense and rejection are some of the greatest tools of the enemy to enslave us. Bevere says people often become offended because they have an expectation that people will act a certain way, and when it does not transpire as expected the bait of offense arises. Then there is the choice about whether or not we are going to become offended. Offense is a huge trap of Satan.

Jacob DeShazer was a bombardier with Doolittle's Raiders, the group that led an attack on Tokyo four months after the Pearl Harbor attack of December 7, 1941. DeShazer's plane ran out of fuel and crashed in China, resulting in his capture, where he was a prisoner of war in solitary confinement for three and a half years. He had the use of a Bible for a total of three weeks, so he decided to memorize the Sermon on the Mount and became a Christian during that time. Jacob DeShazer read about "loving your enemies" while he was in a POW camp in Japan. At first, he reasoned that the directive to love your enemies could not possibly be meant for someone in his circumstances. He was tortured, starved, and forced to live in inhumane conditions. He eventually decided that he had to believe the Word of God and that he was going to live the passage by showing love to his captors. He began smiling at the guards and being kind to them. At first they mistrusted him, but eventually they began responding to him. Relationships were formed, and they were eventually kind to him.

After the war, he came to the United States, where he recuperated and went to Bible college for three years. Then he did an amazing thing: he became a missionary to Japan

²⁶ John Bevere, *The Bait of Satan: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense* (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma House, 1994, 1997, 2004).

and led countless thousands of Japanese people to the Lord. The story has one more interesting turn: Mitsuo Fuchida, the bomber pilot who led the attack on Pearl Harbor, came into contact with one of DeShazer's ministry tracts. As a result of reading the tract, Fuchida became a Christian. Eventually the two men met in the bonds of Christian brotherhood, became friends, and even preached and conducted joint missions in Japan. Only the love of God could turn the story of deep hurt, pain, and bitterness of war into a love story for the people of Japan. Fiction could not be so good! This is what happens when someone is determined to love the enemies, do good to the haters, bless the cursers, and pray for the users.

In the kingdom of God there is no justification for hatred, bitterness, cursing, or mistreating others. It does not matter how horribly we have been used or abused—there is no justification for anything but love. It is a hard word, but it is the gospel truth. Even when someone has taken a life of someone precious, the gospel of God says that we are to pray for those who have mistreated us.

There was a very horrible crime that occurred in my state a few years ago. At the time, there was such an outrage because the crime resulted in the violent murder of a highly cherished young person. I made no comment while in public but rather listened to the conversations going on around me. The unadulterated hatred against the perpetrator was appalling. I knew that I was listening to Christians, many of whom discussed vigilante revenge—although they did not put their words into action. There was not one iota of compassion for the spiritual bondage that the perpetrator must have been in. I am not suggesting that there are no legal and emotional consequences for the crime—the compassion of Christ does not mean that the person should be free of all legal consequences. But if we are going to talk the talk, then we need to walk the walk. It is not easy to follow Christ; it is another cost of our discipleship. We, as Christian followers

of the teachings of our Lord, repay hatred and contempt with love and mercy.

The Lord has been showing me that it is what comes out of a person that makes them unclean, not what goes in (Matt. 15:11). Out of the hearts of humanity come such things as sexual immorality, theft, murder, and adultery. In fact, it is out of the lust of the mind that greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly spring. We should all pray not to be subject to traps such as these.

As I was in prayer one day, I had a mental impression of a mirror, with the countenance of a person reflecting the light of the Lord. If the Lord does not shine on us, we do not reflect his light. Also, what is reflected is not the light of the person; it is the light of God. The mirror had dirt and smudges on it—the dirty places did not reflect the light of Christ. The more dirt, smut, and smudges, the less people are able to reflect the light of Christ through their lives. I pray that our reflectors are clean and reflecting to full capacity. This is what I wrote in my journal entry:

The mirror was mainly reflective, but not completely so. Lord, give me insight, wisdom, and discernment to ascertain the nature and origin of the smudges on the mirror, that I should wipe my mirror clean for you so that I could fully reflect you—let there be no dark, non-reflective parts of me. Lord, let the idea that I reflect you permeate my whole being.

Daniel 12:3 says, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (NKJV). We know that the wise shine brightly because they are reflecting the light of Christ. They shine because they stay in the Word and close to the Lord so that impurity will not take root deep

in their hearts. The wise will reflect the glory and purity of God. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). John also tells us, “In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

Jesus has given us his light so we reflect him to the world around us. We become the light of the world as we seek to stay pure. Believers are salt and light. When the light of Christ shines in us, we become the light to shine before humanity so that the Father may be glorified:

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:14–16 NKJV)

As we reflect light in the dark world, the Father gets the glory. We have no reflective power on our own—we only reflect Him. Proverbs 4:18 tells us, “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining even brighter till the light of day.” We must remember and seek a pure life so that the light of Christ will shine through us and God will be glorified.

The Pure Will See

There is a direct connection between the purity of a believer and seeing God. Jesus pointed out that there was no guile or deceit in the disciple Nathanael: “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” This puzzled Nathanael, but Jesus responded by saying, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater

things than these ... Very truly, I tell you, *you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*” (John 1:50–51 NRSV). What Jesus is describing to Nathanael is an open heaven.

Open heavens happened a few times in Scripture: Jacob’s ladder, Jesus’s baptism, and the stoning of Stephen. In the book of Genesis, Jacob, whose original name meant “beguiling deceiver,” obtained a new name, Israel, or “God rules” or “strives with God.” His nature was completely changed. God proclaimed his change of identity, but the actuality of that change was not a reality for Jacob until he wrestled with the angel of God to obtain the blessing. Stephen was a man full of wisdom, faith, and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3–5). At his death, the heavens opened, and Jesus was seen standing at the right hand of the throne.

The Beatitude found in Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” It is the pure who will see God. Is this a future event or is this a current event for the pure in heart? Psalm 24:3–4 confirms that it is the pure in heart who will come into the presence of the Lord: “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.” On the other hand, Psalm 51:10–11 illustrates that people with impure hearts are removed from the presence of God: “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.”

The Lord said to me at Cane Ridge, “Battle, battle! Do not let the enemy have you, your mind, your thinking. There is no place in my kingdom for foul thoughts or self-serving thoughts.” The stakes are high. The ones who let impure thoughts roll on unchecked like a freight train are cast away from the presence of the Lord, and the pure will be brought into the holy place. The battle for the believer is the battle

for the mind, for whoever controls the mind controls the individual.

The only way that we can fight and win the battle is to have the mind of Christ, which only comes by immersion in the Word of God. We must know the Word as our only offensive weapon to fight the enemy. When we know the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will use it as the tool in our hands to fight the enemy. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV). The Word will convict us when we become contaminated by the world.

Conclusion

The call of the believer is to glorify God. If we are slack about living a pure and godly life, our witness to the greatness of God is greatly diminished. Many times we hear about people who use the hypocritical actions of believers as a good excuse not to come to church or to come into a relationship with God. Of course, we know that the church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. However, the closer we get to Christ, the more our lives should reflect him, including his purity. As we seek to live in truth and keep ourselves clean, we show Christ to the world. I want to distinguish that I am not talking about “self-righteousness” here, but about true, authentic holiness, lived by one who is willing to crucify the flesh in order to be closer to Jesus.

The Spirit knows our every thought, every word, and every ugly thing that enters our minds. It is up to the believer to crush ugliness, crush rebellion, and crush the flesh. He will help us if we make daily efforts so that we can be fully useful to him. Through purity, the light of Christ will shine in us, and he will be glorified through us. Jesus cautions us to take on no hurt from those who reject us. Rather, we are called to

love them, pray for them, and minister to them if they will let us. Our battle is to walk in purity, and in so doing we will be able to keep clear of all afflicting spirits. We do this by knowing the Word.

The Spirit will guide us with the Word, but we have to know the Word so he can bring it up to us at the needed moment. The Spirit will give us the necessary tools to fight the enemy. The war cry went out, “Battle, battle! Do not let the enemy have you, your mind, your thinking. There is no place in my kingdom for foul thoughts or self-serving thoughts.” To enjoy the blessing of seeing the kingdom of God, the cost of discipleship is purity. Purity is truly a kingdom battle.

Chapter 7

EAT THE WORD



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

Yes, read my Word. It is the lifeline to all you hold dear. My Word is precious. My Word is living. Never be without my Word. Take it everywhere you go. You will need it. Use it as much as possible and show people what the Word says, not merely tell them. Let them hold the Word. It is living and anointing is even in the physical object of the book. Get extra Bibles and have them ready everywhere you travel. The Word is the bread of life. Those who eat it will live.

Pray against dusty Bibles. Pray for there to be a renewed hunger for my Word. It is transformative. Holy Communion is important. The bread is the Word and the juice/wine is the blood. Help people feast on the Word; avoid stories (not testimonies) that distract from the Word. The Word does not

need adornment. The Word does not need to be supplemented. The Word is sufficient. Eat the Word. Every day, eat the Word. Feast on it. I will show you what you need for that day. Feast on the Word. Eat it!

Feast on the Word. Eat It.

At Cane Ridge Jesus said a strange thing to me, “Eat the Word.” After going to Cane Ridge, I was studying Matthew 24, in which Jesus talked about being prepared for end-time events. He does not want the body of Christ to fall away, but sadly there will be those who will not stay connected to Jesus until the end because their love will grow cold from a lack of consuming the Word of God. Matthew 24:28 states, “Because of lawlessness, many will grow cold.” Do not grow cold—that is why we have to eat the Word. We eat the Word to keep us from rebellion and lawlessness, to stay in touch with what God is looking for from us, and to be able to battle against the enemy when we need to.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible with 176 verses. The whole chapter is about the necessity of consuming the Word of God for life, purity, blessing, wholeheartedness, obedience, and much more. To really understand the importance of the Scriptures, Psalm 119 is a great place to start. This particular Psalm refers to the Word of God as his law, his way, his testimonies, his precepts, his commandments, his word, his judgments, his righteousness, his statutes, and his truth. The Word comes from God, the Sovereign King, as a solemnly declared proclamation to the world. It is based on his authority, from the declaration of his mind, and it is framed in infinite wisdom. It is binding and true.

There are many who will not find the way into the eternal kingdom of God because they do not receive the Word. It is bitter for Jesus that many will grow cold because they do not

understand the importance of consuming the Word in the last days. We might think we are supposed to eat the bread and read the Word, but not eat the Word. However, the connotation is very clear. Jesus is saying that we are to consume it, to be filled with it, to be satisfied with it, and to receive life-sustaining sustenance from it. Eat it, and it will nourish you unlike anything of which you will partake. The Word is the only thing that truly sustains life.

The concept of eating the Word is also conveyed elsewhere throughout the Bible. The Lord directed several prophets to eat the scroll that was being given to them. In Jeremiah 15:16, it says, “*When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.*” In Ezekiel 3:1–3, the prophet ate the scroll, and it was pleasant to his taste. The Lord said to him,

“Son of man, eat what is before you, *eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.*” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

Notice that Ezekiel first ate the Word and then he went to speak to the people. Without consuming the Word for ourselves, we are clanging gongs and clashing symbols. We can only be in the anointing of God if we are constantly in the Word and in relationship with him. The consumption of the Word comes before the delivery of the message.

Even eating the Word may be a bitter pill to swallow at times, not easy for some people to take. It is the bread of life, and those who eat it will live. In the book of Revelation, we learn just how difficult it can be at times:

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “*Take it and eat it.* It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “*You must prophesy again* about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.” (Rev. 10:9–11)

John ate the Word, and it turned sour in his stomach. Thereafter, he went out to prophesy, and as he did so the word was bitter because there is a bitter message to be delivered. It can be very difficult to give a hard word at times. It is challenging for the receiver of the true prophetic message from a prophet who is anointed with a corrective word. It can also be difficult for the one bringing the message, as in this case with John becoming ill.²⁷

If the prophet refuses to deliver the hard word, however, he will bear responsibility for the bitter message that is not delivered to the people. Scripture tells us that the prophet shall not take responsibility for a hard word that is given in accordance with the direction of the Lord, but he will have to take

²⁷ It is important that believers understand the difference in the gift of prophecy and the office of prophet. The *gift of prophecy* is for building up others, and those who operate in the gift of prophecy will never bring correction. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit found in 1 Corinthians 12. Also, 1 Corinthians 14:3 says, “But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging, and comfort.” First Corinthians 14:31 says, “For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.” Those who are called to the *office of prophet* (Samuel, Nathan, Ezekiel, John, and many others) are often called to give a corrective word. Ezekiel 3:17 says, “Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me.”

full responsibility for the word not delivered (Ezek. 3:16–27). Ezekiel 33:6–9 is very direct when it comes to this point:

But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood. Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, “O wicked man, you will surely die,” and *you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways*, that wicked man will die for his sin, and *I will hold you accountable for his blood*. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

It is tough to carry such a message of God. The prophetic books illustrate that people do not always want to hear the word of the Lord. Fear of God must reign in the heart of the prophet more than the fear of men.

Show People What the Word Says

The Word of God is life to those who read it and follow its commands. There is severe Bible illiteracy today, even among the church-going population. If the totality of Bible consumption occurs on Sunday morning during worship service, a person is on a starvation diet. A Sunday morning sermon is not enough to feed an individual throughout the week. What we get on Sunday morning is spoon-feeding by

someone else who has spent time in the Word. It is milk. Milk does not stay with a person long, which is why babies have to be fed every few hours.

True sustaining consumption must be daily intake by one who personally plows into the Word for him- or herself. The only way to really grow in maturity is for the believer to get in the Word consistently, reading and digging it out. That is where the meat is consumed. Jesus wants us to have a daily provision, and even more than just provision, he wants us to have a daily feast on his Word. Without the Word of God, we will starve to death in the realm of the Spirit.

The Word Is Precious and Living

The Word is precious; it came to believers at a great cost. Everything is built on it. With a word from God, everything that has been created was created. Too many times we limit the “Word” to encompass only the written Word of God, but God’s Word is so much more than that. God loves us and he speaks on our behalf. The uttered Word is just as important as the written Word because it is God’s current and ongoing revelation to us.

Let me explain what I mean. There are at least two words in the Greek New Testament translated “word.” Very simply, “logos” is the building block. It is the frame upon which everything hangs. Logos is typically used to describe the written word of God. “Rhema” is the utterance of God. It is the spoken word or the thing said. Rhema is a word given by the Lord to speak or actually utter into a current situation. We cannot have one without the other. The logos is the bridge to the rhema.

Logos and rhema are two sides of the same coin. Having logos without rhema means that the Lord is silent in all current situations. Having rhema without logos opens the door to distortion because all utterances must line up with Scripture. God will never contradict himself. Jesus is the building block

and his Holy Spirit is the one who gives utterance. The Word of God is living and active, both in the Bible and in the utterance of God. In fact, this entire book is based on *rhema*, but supported by *logos*. In other words, it is a divine utterance or prophecy buttressed by the Holy Scripture of God.

Historically, the *rhema* word was given to many people of God in the Old and New Testaments. Of course, their *rhema* word became our written Word. All written Word started out as an inspired *rhema* word for someone, somewhere in history. Before it could be written down and preserved on the pages of Scripture, it had to be given into the heart of an anointed one hearing from God. Truthfully the Word says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16–17). There are those who think that the current *rhema* words are not real, but they are every bit as real as the historic *rhema* words that became our Scripture. The written Scripture has endured the inspired scrutiny of the early church fathers and the test of time; and our *rhema* words should stand the test of Scripture. Nothing is breathed from the mouth of God that is not confirmed in the Holy Word of God—his written Word.

God’s Word is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to guide us into all righteousness. Dr. Ben Witherington, my New Testament professor from Asbury Theological Seminary, told a story about one of his seminary students who said, “Why do I need to learn all of this anyway? I am going to preach by the unction of the Holy Spirit.” Without missing a beat, Dr. Witherington said, “It’s a shame that you do not give the Spirit more to work with.” It is very true that we are led by the unction of the Spirit when we submit and yield to him. However, many times the Holy Spirit speaks to us in the Word.

Many times, the Lord has given a *rhema* word for the moment from the pages of Scripture. He answers questions and gives direct insight. He counsels us through the Word,

using information that we have put in our brains long ago, perhaps even forgotten until the moment that it is needed by the Spirit to guide or direct us. At times the Holy Spirit will give me an answer by quoting a verse I had memorized long ago. Or he will give me a book, chapter, and verse to look up the answer as I have related earlier. If a believer does not know the Word, he or she may not be as susceptible to the leading of the Spirit or recognize his promptings when they do come.

I had a time of urgency for another believer because I knew of a situation in his life that was causing him some concern. I was praying and asked the Lord about the situation, and I felt that the witness of the Holy Spirit was for me to share a word of warning with him. I told the person the message I felt God had given to me, which was not an easy thing to do. The potential for misunderstanding was huge. In the end, my concern for him and my fear of the Lord if I were to disobey was more than I wanted to carry. In other words, I revered the Lord more than I revered and feared man. I initially felt peace that I had done the right thing, but later doubt crept in and I began to wonder if I had made a mistake. I asked the Holy Spirit, "Did I do the right thing by telling the person those words?" The Spirit immediately said, "Yes!" Still not satisfied, I asked for a more definite word, "Spirit, show me in an undeniable way that I am hearing from you, not hearing my own voice." Immediately, without the passage of even one second, the next words I heard were, "Ezekiel 3:17." I had no idea what that verse said, but it gave overwhelming reassurance when I looked it up. It said, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (NKJV).

In another instance I was writing about how God teaches and directs us. The Lord had been teaching me and showing me new insight about waiting on him. I journaled some rhetorical questions like, "What is waiting? What does it mean to wait? How is the best way to wait?" The Lord answered me

with John 3:10, which I knew had to do with Nicodemus, but I could not think of how that passage had anything to do with waiting. I had to laugh when I read what that verse said: “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things?” I think (at least I hope) the Lord was revealing to me his sense of humor. He then directed me to go back and reread what I had written about waiting from Scripture.

The next morning, I inquired of the Lord, “What would you have me read today?” Immediately the Spirit said, “Psalm 40.” This is what I found when I read it in the Passion Translation, “I waited, and waited, and waited some more; patiently, knowing God would come through for me. Then, at last, he bent down and listened to my cry.” Again, I had to laugh out loud at the blessing of the Lord. This is how the Spirit uses the Word of God to direct, confirm, counsel, and love us.

Give It

The Lord told me to take the Scripture everywhere I go because I will need it to witness and show people what the Word says. He said I was not to merely tell them about it but give them the Bible to hold in their hands. He said it is living, and anointing is even in the physical object of the book.

We see many times in Scripture that physical items carry the anointing of the Spirit. Physical objects were often contacts with the spiritual realm, both holy and evil. Items such as the devoted things that Achan brought from Jericho had the power to defile the entire camp, even the entire nation. Other physical items, such as the hem of Jesus’ garment, the bread and wine, water, oil, or the swatches of Paul’s garment, carried the healing power of the Lord. The Lord commanded me to have extra Bibles and be ready to give them everywhere I traveled.

Giving away Bibles has been a long-term ministry. I love giving away the Word of God into the hands of people who do not have a Bible. I never get very attached to a Bible or have my name embossed on the cover, because many times the Lord has directed me to give away my personal Bible on the spur of the moment. It seems that just when I get one broken in the way I like it, there it goes. I remove my personal notes and hand it over.

When we give his Word into the hands of those in need, I know it is pleasing to the Lord. A few years ago, I was working with my church to place Life Recovery Bibles into the hands of some jail inmates. Over the course of time, our church had given Bibles to the inmates totaling a few thousand dollars. Inmates were transferred to other facilities, and soon we were getting letters from around the state to send Bibles to inmates at those facilities. We were out of money, but the requests for more Bibles kept coming in. I had great peace when I prayed, “Lord, we have done all we can do to provide Bibles. If you want the inmates to have this particular kind of Bible, you are going to have to provide them.” And I meant it. We were finished in the Bible distribution business unless the Lord provided.

Immediately after that prayer, one of the ladies in the jail ministry group asked what we were going to do to earn money for the Bibles, suggesting we might have a bake sale. I said, “We will do nothing. We have put it in God’s hands. He will take care of it or we are finished.” Within two weeks, through a set of highly unusual circumstances, which we know as God’s provision, the publisher of the Life Recovery Bible, Tyndale House, had heard of our ministry. A representative called me on the phone and offered to send us all the Bibles that were returned by purchasers because they could not resell them. At first, the representative said that they may have to charge us \$4.00 per copy, but she was going to check with her supervisor. I knew before she did that we would

never pay a penny for the Bibles because God had his hand in it. Some Bibles may have had a ding or a nick, but many times they were still in the plastic wrapping. Every time our supply would dwindle down to one or two Bibles, a case would be delivered. We cannot give anything more precious than the Word of God, especially to a new believer. It was important to God, and it should be important to us as well.

Eat Bread by Toil

Throughout the Bible, bread is a metaphor for Jesus and for the Word of God. Almost from the beginning of human history, after the Garden of Eden, bread was the post-fall life-line for survival, both naturally and spiritually. God originally gave Adam and Eve “fruit” for their nurturing and livelihood. They had the constant presence and provision of God, so bread (the Word) was not really an issue for them. The fruit represents multiplication in the kingdom and abundance of life. They were placed in the garden, but they were given the earth. “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food’” (Gen. 1:29). God gave them fruit for provision. It was food that they did not have to work for and it would re-create itself in the seed. Everything they ate had the capacity to multiply.

The provision of God changed after the Fall. No longer were they given fruit without cost or effort. They continued to have fruit available to them, but they would have to wage war with weeds and thorns in order to harvest it (Gen. 3:18). God also said in Genesis 3:19, “By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground” (ESV). This is also the story of life to the believer in the current age. The bread is the Word of God; the bread is Jesus Christ. When the people of God were in the presence of God, he provided the food, which led to abundant and everlasting life. They had the presence of

God, so being nurtured by the bread (Word) was not essential because the Word was with them every day. Every need was met by the presence, by the all-present glory, of the godly Father who provided for his children with great joy.

After the Fall, however, the people of God were neither in the place of God nor in the constant presence of God. What had been freely given for their sustenance would come only as the object of toil and labor. The bread/Word would be eaten only by hard work and determination, by the sweat of the brow.

What this means for modern-day Christians is that we have available fruit in the kingdom of God, but we now have to wage war with thorns and thistles to harvest it. We eat bread only by the sweat of our brow. The bread, the Word of God, the relationship with Jesus, comes only by some effort by the believer. Salvation is free, but a relationship with God is not without the believer's cost or effort. In the garden, the relationship with God was without their toil; *they were with him*.

As a result of the Fall, however, God abides in us *as* we abide in him. The bread, the sustenance of life, is available to us all, but it takes human effort to get it. We now have a relationship with Jesus only by our seeking it; in the Garden of Eden they had a relationship because they were in the presence of God. We have to seek in order to get into the presence of God. We only have a relationship as we seek a relationship. Without seeking on the part of the believer, there is no relationship with God. Currently we have to seek to "eat the Word!" It does not happen without effort. However, as we pursue it with effort, we can see the multiplication of God.

Holy Communion

Jesus said to me that day, "Holy Communion is important. The bread is the Word and the juice/wine is the blood." In John 6:51 Jesus said much the same thing: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven." He is the "Word of God"

who became flesh (John 1:1). To eat the flesh of Jesus means to consume and internalize the Word of God, for he said, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). In other words, unless we are justified by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and his work on the cross and sanctified with the Word, there is no eternal, everlasting life. Jesus further said, “This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna (physical bread) and died, but he who feeds on this (spiritual) bread will live (spiritually) forever” (John 6:58). The words of Jesus are called the bread of heaven. In Scripture, natural things are used to represent the spiritual realm. We eat bread to sustain our physical bodies; we eat the Word to sustain our spirits.

At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion. He changed the tradition that had been in place for some two thousand years when he changed the Passover celebration. He said the wine represented the blood of the New Covenant, which was given through his blood that would be poured out. The bread was his body given for many; taking and eating brings life. Matthew 26 says,

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

He was telling us that we have to participate in the atonement, the shedding of his blood that is represented by the

wine. We also have to participate in eating his flesh, which is the Word, for our relationship and growth. Holy Communion represents the concepts of justification, which is salvation; and sanctification, which is maturity of the believer in Christ. We are not justified or saved without the atoning blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on the cross. Likewise, we are not sanctified or matured in faith without the bread of the Word of God. We must have both in order to mature in our faith. One without the other will not allow a believer to be all that God has called him or her to be.

On Resurrection Sunday, Jesus walked to Emmaus with a couple of his followers, though they did not realize it was actually him. After arriving in Emmaus with his roadway travel companions, Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and gave it to them (Luke 24:31). Their eyes were immediately opened, and they knew him. It was yet another time of Holy Communion by eating the Word. Jesus was revealed in the breaking of the bread. As we symbolically and actually break open the bread/Word, Jesus is revealed to us as well. They came to know Jesus in the breaking of the bread, and we will come to know him the same way. As we eat the Word of God, he will be revealed: “Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

The Word Is Sufficient

Jesus said at Cane Ridge that the Word does not need adornment. Let me be the first to confess, I really do not like “sermon illustrations,” canned stories that can be seen as fake from a mile away. In fact, when I hear one coming, it is all I can do to not take a mental vacation during the sermon or pick up my Bible and start reading the Word. The Word of God is vibrant, exciting, alive, filled with joy, sorrow, heartache, pain, love, peace, terror, and blessings unimaginable. It is not necessary to fill the time of a sermon on Sunday morning

with fluff. People who are used to eating good, wholesome food, soon grow weary of fast food. The Word of God is life.

The Lord said that we are not to adorn the Word for it needs nothing else; it is perfect just the way it is. Our job is to help people feast on the Word. We are to avoid stories that distract from the Word; it does not need to be supplemented. The Word is sufficient in and of itself. I would say, however, there is a difference between adorning and supplementing the Word with fluff and true heartfelt testimony. Believers overcome the accuser of the brethren by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (Rev. 12:11).

Conclusion

The Lord said that we must recognize that the Word is our lifeline. The Word is precious, but it can only bring life to the extent that it is consumed. If we have antibiotic capsules and put them under our pillow or even hold them in our hands, they will not bring health or healing to our bodies when we are sick. The medicine can only bring healing if it is consumed, ingested. The same is true with the precious Word of God. Jesus said that to survive until the end, we have to eat the Word. Bon appétit!

Chapter 8

HARVEST FIELD OF THE HUNGRY



I said, “Lord, I wait ...”

The Lord said, “Get up and write!”

“You are needed, and others like you. There is much work to be done. I will give you assignments—do them! Time is short.”

“How short?” I asked.

“Very short,” he said. “Be diligent. Seek those who are hungry. Feed the hungry. If people are not hungry, move on.”

“Really, Lord? Move on?”

“Yes, move on,” he responded. “Some hearts are already hard. You saw a man whose heart is hard.”

“Lord, this does not seem right. Is this you? Tell me; show me.” He said,

The Lord said, “Laura, there are those who can be saved. The ones Satan already has will steal your time from those who can come to me. I will help you and show you when it

is time to move on. My heart cries, but some have seared their consciences.”

Lord, please help me from judging that. Please, Lord, I want to believe that all can be saved.”

“Good, I want you to see that and work hard in the harvest field. I will give you strength, patience, endurance.”

“Teach me Scripture, Lord,” I responded. “I know the Pharisees could not see. Is that what you are talking about? You cried for Jerusalem.”

The Lord Has Need of It

The Lord is looking for people who are willing and ready to get into the harvest field. Randy Clark, in his book *Pressing In*, wonders if believers would pray this prayer if Jesus were looking their way:

God! Let your eye fall on me, for I want to be totally yielded. I want to be that person through whom you can show yourself strong. I want to be that coin in your pocket for you to spend any way you want. I want your glory to rest on me. I want to be the donkey that you ride on. I just want to be yielded, God, and I want to believe that I can be the person that you clothe yourself with. I want to believe, God, that I can be mightily used in your kingdom. God, in my heart I am saying to you, please, look upon me and let your grace

fall upon me because I want to reveal your glory. Show yourself strong through my life.²⁸

The Lord is looking for yielded vessels so that he can show himself strong. In Randy Clark's prayer, he talks about being the donkey that Jesus rides on. The donkey is a lowly creature that is of no consequence, yet had a very important job for the kingdom. On Palm Sunday, just a few days before Calvary, the disciples loosed the donkey on which Jesus ultimately rode into Jerusalem. He told his disciples to say, when asked, why they were untying it, "The Lord has need of it" (Luke 19:34). The Lord has need of us, too.

For some reason, the Lord has chosen humanity to be the workers of his plan in the earth today. Although nothing is impossible with God, he has chosen not to do his work with his sovereign power alone (although he does bypass human vessels at times), but to let humans appropriate his power and be the workers in the harvest field. Time and again in Scripture, we see God's people overcoming tremendous odds against them and coming to victory in circumstances that looked utterly hopeless. God uses his power to help his people overcome situations like parting the Red Sea, breaking down the walls of Jericho, and feeding the multitudes. It was the power of God, but the power came through the conduit of his yielded servants.

Miracles are often two sides of one coin: On one side is the sovereign power of God, and on the other is the action or obedience of humanity. Without the power of God, all would be lost. However, God has most often chosen to act through his people. The powerful display of God frequently works in conjunction with an obedient human. It is unbelievable that God, the God of the universe of whom our words are

²⁸ Randy Clark, *Pressing In: Spend and Be Spent* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Global Awakening, 2011), 3.

too limited to even adequately describe, has for some reason chosen to allow us to give away his grace. First Peter 4:10 says, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, *faithfully administering God’s grace* in its various forms.” We are stewards of the grace of God when we do the things he has called us to do. It is unbelievable that we would have that much responsibility in the kingdom of God.

The Sin of Fruitlessness

At Cane Ridge, the Lord said there is much work to be done. He gives believers assignments, and he wants and expects our willingness to do those assignments—faithfully. The Lord was very explicit that when assignments come, they should be done without delay. Failing to do what the Lord tells us to leads us to the sins of rebellion and fruitlessness. Fruitlessness is a much-overlooked sin, which results in God’s disfavor. Fruitlessness is not often discussed among Christians today. Most believers do not understand that there are serious consequences of not producing fruit for the kingdom of God.

The parable of the sower is very familiar to most believers. In that parable, seed is sown into four different kinds of soils and produces according to the soil in which it was sown. Jesus explained the parable to the disciples. Take a look at Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the sower in Luke 8:11–13:

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root;

they believe only for a while and in a time of testing fall away (NRSV).

Satan often snatches up the first seed before it is ever received. These people never even confess the Lord nor trust in his promises. The second seed is the Word that falls on hard hearts; the joy of the Lord rises up within them, but there is no staying power. The shallow roots do not allow him or her to withstand the hardships and temptations that are sure to come. These people actually confess Jesus but do not last for long haul.

The third seed is the critical part of the parable that is often overlooked. It is in Luke 8:14 that the Lord talks about the thorns: “As for what fell among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and *their fruit does not mature*” (NRSV). The Word falls on the ears of those who are busy. Worldly concerns, riches, and the pleasures of life choke out the Word. Because it is choked out, these believers bring no fruit to maturity. This is the sin of fruitlessness in the kingdom of God. These people may hear the Word and think that they are living according to the plan of God because the Word actually grows in them. According to the parable, the seed actually produces a plant. However, while the seed of the Word is growing, the world is still flourishing within them as well. They are double-minded and are unstable in what they are doing for the kingdom of God.

The plant has matured, but that is all—there is no fruit. These are the people who may be in church every week, feeling good about themselves, but from week to week they never step out to advance the kingdom. They look good on the outside: they are living a good life, and they are substantial in prosperity, but they are fruitless in their walk of faith. These people may be the very pillars of their communities. But the good life is choking them off from being fruitful

in God's kingdom; wealth and cares are keeping them from doing the work of the Lord.

Please do not misunderstand me here: the blessings and provisions of God are wonderful. This is not a lecture against material possessions and wealth; rather, it is a statement of concern for folks who think they are looking good on the outside but are not producing fruit for the kingdom of God. I do not think that many believers are concerned about the sin of fruitlessness in their lives today. The seed that shares ground with the thorns cannot be fruitful. What are the thorns in your life today? What are your pleasures of life that are preventing fruit from being produced within your heart? What are the cares of the world that are allowing the sin of fruitlessness to flourish in your life?

Finally, the fourth and final resting place for the seed of the Word of God in Luke 8:15 is the good soil: "But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance" (NRSV). Those who heard with noble and good hearts keep the Word, and they "bear fruit with patient endurance." There is a blessing of fruitfulness for the kingdom. The good ground is not only those who hear the Word but those who also bear fruit. I am fearful for many in the body who are not bearing fruit for God's kingdom and do not know that they need to be according to the Word of God. We must bear fruit for God if we are truly to be kingdom people. Looking at the parable of the sower, it could be assumed that three-fourths of the soil types bear no fruit for the kingdom of God. Extrapolating this to the final conclusion, the odds are against someone hearing the Word and producing fruit.

It should be noted here, however, that the sowers and the reapers of the harvest field rejoice together. Not everyone who rejoices in the harvest field is a reaper; some are sowers, those who scatter the seeds of the Word of God, and some are

the ones who reap what was sown. But both are considered fruitful for the kingdom of God. In John 4:34–38, Jesus states,

My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, “Four months more, then comes the harvest”? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. *The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, “One sows and another reaps.”* I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.

Another passage that sheds light on the sin of fruitlessness is John 15:1–8. A careful reading about the vine and the branches illustrates that this passage is talking to the church, the body of believers. Jesus was talking to his disciples and to future believers here:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch *in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.* You are *already clean* because of the word I have spoken to you. *Remain in me, and I will remain in you.* No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The fruitless branches are believers. First, Jesus talks about every branch “in me” that does not bear fruit, the Father takes away. How does a branch get to be “in the vine” in the first place? It has to grow there at some point in time. The branch, or the believer, begins in Jesus but somewhere along the way comes to a place of fruitlessness for the kingdom. The branch—at least at this point—appears to still be attached to the vine. These branches are taking nutrients from the other branches that are producing fruit for the Father’s glory. They have the potential of draining vitality from fruitful vines. Many may hear about the fruitless branches being thrown into the fire and mistakenly believe that those branches are nonbelievers. This is a very dangerous fallacy.

The branches began in Jesus but at some point moved to a status of fruitlessness. At some point those branches are taken away by the Father and cast into the fire: “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:6). It is a practical impossibility to remain in Jesus if one has never been in Jesus to begin with. Remaining in Jesus connotes a relationship of connection in the first place. Some Bible versions refer to it as *abiding*, which is a deep connection of indwelling with another. Jesus indwells the believer as the believer indwells Jesus. Another clue that this is directed to the believer is that the ones Jesus

spoke to were already clean: “You are *already clean* because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

My husband often says “as” is the biggest two-letter word in the Bible. He is often referring to the Lord’s Prayer where it says, “Forgive us our sins *as* we forgive those who have sinned against us.” The yardstick we use to forgive others will be used against us. If we are very forgiving, we will be forgiven much. The importance of the word *as* is just as critical in this context, too. The idea of abiding or remaining in Jesus is just as important: “Remain in me, *as* I also remain in you” (vs. 4). He remains in us *as* we have remained in him. The extent that we give ourselves over to him is the extent that he manifests himself to us and in us.

While fruitless branches are gathered and burned, fruitful branches are pruned so that they may be even more fruitful. There is a clear statement here that we cannot be fruitful apart from Jesus. The notion of abiding in the presence of God is paramount for being fruitful in the kingdom of God: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21 NRSV). The one who abides in him wants what the Father wants, so what is asked for is provided. “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (vs. 7). Those who have fruit will have more fruit because the Father will provide what is needed to obtain more fruit.

There is a kingdom harvest that the believer does not have to labor to collect. The fields are ripe and ready to be harvested. Very often, I see that unbelievers are just waiting for a believer to ask them if they want to know Jesus as their personal Savior. People do not need another person to act as an intermediary to be saved. Many have testified about radical salvations alone in the woods or even alone in the shower. However, many in the harvest field are just waiting for someone to ask them if they want to know Jesus. Jesus

himself sent laborers into the harvest field. That was the commission of the disciples as Jesus sent them out two by two, twelve at first, then the seventy. He said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out laborers into his harvest field” (Matt. 9:37–38).

In Luke 19:12–13, we see the call of servants by the master: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. ‘Put this money to work,’ he said, ‘until I come back.’” First, the master called ten “servants,” meaning that this parable is also talking about believers who are workers in the harvest field, not unbelievers. The master said, “Do business until I come.” In other words, they were to be about the master’s business while he was away. But when he came back, there would be an accounting.

In this parable only two out of ten servants actually produced increase. One said, “Master, your mina has earned ten minas” (vs. 16). The next one said, “Master, your mina has earned five minas” (vs. 18). The two who produced were blessed by the graciousness of the master: “Well done, good servant. Because you have been faithful in a very little, have authority over [ten, five respectively] cities.” Those who increased were honored and blessed by the master.

There was one servant who put his mina in a napkin and protected it without using it while the master was gone. When the master returned, he brought back exactly what the master had given him before he left. “Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow” (vs. 20–21). He produced no increase for the kingdom. He was judged, and called a “wicked servant” for not being productive (vs. 22). What he had was taken away from him and given to the servant with ten minas (vs. 24). Having a gift from God and not using it

earns one the title of wicked servant! Here again we see the sin of fruitlessness being exposed in Scripture. The servant had something of value, but he refused to “do business” until the master returned.

Since ten servants were each given a mina, what do you suppose happened to the other seven who were each entrusted with one mina from the master? He came back for the report from his servants. The other seven servants, who also received a mina each, did not come to report. Where were their reports and their faithfulness? Did they lose their mina and have nothing to report? The one servant with one mina held on to his, but it can be assumed that the others did not. Even the one who reported that he had not done anything with his mina was called a wicked servant. What do you think the Lord thought about the other seven?

Out of the ten servants, only 20 percent produced for the master while he was away. All servants had the same opportunity to produce for the kingdom, but 80 percent of the servants did not produce anything. This is a frightening situation when we relate it to the church. The Lord told me that there are assignments to be done: “Do them!” What this really comes down to is the responsibility of the believer in the kingdom. Salvation is free—there is no question about it! We cannot be good enough to earn our way into heaven. We cannot do enough good works to find a saving relationship with Jesus. If we could, the gift of Jesus on the cross would lose its value. We diminish nothing of the value of the cross. Grace is a gift; salvation truly is free. A salvation relationship is only half of the story of the relationship between Jesus and the believer, however.

Salvation is free, but discipleship is not. It costs us something! We have to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus. What was the business the servants were supposed to be doing? It seems from the parables that we have studied, that the business that needed to be attended to was the business

of increase and fruitfulness. The master was very pleased with increase. The good soil produced good fruit with patient endurance. As we labor for the kingdom of God, the master is very pleased with our increase as well. The servants with the increase were rewarded with greater responsibility. He who is faithful with a small amount in the kingdom will be entrusted with more.

When we serve God, it costs us something—or at least it *should* cost us something. Ask yourself, what is discipleship costing me? If it is not costing you anything—time, commitment, resources, or energy—you might just be a fruitless branch that may be cut off. James 2 illustrates that faith without works is not worth much; in fact, it is worth even less than that. James said that faith without works is dead: “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ... Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (James 2:14, 17).

Abraham could have talked for a decade about his great faith in God, but the rubber met the road when he packed up his son, his servant, and wood for a fire and set off on a three-day journey to Mount Moriah to offer up his son of the promise as a sacrifice to God (Gen. 22). He had Ishmael, but Isaac was the one promised by God to bring forth the line of descendants who were going to be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Abraham’s obedience to God perfected his faith. James writes,

You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? *You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed*

God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (James 2:20–26)

Our faith is put to the test by our actions. We can talk about how much the Lord means to us, but without our actions faith is dead, according to James. Believing in the Lord with no action of faith puts the believer on par with the demon spirits (James 2:19). Even they believe Jesus is Lord and tremble.

What does all this talk of fruitlessness have to do with us and what happened at Cane Ridge? At Cane Ridge, the Lord was calling his church to be diligent in seeking to feed those who are hungry: “Feed the hungry.” God is looking for a soul harvest—there is no doubt about it. In the parable of the soils, only 25 percent of those who heard were fruitful, and in the parable of the minas, only 20 percent of the servants produced an increase. If only 20–25 percent of God’s people are producing fruit for the kingdom, it will make a soul harvest very challenging. God wants every person who is in the kingdom to be a producer. Many are not producing and really do not even know they are called to be producing fruit for the kingdom. This is the crux of this book and why it was so urgent to the Lord in my encounter with him that day.

There are countless other examples of fruitlessness being met with harsh judgment in Scripture. The parable of the fig tree is another one that shows much the same message:

A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, “For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?”

“Sir,” the man replied, “leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.” (Luke 13:6–9)

The fig tree in the vineyard had been barren for three years. The master told the keeper to cut it down. He pleaded for a final chance to bring the tree to *fruitfulness* by tending it and fertilizing it (feeding it with the Word). The keeper implored, “If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down” (Luke 13:9). Who is the keeper of the vineyard? Jesus? Who is the man? The Father? Who are the figs? Are they believers? The truth of the matter is that the keeper cannot bear the fruit; only the fig tree can bear its own fruit. It is up to each person to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. Jesus is not the fruit bearer, the people are.

What Is Fruitfulness?

I often wondered what makes up fruit for the kingdom of God. Is it simply working for the Lord in good causes, or is it actually bringing lost people to salvation? John 4:35 gives some insight to the harvest: “Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (NKJV).

The harvest is ready to be plucked by any who are willing. When a believer becomes a harvester, there is fruit for eternal

life: “For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors” (John 4:37–38 NKJV). In this context Jesus was talking about the harvest of lost souls. However, there may be other ways to bear fruit for the kingdom of God, too. Each person must decide if they are bearing fruit according to the biblical precepts laid out by Jesus.

One day my husband was reading about the fields being white with harvest, and he had an interesting insight. The harvest field is constantly changing. That which was not harvested yesterday may already be lost today. What happens to a crop that is not harvested? It rots in the field. What happens to the souls that are not harvested? They will eventually be forever lost from the possibility of harvest. The harvest is always changing. Take care not to squander harvest opportunities.

Our Duty Is to Be Fruitful

Bearing fruit is only what we are asked and required to do. We are not special because we have borne fruit: “Do you thank the slave for doing what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, ‘We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!’” (Luke 17:9–10 NRSV). The Amplified Version says it best: “Even so on your part, when you have done everything that was assigned and commanded you, say, We are unworthy servants [possessing no merit, for we have not gone beyond our obligation]; we have [merely] done what was our duty to do” (Luke 17:10 AMP).

No matter how hard we work for the kingdom of God, we will not be loved more and we will not be loved less. Our merit does not change at all. We are who we are regardless of our work for God’s kingdom. It does not change our merit in God’s eyes. The prodigal son was loved just as much when he

was living a shameless life as he was when he repented and came back to his father. His worth did not change. Likewise, the worth of the other son did not increase because he stayed and served the father. We are not special because of the work we do for the kingdom, and we are not diminished for the work we fail to do for the kingdom.

All workers are paid the same wage at the end of the day, whether they worked a full day or only one hour (Matt. 20:1–16). However, the point should also be made that they all worked—how long they worked did not matter; it only mattered that they worked. We are to do our duty not because it comes with reward, but because it pleases God, whom we love more than life itself. It honors God when we do more than what is required of us, producing fruit for his kingdom.

Time to Move On

The Lord told me, “Laura, there are those who can be saved. The ones Satan already has will steal your time from those who can come to me. I will help you and show you when it is time to move on. My heart cries, but some have seared their consciences.” This was a hard word for me to hear, and it still is. When I heard it, I questioned for the first time whether I was actually hearing from the Lord. None of us want to think that there are those who will not be saved. I asked the Lord to show me in Scripture if this were so. Matthew 10:14 says, “*If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.*” Jesus told the disciples that when they or the Gospel message they carried was unwelcome, they should leave the area. The end result was that the town would be judged, “I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the Day of Judgment than for that town” (Matt. 10:15). With regard to this verse historical theologian and commentarial expert Matthew Henry suggests,

At their departure they must shake off the dust of their feet. In detestation of their wickedness, it was so abominable, that it did even pollute the ground they went upon, which must therefore be shaken off as a filthy thing. The apostles must have no fellowship nor communion with them; must not so much as carry away the dust of their city with them.²⁹

Sometimes we have to shake the dust off our feet or even shake out our garments (Acts 13:51; 18:6). Before we move on, we must do everything we can to reach those God sends us to.

We Have Been Given a Kingdom

The final word is that believers have been given a kingdom, just as Jesus was given a kingdom. Jesus said, “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29–30).

At the Last Supper of Jesus and the disciples in the upper room, there was a face-off between Jesus and Satan. Satan had in-dwelled Judas (Luke 22:3), who had made the deal with the Pharisees before coming to the supper (Luke 22:7). We know this because Jesus said that the hand of his betrayer was on the table with him (Luke 22:21). However, we know the true betrayer was Satan. Satan was the one who made the deal with the Pharisees, but Judas was a willing participant in that deal. Can you imagine the tension as Jesus was having an intimate moment with his disciples, and Satan was there as

²⁹ ²Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible: Volume V (Matthew to John)*, available at http://www.ccel.org/study/Matthew_10:1-5, accessed December 16, 2014.

a guest of Judas at the Passover meal? Judas was dismissed to go do what he had to do, and Jesus and the disciples went to the garden. Jesus told Peter, James, and John to watch and wait with him, which is a good word for us as we wait for the final days. He told the disciples to wake up and pray that they would not enter into temptation. They slept anyway.

The preparation for the Last Supper is a foreshadowing of the wedding feast of the Lamb. Even though Jesus told his disciples to make preparations for them to eat the meal, the interesting thing is that the room was already furnished (Luke 22:12), but the disciples were to prepare the meal itself. The Lord is preparing the place, but as current disciples are we to prepare for the final supper, the Lamb's wedding feast? The disciples did it in their day, and I think that we will do it in our day as well.

Jesus is coming for a bride who has prepared for the wedding supper of the Lamb: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, *and his bride has made herself ready*" (Rev. 19:7). Part of the preparation is that the bride will make *herself ready* to receive the Bridegroom. Jesus said he would no longer eat the Passover meal until he eats it when the kingdom of God comes. I have always thought of this as a long intercessory fast for his people until the end of time and the harvest is gathered.

Jesus told the disciples, "And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me" (Luke 22:29–30). Jesus has given his authority to believers. He has given us the kingdom to rule and reign with him. He told Adam to exercise dominion over all the earth, even though he only gave him the Garden of Eden to work with. Likewise, he gave the disciples the authority over the kingdom. Are we properly minding the kingdom entrusted to us?

I love the Nike slogan, "Just do it!" As founder of the Vineyard, John Wimber, said, "Do the stuff." I wonder how we are doing in taking our rule over the kingdom that has

been entrusted to us? I fear that we are not doing all that well. This is the time to change; this is the time to step up to the plate or grab the reins with gusto. I am praying that as you read this book, God is speaking to you and telling you the thing that he is calling you to, even now.

Conclusion

The Lord seemed urgent at Cane Ridge that believers are needed because there is much work to be done. He confirmed that the time is short, he would give assignments, and we needed to be diligent to do them. Immediately. Believers are called to diligence. We are called to look for those who are hungry for God and to feed them.

The hardest part of the entire Cane Ridge experience came when the Lord said to me, “If people are not hungry, move on.” It was the first and, in fact, only time that I have questioned what I was hearing. However, in later study and reflection, I knew that it was a true word from God. Jesus never chased the Pharisees, the ones who were hardened and wanted nothing to do with him. The Lord said that some hearts are already hard, and he pointed out people I had already come into contact with who were so hardened that there appeared to be no light in them at all.

Time has progressed, and there are those who can be saved. Time is critical, and the ones the enemy already has will steal our time from those who can come to know the Lord. The Lord said that he would show me when it was time to move on. Actually, that has happened once since Cane Ridge. It was the first and only time I felt like there was “enemy infiltration” in the camp. A man came loosely into my ministry circle, and his ideas were evil. He had very distorted ideas about the origin of different races and other thoughts that were “anti-Christ” points of view. I discerned it was not as it should be with this man, and so I asked the Lord about

him. Should I minister to him or how should I proceed? The Lord said, “Move on.” The Lord was talking to me in Cane Ridge vernacular, and I knew exactly what he was talking about. He said, “My heart cries, but some have seared their consciences.”

The Lord stressed there is much work to be done and there is a big harvest to be reaped. Brothers and sisters, we must harvest. The Lord will equip us with strength, patience, and endurance as we set about his work.

EPILOGUE



Weighing the Cost of Not Serving God

The Lord has blessed me with multiple visions of the throne of God, as well as the thrones of iniquity. I described some of those visions earlier in the book, where the thrones of black were placed all over the world, depending on who was reigning in that particular area. I have had one more vision of the throne of God that I have not shared before. It gave me greater insight into the fulfillment of the final enthronement of the Lord.

While I was worshiping with Nic and Rachel Billman, anointed worship leaders and missionaries to Brazil, I had a vision of (or was literally allowed to peer into) the throne room of heaven. From a great distance, I saw what appeared to be the throne of God—extremely bright and tall, almost crystalline. The atmosphere was brilliant, mostly cobalt blue with multiple hues and shades of brilliant blues, with some purples, and pinks. The color was living and ever-changing with energy. I have previously described thrones I have seen as pyramidal structures, but in reality this throne appeared to be more the shape of an oil derrick—360 degrees. On the top was the brightest light I had ever seen: brilliant and beautiful, welcoming, pulsating, and emitting a glow that bathed everything in light.

Even though it was fairly tall at that point, later, after more worship, I saw it again and it was much taller, higher and lifted up on the praises of the people. The glow of the light came down at about a 45-degree angle from the top. When the throne/platform of praises was marginally tall at first, the glory light did not cover as much area. Later, however, when the throne/platform of praises was high and lifted up, even though the angle of the glow was still about the same, it encompassed more area because it was taller. I had the interpretation that when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, the throne will be lifted up and the glory of God will fill the whole earth. And when the glory fills the whole earth, there will be no more reign of darkness. There will be no more thrones of iniquity. Satan, the god of this age (2 Cor. 2:4), will be no more, and there will be total fulfillment of the enthronement of the Lord. He is preparing his people for this moment.

This book started with my prayer to the Lord at Cane Ridge, “Lord, I have come here to re-dig the wells of revival. How do I do that? What do you want me to know?” The wells of revival are dug in the hearts of each and every individual. We crave the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit’s manifest presence that changes communities, states, whole nations, and even the entire world. Revival begins in the heart of a person, and then another person, and then another until the presence of God is exceedingly welcomed, coming in glory with indescribable power and love.

This book seeks to answer the questions about re-digging the wells I first wrote down at Cane Ridge. It is the cost of loving the Lord and yielding everything to him. When God is fully and finally enthroned on the praises of his people, revival will be upon us. The glory of God will come and we will be overcome with his manifest presence. This revelation is about getting us to that point. It is about preparation in the

hearts of men and women who love God and who want to serve him above all.

The urgency of this work was lost on me for a while. I was working on final project paperwork for a doctor of ministry degree and was dividing my time between it and this book. When the doctoral project paperwork was completed, I did not immediately begin working on this book in earnest. While in prayer one day, the Lord impressed upon me the urgency of completing this assignment. In essence, he then gave me a time frame in which to get the draft done and given into the hands of others for further handling.

This work belongs to the Lord. In many ways, I was the scribe, while he dictated new insights and understanding that I previously had not had before that point. In other ways, my mark is very much on this book as it is distinctly my labor and what God showed me. I truly believe that this reflects two sides of the same coin: the sovereignty of God along with the human elbow grease to bring this from a command of faith into a reality of a tangible offering to the kingdom of God. As always, as with any prophetic word, I invite you to chew the meat and spit out the fat. Hold to what is of God; throw out anything that is not.

When I began this book, I did not know that it was going to lead in the direction that it did. It is a wake-up call to the body of Christ. It is an alarm for the sleepers to arise and begin bearing fruit for the kingdom of God. This is a cry for the church to wake up and be the church as it is described in the New Testament. Jesus cried during his earthly ministry because his people did not understand what he needed them to understand. How can the people operate in the kingdom perspective if they do not understand Jesus and his mission?

I did not know the title of this book until I wrote, "Salvation is free, but discipleship is not" several times throughout this work. It just tumbled out. The subtitle came when I realized that while serving the Lord may cost the believer

something—time, effort, emotional involvement, hurt, pain, rejection, loss of time with family, and much more. It is much more costly to *not* serve the Lord. In fact, not serving the Lord will cost the believer everything, and ultimately, a place in the eternal kingdom of God. Not serving God will cost the believer more than he or she can pay.

Let me be very clear here so no one is mistaken: serving the Lord is joy unspeakable—it is not drudgery. It is the development of a relationship that results in constant communication with God, the Lord of lords and King of kings. I love God more than I can express through my words. Serving him with my best effort at wholehearted devotion is truly my greatest joy. The fruit comes out of relationship, not out of serving Martha-style with little or no relationship at all. The best way to serve God is to blend the best of Mary and Martha—devotion and service together, with devotion coming first and service not giving way to distraction. Mary took the better way in devotion, but Martha’s way was also necessary.

The Cane Ridge download led me to some new insights of Scripture. Some of the writing of this book as the Lord opened my eyes and let me see in Scripture the importance of the *rhema* word. Other times I related understanding that I previously gained by study and seeking, which was written in earlier journals. Each chapter is built on the previous one.

In chapters 1 and 2, the Lord showed me the urgency of repentance. At first I thought, “Lord, I really do not want to have only a message of repentance.” When I was preaching every week, those were the hardest messages to preach. Failure to repent leads to separation from God for eternity. Even as I began writing the first message, I knew there was going to be seven messages. The seven messages fit together like a well-designed puzzle, but everything hangs on an attitude of repentance. The Lord pulls away from those who are hardhearted. Our disobedience leads us to judgment. God loves us, hurts for us, and does not want to judge us, but he

will because he is truth and commands us to live in that truth. We see from Scripture that Jesus truly hurts when his people do not understand his ways or repent for their sinful actions. The unrepentant attitudes of the people have led to sins piling up as thrones of iniquity, which are platforms for enemy principalities. A true attitude of repentance is the way to break the power of the thrones of iniquity. The spirit of Elijah is loosed on the earth to bring the hearts of the people back to the Lord through repentance.

In chapter 3, the Lord is seen as seeking a people who will be wholehearted and devoted to him. Time is short, and many will be deceived by not turning their hearts away from the pulls and distractions that cause people to grow cold in their relationship with the Lord. It is really in the best interest of the believer to be wholehearted for Jesus and to worship him fully with the whole heart engaged. Sometimes it is difficult to get our minds cleared because of the noise that is constantly surrounding us. The Lord is calling for his people to be alert and watch for distractions. Believers see the Lord and only him; they want the Lord and only him.

Chapter 4 biblically illustrates that if believers do not stay alert and on the offensive, the enemy will deceive us and has indeed already deceived many into serving idols without even realizing it. Good, honest people have fallen into the trap of Israel in the Old Testament. Believers currently read the pages of the Old Testament and say, “How could Israel fall into the trap of worshiping false gods?” What is easy to see for Israel in retrospect is very difficult for us to see in prospect. The culture is deadened to the spiritually polluted things that it engages in without so much as a raised eyebrow—Harry Potter, Twilight, Yoga, Buddhism, Hinduism, universalism, and dead religious practices that do not lead to life. I even heard of a church split that came over the senseless argument of whether Adam had a navel or not. I want

to scream from the top of a mountain, “Brothers and sisters, wake up; *please*, wake up!”

Jesus said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Jesus is talking in John 10 about Satan stealing, killing, and destroying the sheep who are in the sheep pen! He wants to steal us right out from under the care of the Shepherd. The enemy will try and steal us; if we are not cautious we will be stolen away out of the sheep pen of the Shepherd to the sheep pen of the enemy and not even be aware of it until it is too late.

Chapter 5 shows the need for believers to walk in radical obedience. It addresses the idea that a relationship with Jesus is actually supposed to cost us something. The Lord needs people who will listen to him and obey him without question. It must be decided that the fear of man is something that will not be trifled with. The Lord is calling his people to radical obedience, which may take us to uncomfortable places or even subject us to criticism or misunderstanding. God may even ask us to do things that are unusual. We do not always have to understand why he is asking us to do something, and indeed many times we will not understand. But God has the full picture in mind. Our lot in kingdom life is to obey and to be overjoyed, whether we get to know the plan or not! We obey God because we love him and his people enough to do what he tells us to do. If we do not follow God’s commands, it shows that we do not love him. To obey God then, we have to be able to hear him. His sheep know his voice and will not follow the voice of a stranger. The hard truth is that radical obedience costs us something. If it does not, it should.

In chapter 6, the Lord asks to be glorified by believers living a pure and holy life. He commanded a spotless life with frequent repentance. We can only do that if we, as believers, live in the truth. The Lord seems to be really serious about the issue of eliminating guile by seeking to live life in pure,

unadulterated honesty. I am praying for everyone to have the revelation that the Holy Spirit is living within us, and that the Holy Spirit is privy to every thought and action of the believer.

We can really only be what he has called us to be when we keep our thoughts and actions pure. The Holy Spirit is in us, knowing every thought, every word, and every ugly thing. The Lord is telling us to crush ugliness, crush rebellion, and crush the flesh. He wants us to be pure, and he will help us to do so, but it may take a daily effort to crush the flesh. By this pure life, the light of Jesus will shine through us, and he will be glorified. The word the Lord gave was, “Do not let the enemy have you, your mind, or your thinking. There is no place in my kingdom for foul thoughts or self-serving thoughts.”

In chapter 7, the Lord gives us understanding that the Word of God is his plan for sustaining our lives while on the earth. At a future point, we will have the true bread of life, the very presence of God; we will be with the Word and will not need to hear from him for our daily sustenance. But for now, the Word is the lifeline to all we hold dear; it is precious and living. A wise person will never be without the Word. People need to be in the Word, and they need to know how critical it is to the life of a believer. It is the bread of life, and those who eat it will live. This work is a prayer for a renewed hunger for God’s living and abiding Word. It is transformative. The Lord told me to help people feast on the Word. We really need only the Word without adornment or supplement. The Word is sufficient. Feast on the Word. Eat it!

Chapter 8 talks about the harvest that is white and ready to be plucked from the field. If the harvest is not plucked, it will be lost. What I never realized before is that if the harvest is not plucked, not only would the harvest be lost, but the harvester would be lost as well. The sin of fruitlessness is serious, and the church is arguing about what color the carpet

should be. This really is about the church waking up and realizing that we have a job to do and time is short. I do not know how many times the Lord said that to me in the Cane Ridge experience and also in prayer when he was giving me some loving discipline about being radically obedient in a timely manner. The cost of *not* serving God is more than we can pay.

This message is about followers of Jesus Christ living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven now, and being kingdom minded now. If we live as citizens of earth during our earthly lives and are concerned about the things of this life, we are very shortsighted indeed. If we are working toward storing up riches, we are working toward perishable fruit that will pass away. The only thing that will last and be eternal is the fruit that we gather here and now for eternal purposes. I have never seen a U-Haul behind a hearse. The pharaohs tried to take material wealth with them, which only turned out to be the treasure troves of grave robbers in later years.

Beloved, I think that the Lord wants his church to be sound and ready for what will come. We may already be living the parable of the ten virgins, when *all the believers fall asleep* while waiting for the groom to come. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak. When the alarm sounded, even though all had been sleeping, five (or about half of the people) were ready to go to the wedding with the bridegroom. The oil of relationship must be replenished every day. The bride must nurture the relationship with the groom to keep the love alive and growing. The relationship that we, as the bride of Christ, have with our Groom is a relationship of abiding. He will abide in us *as* we abide in him. He will let the bride call the depth of the relationship, not forcing his way upon her. There is exceeding joy we can all ask for or imagine if we will abandon ourselves to his love and care. Remember that the safest place to be is in the will of God.

In many ways, this book is about yielding our will to the will of the Lord and giving him that which costs us something.

The cost could be status, pride, or acceptance. As we crucify our flesh, we begin to pray, “Lord, may it be that I want what you want more than I want what my flesh wants.”

I have only been a distant admirer of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was imprisoned in Germany during Hitler’s terror during World War II. Bonhoeffer hatched a plot to eliminate Hitler and was caught in the process. He was executed about three weeks before the end of the war. A prolific author from prison, he often wrote about cheap grace and costly grace. Cheap grace is to preach forgiveness without repentance, baptism without discipline, and communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace with no discipleship and no cross attached to it. It does not cost anything. Costly grace, on the other hand, is to sell everything to buy the hidden treasure, to trade all goods for the pearl of great price. Costly grace is the kingly rule of Jesus, for which a man will pluck out an offending eye that causes him to stumble. Thankfully, I had an opportunity to decide that I was living in cheap grace rather than costly grace before it was too late.

After I had been saved, but before my service to the Lord actually cost me something, I had a potentially fatal near-miss car accident. As I came around a bend in the road, I met a truck pulling a trailer with overhanging utility poles. The truck turned in front of me, and the poles swung over into my lane of travel. The scene unfolded in front of me in slow motion. I swerved and barely missed the poles and certain catastrophic injury or death. In the process, I broke the windshield on a mailbox and came to rest a few feet down the road adjacent to another mailbox. I later learned from a witness that my vehicle had been airborne. The truck driver commented that he could not believe that I had driven the vehicle in such a way as to avoid a much more serious accident.

Later that day I passed the location again and prayed, “Lord, what did you want me to know about this near miss?” I realized that I would not have wanted to meet the Lord that

day and say, “But, Lord, there was so much more that I could have done for you while I was there.” I knew that I had one life to live. I was not using my life for eternal purposes; I was living in *cheap grace*.

Needless to say, that event changed my life in remarkable ways; it was a great pivotal point in my life of faith. I started living life, knowing that one day I was going to stand before Lord and give an account for what I had done or failed to do while in my body. I started living life, knowing that my time to impact the world and expand the kingdom of God was rapidly fleeting. This was not about me doing more because someone else expected it or because I felt guilty; it was about doing more because I loved Jesus enough to give him my all.

Has your relationship with God actually changed the way you live your life? Having this kind of faith means that we may look odd to the world. If our lives look normal to the world in which we live, we may be fitting in much too well. In fact, if our lives are normal to the world, we may not be doing something right. Our business every day is to prepare for our final day. We are to live each day as if it would be our last. We never know when we could be standing in front of God, saying, “But, Lord, I could have done so much more for you while I was there.” Let that never be said of us.

