

In Search of Purpose

*Understanding your purpose
in times of transition and change*

Dr. Jerry D. Edmon

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to the many who have lost their way on the road of life. I dedicate it to those who have struggled with the question of lost purpose and hopeless dreams. I dedicate it to those who have given up and have been sidelined by discouragement. To you I say that your life is not over. Your dreams are not lost. You are going to be everything that God intended for you to be. If you will just get up and continue, you will realize that your life is an assignment and the purpose of God is going to be fulfilled in you. Today courage is going to be imparted into you and you are going to get back into the race.

I also want to make a special dedication of this work to my grandson Michael.

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Preface

The label, "some assembly required" just about pushed me over the edge this last Christmas. But isn't that the story of our Christian journey? It reminded me of a tomb stone that said, "Construction complete, thank you for your patience".

Both of these statements remind us that our whole life is reflected by the experiences, both good and bad, of life's journey. It is the struggle of the journey that makes you grow. It's not so much in what we do in life, rather in what we are becoming. The journey is what we travail over the most. That is where life is lived and experienced. The journey is where we feel the bumps, the excitement and the disappointment. The journey is where we live by faith and not by sight.

- This is a book about your journey.
- It's about your relationship with God and your trust in Him.
- It's about His faithfulness and His wisdom at work in your life, even when you don't perceive His guidance.
- It's about how He uses us and other people in our lives to move us forward.
- It's about how He responds to the needs of mankind.
- It tells of His faithfulness to his covenant with man, of His ability to turn the hearts of peasants and kings.

I want to give you the assurance that no matter what you feel or experience, God is at work in your life. He is the Lord and Master of all things.

In Psalms chapter 30 David is crying out to the Lord for help and deliverance. We have all been there. We find ourselves in a difficult place and we cannot figure why.

⁷ You hid Your face, and I was troubled.

⁸ *I cried out to You, O Lord;
And to the Lord I made supplication:*

⁹ *What profit is there in my blood,
When I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise You?
Will it declare Your truth?*

¹⁰ *Hear, O Lord, and have mercy on me;
Lord, be my helper!”*

Then in verse 11, David turns it to a song of thanksgiving.

¹¹ *You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,*

¹² *To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent.
O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.*

Sometimes it feels like you have been forsaken because you do not see the big picture. We tend to see things from a micro view, but God sees it from a macro perspective. In other words, there are things taking place in your life that you cannot see. But I promise you that even in the midst of your desperation He has you in the palm of His hand. His plan is at work in your life right now.

Chapter One



The Principle of God's Faithfulness *Understanding your purpose in times of transition and change.*

"Great men are the ambassadors of Providence sent to reveal to their fellow men their unknown selves. To them is granted the power to call forth the best there is in those who come under their influence."

- Calvin Coolidge

We must understand the deeper revelation that we exist for other people. First of all, we exist for those who make our hearts smile, and then for the many who are nameless. To them we are bound by the three-fold cord of compassion, sympathy and love. This is the foundation on which our sense of inner equilibrium is built.

It is a mistake to look on ease and comfort as the goal of life. Our path is enlightened by kindness, beauty and truth which is only expressed in a sense of kinship with the struggles of our fellowman.

Human achievement and modern day success has become a doctrine of self-indulgence and one on which our society is drunk. It is very difficult for us to connect with the needs of others because we are overwhelmingly pre-occupied with ourselves. Only when we are freed from the view of ourselves do we truly see the path of purpose that God has for us.

It is only when we see the bigger picture that we reach beyond ourselves and understand that our steps are ordered by the Lord. The bigger picture helps us to see that we are to be sent into the places where men cry out from their pain. This is where our assignment is revealed. Darkness cries out for help and God sends light. That is the reason for all of the movement in your life. You are sent. It may be for a visit, a season or a life time. But make no mistake about it; your life is an assignment.

Unfortunately, that assignment sometimes requires you to go places that you would not normally go, and as a result you must encounter a bit of discomfort in order to truly reach the needs of others. The chaos in others cannot help but have a direct effect on you. You must not let that discourage you. They are your assignment.

Our life consists of what I call divine appointments and divine contacts. They are divinely appointed connections that God puts in your path. These are the spark plugs that keeps you moving forward, or holds you in conditions that sometimes make you question the faithfulness of God.

We all have questions about our assignment in life, especially when it appears that our life is going in the wrong direction. We tend to question our purpose or placement when we feel that we have lost something special to us or when our marriage or family seems to be falling apart. The unexpected makes us feel that our life is over or that we have somehow lost our opportunities to succeed in life. I lost my job, I got a divorce, I went to prison, I filed for bankruptcy. The list goes on and you disqualify yourself from the race because of the circumstances you encountered. You must put away the pretty, perfect plan you had for your life and begin to view it as a journey in which each building block, whether pleasant or not is imperative to reach the next level.

You are called to run a race, not just take a ride in the country. The term “human race” is not just a description of humanity in general. Our earthly experience is literally a race we are running. It is seen in our time, our talent and our energy. It consists of our decisions, our compassion and our obedience. There are three bible passages that use this word in relation to our life and stewardship.

Ecclesiastes 9:11

*“I returned, and saw under the sun, that **the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong**, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”*

Hebrews 12:1

*“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, **and let us run with patience the race that is set before us**”*

1 Corinthians 9:24

*”²⁴ Know ye not that **they which run in a race run all**, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.*

²⁵ And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

²⁶ I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

²⁷ But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

Obviously, the race mentioned here is a picture of our life and stewardship. In this race, we encounter many things that have the potential to side line our life and efforts. We must prepare and discipline ourselves to run our race. Can you imagine a marathon runner preparing for the race of his life without giving his all into it? I am thinking of his exercise routine, strength training, diet, his endurance training. He has to want this. Yet we get up every morning and run our race with such a ho-hum attitude and the result is that our life and achievements are mediocre at best. The majority of these people fall by the wayside because of fatigue and lack of endurance. How have you prepared for your race? Are you giving it your best? Are you pacing yourself or are you just hanging back? Temperance is a word that is introduced in 1 Corinthians 9:25. In our race we must be temperate, unmoved by the changing elements around us. It is here that our control and restraint are shown.

Why is this necessary? Because we encounter instability in others, opposition, fatigue, distractions and discouragement. As we run we are affected by outside conditions and elements. On the other side of the coin, this race also holds joy and fulfillment as we offer our lives to God through faith and obedience. Although we all strive for the crown at the end of the race, and in our minds eye we see ourselves with our hands raised in victory

breaking through the ribbon at the finish line, the reality is that life is not experienced in the destination but rather in the journey.

In the process of that journey is where you are right now. Your day to day experiences, the things you encounter are all part of that race. In this life, victory is not seen in those who finish first, but rather in those who live the life of faith from day to day. And that victory is sustained when it looks like everything is falling apart around us.

1 John 5:4

“and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”.

My victory is seen in my faith and not in my circumstances or position at the present time. I live in victory because of what I believe, not because of what I face. I live in victory from day to day regardless of my circumstances, because I live by faith in the Son of God. I run with the objective of obedience to finish the assignment that God has mapped out for my life. That is my race. The Apostle Paul described the end of his race:

2 Timothy 4:7-8

”⁷ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

One day, your race in this life will be over and you will cross the finish line and enter into the glorious experience that God has planned for you. But today you hit the ground running. You overcome obstacles and hurdles. You pace yourself. Why? Because it's your race. This is not a thirty-day sprint; it is a marathon that lasts every day of your life. God

obviously had confidence in you to have placed you on your path. It is your “assignment”. This is where the gifts in you are seen. The needs in others cry out for the treasure in you.

You might ask, “Would God send me down a rough road if someone on that road cried out for help”. You bet he would. If you don’t understand that, it will leave you feeling insecure when you hit your first pothole.

Potholes come in the form of people, events and circumstances. Most potholes are formed due to fatigue of the road surface. How many people do you know that have these fatigue fractures that infiltrate everything in their life? And you feel the bumpiness when you get near them. Stress and hardships have turned the conditions of their life into deteriorating hazard. This is a definition of what other people’s lives look like. Fatigue fractures everywhere. Everyone who comes into contact with them feels the stress.

I hear people talk about their life and they make statements like:

- “It is not getting better for me, it is getting worse”.
- “Where is God in my situation?”
- “I’ve done everything right. I don’t deserve this. I am angry”
- “It’s just my luck”.
- “It seems that everything I put my hands to falls apart. I hate my life”.
- “I feel lost”.

There are the people that God sends you to, warts and all. The reason is that He loves them. Unfortunately, their potholes have an impact on you. You feel their stress and it becomes unpleasant and stressful. Again it is not an interruption, it is an assignment.

It doesn’t just sometimes seem like that; it really is like that. C.S. Lewis said, ‘Stop regarding all of the unpleasant things as interruptions of one’s “real” life. They are precisely one’s real life’. So what do you do when you are on your journey and everything seems to go wrong? The first

thing to remember is that "things are not happening to you", It's all part of the assignment. The events of your life are all being used to facilitate your gifts and move you forward.

Let's talk for a moment about the difficulties that we face and what it accomplishes in us as well as through us. This difficulty in your life work on two levels:

1. First and foremost, you are sent into other people's problems to bring light to them. You get into the battle with them. You make a deposit that empowers them to move to the next season of their life. It's your opportunity to introduce the Kingdom of God into their dark situation. Broadly speaking, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all of creation.
2. The other thing that is happening when you encounter hardship on some level is that God is revealing the things in you that keep you from moving forward. It's the weeds that call for the plow in your life. Jesus is lord and he positions you according to what is in your life. You ask him to advance you so he reveals the things in you that are keeping you from advancing. Hardships reveal what is really in your heart. He is a master artist. Think of a potter who constantly skims the vessel on the wheel, feeling and looking for imperfections that need to be smoothed out.

He does the same with your life, looking for what needs smoothing. If you have impatience, anger, unforgiveness or pride, God will position you to reveal that pride and give you the opportunity to deal with it. All the things in your life come because of what is in your heart and life. God is less concerned with what you have, more what you are becoming. He is looking to perfect you as a vessel, and will not allow you to be flawed regardless of how uncomfortable it makes you.

As we consider why we experience the things that we do, let's go to the book of Genesis and look at Joseph, the son of Jacob, because through him we see an example of the bigger picture and plan of God as it unfolds

over the course of his life. Through the story of Joseph's life, we see how God works his purpose in our lives even when we don't understand it.

The Assignment of Joseph, the Son of Jacob

I cannot think of one story that better reveals God at work in the midst of uncertainty than that of Joseph. Even when he didn't understand it. Every event, good or bad moved him closer to his destiny. It is evident that Joseph trusted God. He saw God in everything that was happening to him even though he did not understand it. We see this when he made this statement to his brothers, "*What you meant for evil, God worked for good*". That is not a "spur of the moment" statement. That had been his meditation for a long time. It was particularly clear when he had time in his position as Prime Minister to reflect on all of the things that had happened to him, especially in regard to the uncertain and hostile movement in his life. This is where we begin to better understand the question. If God is in control, then why is there uncertain movement in my life? That is really the question we all ask when everything seems doubtful and we don't have an answer for what we are experiencing.

The fact is that we only hold one piece of the puzzle and too often our future doesn't make sense until we are plugged into our assignment and can see the bigger picture. In this we find the issue of trust. The one thing God wants from us is the very thing we have trouble giving him: our trust. Do we trust that He is faithful? Do we trust He is working in our lives even when we fail or make a wrong turn? Do we trust that the Lord is involved even when it appears that the enemy of our soul has gained a foothold in our lives? Do we trust that God can make beauty out of our mess?

The life of Joseph is such a wonderful story to tell because we can clearly see that God was working his plan and purpose through Joseph's life even though Joseph could not. Joseph couldn't go back to the book of Genesis and see how the story turned out because it had yet to be written. From his perspective, he was going from one disaster to another. Talk about a life of mishaps. From day to day I am sure that he had to ask himself,

“What else could possibly go wrong? I’ve ruined everything by telling my dreams. My life is a complete waste and I will probably die in this prison cell”. Imagine how foolish he felt as recalled his own dreams and telling his family that they would all bow down to him. We many times feel that way. It is almost as though everything has been taken out of our hands and like a boat with no sail, the current is driving us wherever it wants.

Maybe this sounds like you. I assure you that God has not lost control. He is God. That means everything, which includes what you are facing right now is under his control. He has a plan for your life. Trust in his faithfulness. I promise that obedience to his voice will keep you on track to the end of your journey.

Let’s stake a panoramic view of Joseph's life. Things didn't happen as quickly as we would have supposed.

- He was 16 or 17 when his father gave him the coat of many colors.
- He was 17 when he was sold into Egypt.
- He was in Potiphar’s house about 11 years and in prison for about 2 years.
- He was 30 when he was made Prime Minister in Egypt.
- He was 39 when his brothers first came to Egypt (second year of the famine, or nine years after being made overseer).
- He was probably 41 or so when the brothers came a second time and Jacob comes to Egypt.
- He was 110 when he died.

That is a lot of time to try to figure things out. But what held his compass to true north was his trust in God. It was his belief that God was in control of all of the movement of his life. With this as a foundation, lets walk with Joseph through each step of his life and see how that applies to us in our journey of faith and trust in finding God's purpose for our lives.

The Power of the Blessing

The “Blessing” is the basis and foundation for understanding and walking in the purpose that God has for our lives. To better understand it, let's continue to look at the life of Joseph and see how God moved him from place to place and how his experiences prepared him for the position of Prime Minister over all of Egypt. Even though he couldn't see it, all of his circumstances had to bow its knee to the blessing that this young man walked in. Actually, we see the life of Joseph in one word, “Blessing”. God had previously made a covenant with Joseph's Great Grandfather, Abraham.

Genesis 17

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

² And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

² Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:

“⁴ As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.

⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations.

⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

⁷ And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

⁸ Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

As believers, the foundation for our faith begins with the basic understanding that we are equal partners, co-heirs and joint recipients of the covenant that God began with Abraham, by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. But how do we integrate the blessing of Abraham into our life and circumstances? The story of the life of Joseph gives us a picture. We see the blessing of Abraham in Joseph’s life in the form of an assignment. That is where the blessing is seen in our life also.

God told the man called Abraham that he would be blessed, and the blessing would consist of this. *“I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.”* The blessing of Abraham was not that he was going to “get” a blessing but rather that he was going to “be” a blessing. The blessing is always revealed through assignment. That means that the purpose of Abraham extended far beyond just living out his life in comfort. The love of God is the catalyst. The love of God not only pushes you toward your assignment, it also equips you and empowers you to fulfill the desire of his intense love. That is the higher purpose in life. To “get” a blessing does not imply purpose. To “be” a blessing does.

Galatians 3:29 said that *“if we belong to Christ, then are we Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.”* If that be so, it means that we are also blessed. Not just with something, but rather to do something. What have we been blessed with? Romans 5:5 tells us:

Romans 5:5

“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us.”

This scripture is a defining commission. Not only are we loved by God, we are now called to be lovers after God’s order. That is the blessing in

one word. We are loved. We are fused by that love. Now we are dispensers of that love. That is a blessed person.

Man's purpose was to be filled with the love of God, and to express that love to the world. So in order to be blessed, one must become a blessing. We unfortunately assumed that the blessing was, "I'll get a blessing." While that is true, it is so much deeper than that. Again, what have we been blessed with? We have been blessed with a special love, the nature of which must give itself away. I am blessed, but look further. I am blessed in order that I might be a blessing.

We certainly are not seeing that in society today. According to the world standard, to be blessed is...

- ME rich,
- ME happy,
- ME fulfilled.

While it is true that God wants to bless you with resources, the problem is that the attitude tends to be self-serving. People have measured their success by wealth, and they are driven to get more. Society has become so full of itself. Actually, that is an understatement. It has gone far beyond that. People are consumed with themselves. They have become a generation of spoiled self-pleasers.

The church fed into that narrative because they do it in the name of the Lord. The church has gone through decades of self-indulged theology. The only purpose they could see in life or the bible was to make them feel better, to get them more money. To make them more comfortable. Let me again clarify that I do believe that the blessing will increase you in the area of your resources, but even that brings me back to this point. The reason you have resources is to position you to be a blessing.

I am careful to not throw out the baby with the bath water, but there is some bath water here. It grieves me to hear ministers of the gospel talk

about blessing and prosperity only as a means to get you rich. Is that why God has blessed you?

Many of the ministry outreaches of this modern day have simply become a channel to hustle the poor. I see men of God who have prostituted their gift, preaching the gospel with the back handed motive of hustling cash. For too many greed is at the heart of all that they do. And it is certainly not just the preachers. The people in the pew sent their love offerings with the belief it was to “get rich quick”, soiling the true motive and purpose of giving. They empty their resources trying to purchase the blessing without being the blessing. We are self-serving, self-pleasing children consumed with self-interests. This is not what God had in mind.

For the most part, we cannot be a blessing to others because we are too concerned with our outcome. “How am I going to look? What's in it for me?” As a result, we have determined the will of God by our comfort or discomfort.

Did you know that the greatest fear of our generation is the loss of luxury? The thought of self-sacrifice is not even in our vocabulary. The result is that we have not been able to see the higher purpose in life.

Let's get back to the real purpose that God has in mind through blessing us.

"God promises that I will enter into His love and become an extension of His love to the world."

Once we understand purpose, our assignment is clear and we are tasked with the weight of responsibility to walk that out. This is something that we will answer for. We will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. We will give account for the things done in this body. Do you remember the parable of the talents and the unjust steward? Of course there are others, but all of these teachings bring purpose to light. We have a purpose for being here. We will be judged according to our stewardship in relation to what he has entrusted us with.

We have tried to embrace our purpose apart from its assignment and it has left us empty and unfilled. You hear it from almost everybody. "I know that I'm here for something but I don't know what it is. I believe we can help you find what that something is.

Before I go back to Abraham, let me say what your purpose is not. It is not to replenish the earth. It is not to gather wealth. It is not entirely true that you were put on this earth to have a relationship with God. He could take you to heaven to accomplish that.

Your commission in this life is to introduce the spiritual resources of God's love and His Kingdom into the natural and through that conduit, be a blessing. We are calling the creation of God back to that position of Sonship. In this daily commission, we are to hear the voice of God and be obedient to that voice. We are ambassadors of another Kingdom. We are spirits having a human experience.

So this is the back drop of what God intended for Abraham.

Gen 12:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Now the LORD had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country, From your family, And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.

*² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; **And you shall be a blessing.***

³ I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This applies to us also. Jesus brought the Blessing of Abraham into our lives.

Gal 3:29 (NKJV)

“²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

What does this mean to us? “The blessing” is obviously very important to us. We expect God’s intervention because of it. We all want to be blessed. But unfortunately we embrace its benefits but fail to see its true purpose.

We take it to mean that God’s hand is on us because of the way life responds to us. If everything goes well, it is easy to see God keeping His promise. If things go bad, we wonder what happened. If we don’t understand its purpose, we will complain at every discomfort. As a result, God cannot trust us to be sent into difficult situations to be a blessing.

The greater power position in this life is not getting a blessing, it is being one.

Luke 6:38

³⁸ Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.

God wants you to be one of those men that the latter part of that verse talks about. Although the primary focus of this verse is to explain what happens when you give, the goal, at least in the heart of God, is for you to become one of the givers and not just a receiver. Unfortunately, too many people have become professional receivers. That is all they think the covenant means. We somehow think that the only reason that God gave us scriptures was so we could gain more possessions.

We are completely caught off guard when God sends us on an assignment that is uncomfortable and doesn't seem to yield the "hundredfold return" that people mistakenly refer to. I am not suggesting that when you give that it will not be measured back to you, but that isn't what the covenant is about. There are times when you are needed in a desperate situation where men are crying out. In that assignment, your comfort and your increase is not at the top of the food chain of importance.

There are three stages of growth in life:

The first stage of growth

"Feed me, and clothe me".

I know that stage one is pretty crowded. Feed me, clothe me and take care of me. Really, not much more is expected of them than that. We are all responsible to care for this group and make sure that they are loved and cared for. These "Little Ones" hold a very special place in the heart of God. And they should hold a very special place in our hearts. Like the infants in our homes, we are to feed and clothe them.

The second stage of growth

"Now I can feed myself"

Then there are those who finally reach stage two. Unfortunately, too many of them spend the rest of their life here. They stop growing at stage two. "I can feed myself". "I believe for myself a new car, a new house". "I believe for a raise or promotion". These are the ones who believe that the purpose for the tithe is just for them to get promotion, unexpected inheritances, jobs and more jobs, finding money and increases. These have no concept of the tithe being their worship to God. Again I repeat, they believe that the only reason for the bible is to get them more stuff. 1 Corinthians 13: *When I was a child I spake as a child...ME...ME ... ME!* It is easy to become frustrated with this age group, but actually, that is just where they are. Adolescents. Give them time and they will grow. When they

do, the glow of such things, as position and possessions loses its luster and they start asking questions like, “Is this all there is?” Stage two is a mindset that is out of balance with true purpose in life. Self is at the heart of all sin. Selfishness will lead you down a road to which there no return. God knows that you will pass through this neighborhood in your growth and spiritual development, but he never intended for you to make a homestead there.

The third and final stage of growth

“Now I can feed you”

God wants you to come to the final stage of growth which is, “Now I can feed you”. Romans 15:1 *“Those who are strong should bare the infirmities of the weak and not to please themselves”*. The motivation of my faith is love and the focus of my faith is to those that love reaches out to. In this we understand the phrase, *“Thou shall be a blessing”*. Do you want to see the gifts operate to their fullest potential? Do you want to see your faith work to its highest potential? It only works by love.

- Faith is the Power
- Hope is the Blue print
- Love is the Motivation.

Love is the force that makes everything work. Even faith works by love. When love turns you toward the needs of someone, it equips you with whatever you need to accomplish that which love has demanded.

It is so easy to be a blessing to someone. That doesn’t just have to be an exchange of money. It could be a kind and encouraging word, a deed in behalf of someone in need. Can you imagine yourself being used in bringing a prophetic word to somebody? It doesn’t have to look deeply spiritual and be in Elizabethan English. It starts out with a word of blessing and encouragement. It starts out in the flesh but ends in the spirit. It starts out in a word of encouragement and the love of God carries that word into the revelation of his desire for their lives. He loves them and desires to bless them. And in that, his purpose is revealed.

Yet people live their lives self-absorbed and inverted. They live for themselves. I have heard so many say, *“I don’t have enough to be a blessing”*, or, *“When things change in my life I will be a blessing to someone”*. But the fact is that God wants you to be a blessing where you are right now. Listen to the wonderful story of the woman with the alabaster box.

Mark 14:3-9

³ And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

⁴ And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

⁵ For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

⁶ And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

⁷ For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

*⁸ **She hath done what she could:** she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.*

⁹ Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.”

Did you hear it? Jesus said it. She did what she could.

- Do what you can
- With what you have
- Where you are

You have something in your life that you can bless with, and when God can trust you with that he will use what you have in the form of assignment. What a wonderful assignment this woman had. If she had been selfish, fearful or self-absorbed she might have missed this experience to be a part of the plan of God by anointing Jesus for the next phase of his ministry. When you are obedient and determine to be a blessing, you anoint people to move to the next level of their life and ministry.

Life, as God designed it, is built on giving, planting and sowing. Like these, being a blessing requires a choice. Many times (most of the time) it is a step of faith. Opportunities arise all of the time and it is up to us to respond to our circumstances in an attitude of faith and charity.

Giving is a principle of necessity in our life. It does several things:

1. Giving keeps us from being immersed in self-interest and helps us see the bigger picture.
2. Giving declares that there is enough to meet the need of others and moves us from fear into faith.
3. Since the material with which we become charitable represents our time, talent and energy, and giving is a spiritual principle, giving enables us to spiritualize our life and our material substance.
4. Giving ties the spiritual and the material together. Without charity, material gain becomes a deceptive, ultimate symbol of Idolatry. Charity reaches out to others and transforms diversity into unity.

I know that it is possible to be so intimidated by our circumstances to the point that we feel we have nothing to offer. For one reason or another we feel insufficient to meet the need of others. What is my little contribution in the face of such need? My dear friend, please know that God never

intended for one person to do everything, but he did intend for everyone to do something. God never intended you to be the Messiah...just be a blessing. If everyone does just a little, the needs are met. All God wants from you is obedience.

What does it mean to be a blessing?

What does it mean to be a blessing? It is obviously seen in what you do for others, something as simple as food, money or a simple cup of water. Most of the time, it comes in the form of encouragement. Do you know what it means to encourage someone? It means to impart courage when people are heavy and depleted of strength in their journey. It is something that refreshes them and that makes them say, "I'm glad that you are here", "Thank God you are here for me". It gives them the strength to stand up when they are down.

This is how Paul felt when he spoke of his friend Onesiphorus:

2 Tim 1:16-18

¹⁶ The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:

¹⁷ But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.

¹⁸ The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well."

Let's look at blessing again through the life of Joseph. The power of blessing was really the lesson that we can see in the life of Joseph. When you understand that you have been blessed with something (the very nature

of which, must be given away), it affects how you respond to hardness that you face in life.

Joseph was the great grandson of Abraham. Joseph's father was Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. It is very clear that Jacob had a favorite son. In most cases the oldest son gets the spotlight. That would be Reuben the son of Leah. Jacob had four wives and eleven sons from them. Leah, Rachael, Bilhah and Zilpah. But Jacob loved Joseph's mother, Rachel the most. He was completely smitten. He had worked fourteen years for her. He was truly in love with her and since she had died while traveling, her sons Joseph and Benjamin were all that he had to remember the woman he loved.

It was through Jacob that Joseph was taught about the blessing. Joseph was the focus of what Jacob wanted to pass to his sons. While the other sons of Jacob were out doing the business of their father, Joseph was the youngest, and all day long he was instructed about the blessing of his great grandfather. He became a spoiled little tattletale and his brothers resented him. Jacob blessed him daily. He educated him. He probably put him over much of the family business, which brought great resentment and envy from his brothers. Jacob gave him the coat of many colors. It was a coat that represented "favor," which by right probably belonged to the first born Reuben, but was given to Joseph. He was so favored by his father that his brothers became jealous, even to the point of murder.

As a naive seventeen-year-old boy, he could never have predicted his brother's nefarious intent. It somehow slipped by him that his brothers resented his dreams and the position he held with their father. I think this shows his nature of always seeing the best.

One-day Joseph came to breakfast with a dream about his whole family bowing down to worship and reverence him. It was just enough to push his brothers over the edge. This "blessed" brother of theirs, this dreamer, has set something in motion that will alter his life. But what is interesting is that his dreams were not set in motion until he began to talk about them. Your words become the fuel to start the plan in motion. The

next day Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers. Joseph puts on his coat of many colors and heads out the door. His brothers saw him coming and the envy of their hearts manifested in violence and revenge. If you give envy and jealousy a place in your heart, it can quickly take on a life of its own. Matthew 27:18 tells us that Pilate knew that it was for envy that they had delivered Jesus to him. Envy will cause your emotions to whip into a frenzy, and like a drunken man your judgment will be altered. As Joseph approaches his brothers they go into a rage. They ripped off his coat, and threw him into a dry cistern which was built to store water. Many people today feel that their position or authority has been challenged or torn away from them and they have fallen into a dry place with no ability to get out or change their circumstances. Joseph did not see this coming.

While arguing over what to do to him, a caravan of Ishmaelite merchantmen and slave traders pass by and stopped to refresh themselves. Even the steps of these slave traders can't escape the purposes of the Lord. The brothers can see the other victims who are being transported to the slave station in Egypt. Judah's extemporaneous response was both practical and prophetic. He launched Joseph into his purpose. He speaks up and said, *"It makes no sense for us to kill our brother when we can sell him and let his blood be on someone else's hands"*. And with that, everything was set in motion.

Joseph was a victim of human trafficking. Joseph is sold for twenty pieces of silver, probably shekels. This is the rate at which Moses estimates a male from five to twenty years old. Leviticus 27:5. A man-servant was valued by him at thirty shekels. See Exodus 21:32 for more insight.

Reuben was the oldest brother and was not present when all of this took place. Reuben assumed his brothers would cool off and he would send Joseph back to his father with a bit more humility than he had approached them with. When he learned what happened he panicked and said, "What are we going to do?" When you become blinded by envy, you seldom count the cost. Now all they can do is try to cover their tracks. They still had the coat. That was the first things that the brothers stripped off of him. Envy always looks first for opportunity to undermine someone else's position. But

now they have to cover their tracks. But they couldn't comprehend what it would do to their father. Joseph didn't just represent his son. In Joseph, Jacob was connected to the one true love of his life, Rachael. The pain of that loss was only worsened. They put the blood of a goat on his coat, and made his father believe that it was the blood of Joseph and that he had been killed by a wild beast.

As horrible as all of this looks, Joseph had begun his journey that would take him to the fulfillment of his purpose and destiny. Your destiny is bigger than your circumstances. Joseph is headed to Egypt. If you were a slave in those days, there were only a couple of methods for transport. Either you would be stuffed into a small cage which was hooked on the saddle of a camel, or you would be tethered to the back of a camel and forced to walk to your destination. As they leave the area he most likely could see his father's house in the distance. I wonder what that felt like? How hopeless you must feel when you are being drug away from the safety and love of your father's arms with the realization that you may never see them again? You can't say goodbye, and anxiety and grief overwhelm your soul. You know there had to be a time of panic and extreme fear. After a few days, he arrives in Egypt where he is hosed off and prepared to be sold as a slave. Now Joseph stands like an animal on an auction block in Egypt, dazed, alone and confused.

Here is the big question: how does a blessed man interpret that? How does he find the purpose of life in all of that? It's difficult to think about theology when you are fighting for your life. This could be where you are right now. Everything is going wrong. "What is going on in my life? I've made my confessions; I've paid my tithe. How come I am in this difficult situation?"

Some of you have hit a wall in your life. As a good Christian should, you've prayed that God would move the wall. When nothing happened, you began to bind the wall. Then you loosed the wall. You tried to cast the devil out of the wall. You write scriptures on the wall, or you ignored the wall. Does that sound familiar? If you step back and look at it, you may find that it is not a wall at all. It is a staircase. God wants to move you to another level. What you perceived to be one thing was something

totally different. Maybe that is a picture of what you are going through right now.

So how does Joseph interpret his wall? How does a blessed man handle it when everything goes wrong? If you can understand this, it will change everything. Joseph's response was something like this. *"If God has blessed me, I cannot be unblessed. My blessing cannot be revoked by anybody. Not by my family or these slave traders; not by anyone."*

Here is his leap of faith. A blessed man says, "I am here with a purpose." And the only thing that a blessed man understands is that he is blessed in order that he might "be" a blessing.

That is the blessing of Abraham. It talks like this:

- *If I am blessed, it is with one purpose, and that is to bless others.*
- *Somehow, standing on this slave stand, I am here to bless others.*
- *Even though it is not apparent to me at this moment, I have the blessing of Abraham on my life.*
- *I am not here to be overcome, but rather to overcome.*
- *Nothing comes into my life without my Father's permission.*
- *This is my assignment.*
- *He has sent me here to bring the world of the spirit and the world of the natural together.*
- *I am here to be a blessing. Now who can I minister to?"*

Let's listen to the Psalmist interpret Joseph's situation.

Psalms 105:16-22

"Moreover He called for a famine upon the land: He brake the whole staff of bread. HE "SENT" A MAN BEFORE THEM, EVEN JOSEPH who was sold for a servant. Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron. Until the time that His word came: the

word of the Lord tried him. The King sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people and let him go free. He made him Lord of his house and ruler of all his substance: to bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom."

Now, let's consider this scripture for a moment. "*God sent a man before them*". Notice in verse 26 that in the same manner that he sent Joseph, God also sent Moses and Aaron. They were all on assignment. The number one truth in all of life is that God is in charge. He is and will always be the Lord God Almighty. He is the Lord of Hosts. We have looked at this as though Satan was opposite of God and this is not true. To be opposite of something, you have to be equal with it. Satan is not equal with God. He might be opposite with the angels. He might be equal with them, but God is in a class all His own. You need to stop serving two gods. There is only one God and He is in control of your life.

Ephesians 2:13-16 assures us that we are a purchased possession.

Ephesians 2:13-16

"¹³ But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

¹⁴ For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us];

¹⁵ Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace,

¹⁶ And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby"

Let me show you the application of what he said here. He purchased me. He owns me. I am not my own, I am bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. My time is not my own and my words are not my own. Satan is not the Lord of my life, Jesus is. Satan has no part in me. I am a new creature in Christ. Old things are passed away, and all things are become new. All of the things that happen to me are under the watchful eye and instruction of my Heavenly Father. The only way that Satan finds any access into my life is when I open my heart to rebellion or disobedience. And even that is very limited. Jesus is Lord and there is not, nor will ever be another.

Even though Joseph cannot see it, he understands that God is in charge of his situation. The bigger picture is that a famine was coming on the earth. This is why He sent Joseph to Egypt. God will never leave the world without a savior. All of this unexplained movement in Joseph's life is because of that. The betrayal, the hurt, the confusion and the disappointment, it is all tied to an assignment in Joseph's life.

God sees the need that is coming, so he must find someone who understands the blessing of Abraham and get them into the heart of the world's system. God always wants to put a man or a woman in the midst of someone else's need. He is looking for an ambassador to go into the court of Pharaoh. Now since only one man understands this blessing, Joseph is chosen to go. *"Joseph, you are now appointed to go to Egypt."* Wait a minute. I thought Joseph was kidnapped. No, look past that. Psalms 105:17 said he was sent. He was commissioned at a higher level to go into darkness and open the door for light. It had all of the trappings of being kidnapped but he was sent. God just used the Ishmaelite slave traders as his vehicle.

Joseph knew this, because he understood what God had said to Abraham. He understood the assignment aspect of the blessing.

"I am here for some reason that I do not understand, and may not for years, but I am kept by His blessings." Circumstances had not unblessed him. "Nothing happens to me without a plan. So since I am here, I must be here to bless someone."

And if he had not understood this, he would have been filled with self-pity, and probably died in the house of Potiphar. But he rose to the top. It didn't matter where he was. It didn't matter what he went through. He saw the purpose of God in everything that happened to him. He was framed, but his attitude didn't change. He was there to be a blessing and serve a purpose. As a result, each thing that he encountered elevated him. Every obstacle simply became a stepping stone. The difference between a stepping stone and a stumbling stone is how high you lift your feet. His attitude facilitated the blessing and gave him the green light from God to move to the next level.

Genesis 39:2-4

“The Lord was with Joseph and he was a prosperous man: and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight and he served him: and he made him overseer over his house, and all he had he put into his hand.”

I asked the Lord one day why he did not deliver Joseph from the jail. Joseph was an honorable man, a good man. He was obviously a man of faith and character. I wasn't expecting the answer the Lord gave me. It was very short and very direct. He said, *“Because I didn't want him to run away”*. Of course! God had gone through all of the trouble to position him for his divine appointment. He was just a shave and a haircut from being Prime Minister over all of Egypt. The depth of that kind of responsibility calls for a depth of character. Not only had Joseph's hardship brought him to the place of divine appointment, it also prepared and shaped his character, and the prison was simply the place where the divine appointment became a divine contact. How many people have sat in the dungeons of divine appointment and missed the divine contact?

If you were in Joseph's shoes, what would you have done if you were released from prison? Since you really can't see the whole picture, you would be looking for the eleven brothers who did this to you. You would go

home. So as a result, God kept him under lock and key until his appointment. If Joseph were to leave Egypt, it would have thrown everything off track. The connection between him and Pharaoh would have been lost. Don't complain about where you are. Serve where you are. Give where you are. Pray where you are. Believe where you are. Most importantly, trust where you are. Trust that once you have submitted and surrendered your life to God, he will have you in the right place at the right time. I want to repeat. The secret of the woman with the alabaster box was this. She did what she could, with what she had, where she was. That is all that is expected of you regardless of where you are and what you are facing.

Growing in the midst of hostility

There are times when people cry out to God for help and as a result God plants you in what seems to be a hostile environment. When this happens you must remember that God is using you to answer their prayers just as he did with Moses and Gideon. You have been put there for a purpose. It is your assignment. Psalms 105:17 tells us that Joseph was sent to Egypt. It looks like he was kidnapped, but in reality he was sent. He was betrayed by his family, ripped away from his father and left knowing that his father would break under the thought of his death. He was sold as a slave. They hurt his feet with shackles, and bound him in irons. You can't get much more hostile than that.

In Philippians 4:22, Paul sent greetings to the Christians in Caesar's house. Can you imagine that? Would you consider it dangerous to be a Christian while actually working in Caesar's house? You bet it was. This was the same Caesar that had Paul beheaded.

The Roman emperors after Julius Caesar were all called "Caesar"; thus, Augustus Caesar, Claudius Caesar, and the list goes on. In the same way, all the kings of Egypt were called "Pharaoh," though they each had their proper name, as Pharaoh Necho. The emperor at the time of Paul's writing in 60 A.D. was Nero, one of the most cruel and impious men that ever sat on a throne. Would you call that a hostile work environment? These

Christians were in the will of God. They were there by divine appointment, even if it was for a season. Paul never prayed that they would be taken out of Caesar's house. They were there to bless. It was their assignment. Their purpose in life was to introduce the Kingdom of God into that house and trust that God has equipped you for that assignment. You must bloom where you are planted.

A number of years ago our church put a fresh layer of black asphalt on our parking lot. As you can imagine it gets hot in central Texas. Yet one day I was walking out to my car and there in the middle of the all of that black parking lot, a beautiful small yellow flower was growing in a small crack. I couldn't believe my eyes. You talk about a hostile environment. Yet there it was. How could it flourish there? No water to speak of, no nourishment, in a very hot parking lot. Yet, its colors were vibrant in contrast to its surroundings. This is how you are to be on your job or in your community. This is what Joseph looked like. You should stand out in contrast against the world when it comes to their attitude, core values, marriages and work ethic. You should stand out in contrast to the hatred, strife and confusion. You should be a beacon of hope. We have such a tendency to run from problems and to try to make our surroundings as comfortable as possible. As a result, we are seldom in the place where we are needed, and we miss our divine appointments and divine connections.

This brings us to a very important understanding about our circumstances and our response to the hostility around us. Like Joseph, you are planted where you are and that is your assignment. You are introducing beauty and life in the midst of hostility and barrenness. And the people around you are blessed because you are there.

Genesis 30:27 tells a story that should open your eyes to the fact that the people in your life are blessed because of you. Jacob was trying to break away from his father in law Laban. Laban made a statement that is astounding. Listen to his statement.

"I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake".

Prosperity came to Laban's business because Jacob was working there. The place you work is blessed because you are there. This explains a little bit of the "Assignment" aspect of your position. It may at times feel hostile, bitter, unpleasant and adversarial, but that is most likely why God sent you there. Someone cried out for help and the Lord heard them and sent you.

Now here is Joseph, surrounded by hostility. Yet there in the midst of that he flourishes, like that beautiful flower in the middle of the hot asphalt parking lot. God gave him favor and he flourished in the midst of his enemies. Now this is important; Joseph maintained victory throughout all of the changing seasons he experienced. How did he do that? Something remained a constant in his life. He seemed to understand the "why" of the challenges he was facing.

Chapter Two



Don't lose your mind when adversity comes

"We must learn from misfortune the means of future strength."

- Winston S. Churchill, 1938

We have discussed how God uses you to bless others, which means it is very possible and even probable that the difficulty that you are experiencing may be because someone cried out to the Lord for help. Congratulations. You were appointed for the assignment. In light of that we must endure the challenges with the attitude of expectancy and victory.

Most of us need an attitude adjustment when it comes to adversity and hardship because there is no way to escape it. Hardship and struggle on some level is a part of life. Everything around us is dying and the majority of the people we rub shoulders with are living under the hardship of transgression. On a personal level, hardship usually comes for a reason. Proverbs 13:15 *"The way of the transgressor is hard"*. We have wrongfully assumed that was only speaking about the sinner or those who would reject God. It is much closer to home than that.

I know people who love God, who experience great hardship. The thing that brings hardship into people's lives is when they transgress wisdom. Since everything was created through wisdom and understanding, the person who *goes "against the grain"* of wisdom and understanding will experience difficult times. Life stops working for them. That is on an individual level. But on a broader level, all of our advancement comes through struggle on some level. Everyone and everything experiences struggle. Like the salmon who continues to struggle to go upstream we are constantly pushing the decay of the world away from us.

Occasionally we get hit broadside, just like Joseph. Because of that, we too often become offended at our circumstances and eventually at God. All offence will eventually turn toward God. "Why did you let this happen to me?" Even though we know that we are the children of God, life seems unfair and the odds seem stacked against us. Because we don't understand, we get sidelined in our race. We respond negatively and just sit down. Proper perspective comes through our understanding of adversity.

Let me recap a little bit here. Adversity and hardship works on two fronts. It works in you and through you. It works in your personal growth and through your connections with life. It is certainly true that God joins us

to challenge and adversity. It is a deliberate union. This is seen in every aspect of life and it is used to make us grow and develop. It pressures us to move out and up. It prevents us from becoming so comfortable that we fall into a spiritual coma.

Adversity is there by design. Look at the different aspects of struggle we see in life. It's everywhere. The caterpillar, child births, body building, even the chicken inside the egg. What makes that little chicken strong enough to live outside the egg is the struggle to get out of the egg. As he instinctively pecks away at the inside of the shell the resistance strengthened him enough to survive once he breaks through. If you were to try to help the chicken and do the work for him, he most likely would not survive. That same principle applies to us. We are confronted by life and the challenges it holds. How we respond to it determines the work that it does in us, and furthermore determines our ongoing strength in future adversity.

How many people throughout history are considered great because of the adversity they encountered and overcame? I believe that Abraham Lincoln was a very smart and gifted individual, but no doubt there were people more intelligent than Abraham Lincoln that we have never heard of. There were people with much greater gifting than he had, yet they are not in our history books and we don't consider them great. Why does he stand out? There was a President just before him and just after him and I will bet that most people cannot remember their names. Abraham Lincoln did something that placed him on a very difficult road. In the face of hatred, prejudice and ignorance he blossomed. He confronted hardness and showed endurance, strength and character in the time of adversity and because of that we all stand in admiration of him and call him great. Lincoln confronted the adversity. He knew he was in danger for his life yet he didn't hide when hardship came his way. How would the story of his life have been different if he opted out and walked away because it was hard? This is why we have the scripture in 2 Timothy 2:3 that says, "*Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*". How does a soldier do that? He confronts hardness. If you run from hardness it will track you down and put you in your grave. But if you confront it, it will not only enable you to overcome the future difficulties you encounter, it will also cause you to grow in areas that

strengthen your character. Again, how you respond to hardness determines the work that it does in you.

Character is an important thing to God. Character and integrity are the glue that holds you together when adversity strikes. When we talk about the integrity of a ship not being compromised, we are speaking of how it holds together and maintains itself when put under extreme circumstances. It's the foundation for your core values. It also determines your value to the Kingdom of God when the battle is hot and people are crying for help. Do you have what it takes to be there when someone's life is falling apart?

Character is identified and defined by the things that you go through. It is shaped in the fires of life.

Deuteronomy 4:20 said that Egypt was the iron furnace for the nation of Israel. You can't go through the fire of hardship and come out unchanged. The process of refining gold determines whether you spoil or shine. It was the hardship of Egypt that brought cohesiveness to the nation of Israel. They went into Egypt as a tribe, a clan. They came out a nation.

Don't despise the hardship of the furnace. Use it. Let it do its work in you. I know that for a season you may be pulled out of your comfort zone, but comfort has very little to do with improvement. Your entire lifetime can be spent pursuing comfort and you totally miss the next level.

So in the midst of everything that you face, you have to come to grips with the fact that you either believe that your life is an assignment or you are just hanging out.

Let's spend just another moment talking about adversity. I am not suggesting that because you experience hardship that somehow you are a better person. What adversity does is reveal what is in your heart and presents you with a decision to do right or wrong. That is the process for building up the walls of your life that will stand when the storms blow against you. As a result, God will drop you right in the middle of a difficult situation and use the adversity to shape and insulate your life in areas where

you are weak and vulnerable. In doing so God is preparing you for what is in your future. What you are becoming is more important than what you are possessing. Consider it the training grounds of a soldier.

From a personal stand point, there are things in you that need to be dealt with, immaturity, attitudes, dispositions, wounds and fears. This is what keeps you from being whole as a mom or a dad, as a civic leader or church member. We put on masks so no one will know, but just below the surface we are in pain and that spills out from time to time and people around us are left without the help they need because we are too consumed with our own pain. God sees that and he is not content to leave you where you are. He has a plan for you. So he starts you on the potter's wheel to perfect you in those areas.

Remember that the presence of weeds is what calls for the plow in your life. If you struggle with pride for example, God will position you in such a way that reveals the pride and works it out of you. There are exceptions but for the most part, all the things that come in your life are because of what is in your heart and because of his plans and purposes for your life. Life is designed to squeeze you when you are going the wrong direction. Everything you bump into is an attempt to bring order in your life. This is the beauty of repentance.

So how do you respond to adversity when you determine God might be behind it? Let's look at two passages of scripture and see what the word says about overcoming adversity. You will see that your battle is not on the outside but rather on the inside. The things that we see on the outside are temporal or subject to change.

2 Corinthians 10:3-7

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

⁴ (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

⁶ And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

⁷ Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? if any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. "

There is certainly a battle, but the initial battle for you is on the inside and not the outside. Your challenge on the inside is to arrest imaginations and thoughts that are destructive and contrary to God's purpose. The challenge on the outside is to just be obedient. Let the adversity you are going through reveal the integrity of your ship and take advantage of the opportunity to make right decisions and do right things. Don't quit because the battle gets hot.

But this brings up the question. I know how to hold the position of victory when everything is looking great. How do I do it when everything looks and feels wrong? How do I maintain a poise of victory when defeat looks inevitable and the storm seems overwhelming? Can I actually have peace or victory in the midst of that? Yes you can. God planned for you to live in victory all of the time, regardless of what you are facing. Victory is a triumphant attitude. It's the same one you have when a battle has been won and victory has taken place. It is a mental and emotional positioning. It's the spirit of faith spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:13 that says, "*We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore speak; we also believe, and therefore speak*"; That is the spirit that your faith projects. Your countenance doesn't change. Your resolve is firm regardless of what you encounter. It is that kind of victory that causes you to overcome the world.

1 John 5:4

”⁴For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

This scripture teaches us that our victory is not in what we see. It is in what we believe. Victory is not based on circumstances. It is a derivative of faith. I walk in victory regardless of what I encounter. My victory status never changes because it is rooted in the promises of God and is expressed through my faith. I refuse to judge my position in life by what I see on the outside. My victory is and will always be in what I believe. And because of my belief in the truth of Jesus, I will always have victory.

Everyone wants to live with a sense of victory when they are facing adversity. It's the feeling that lifts our head and brings life to our gait. Unfortunately, we live life on a roller coaster. When things look good we feel we have victory. When our circumstances look bad we lose our victory.

The ability to push through adversity in your faith walk is one of the most important things that you possess. It is so easy to faint and loose heart along the way. Some have prayed and hoped that things would get better. They start out in faith, but when adversity arises, they give little or no resistance. Proverbs 24:10 says, *“If you faint in the day of adversity your strength is small.”* Passive, non-committal faith is not faith at all. What is the adversity? The adversity I speak of is the resistance or circumstances you encounter in life. Sometimes life is just hard. We tend to look for circumstances to assure us, comfort us and give us courage to continue. It doesn't work like that. Most of the time circumstances are adversarial.

Sarah was a type of circumstances for Abraham's faith. Abraham was about a hundred years old and he had to fight off negative thoughts about him being too old for God's promises to be fulfilled. After all, he is too old and Sarah is in the same boat. She was a type of the circumstances for his faith. The bible said that her womb was dead. She was past the age of having children. I can hear him saying, “I think I could believe for myself but I have to deal with her too”.

Romans chapter 4:18 said, Abraham wouldn't consider the circumstances, but continued to believe in spite of what he saw. The scripture said he hoped against hope. When all hope was gone, he hoped on in faith. God's promise to him became the image of what he hoped for. He wouldn't give thought to the possibilities or acknowledge the strength that circumstances held.

Adversity or circumstances gets its authority from you. We look at our circumstances and ask, "What are my limitations?" Then based on our perception of our circumstances we empower our limitations.

We then build all of our strategy for living around that. You allow yourself to be trained by your circumstances, even though it may be an illusion.

Your boundaries then are defined by what you think about your circumstances. Do you know how they train an elephant to stay on a rope? The rope is the adversity that has deceived the elephant. The rope is certainly no match for the elephant so the trainers deceive him into believing that the small rope is stronger than he. This is done by putting the elephant on a log chain when he is just a baby elephant. The elephant will struggle and fight until he knows that he cannot break the chain. After that they can place him on a rope and he will never challenge the strength of the rope. This deception brings his entire life into captivity.

In the same way we are deceived by our circumstances time and again. Stories of failure become legends and they hold us in captivity. They keep us from ever breaking out of our boundaries. That is what happens when people anchor themselves in past experiences rather than God's promises. They only have victory when their circumstances are right.

On May 6, 1954, in Oxford, England, 25-year-old medical student Roger Bannister broke the track and field's most notorious barrier: the four-minute mile. Bannister won the mile race with a time of 3 minutes and 59.4 seconds. The four-minute mile was considered humanly impossible until Roger Bannister broke that barrier. After that all of the world class runners

break that limitation. It is conceded that the barriers are not on the outside but on the inside.

I heard a story of an experiment where 12 monkeys were placed in a large cage. High above the cage the scientist hung a large bunch of bananas. They also attached a rope for the monkeys to climb up to get to the bananas. In this experiment when the first monkey attempted to climb the rope it activated a shower of water that drenched all of the monkeys. This happened several times. After a few repetitions of getting soaked the monkeys learned not to climb the rope.

The next step in the experiment was to disconnect the water so that climbing the rope was perfectly safe. They then replaced one of the wet monkeys with a dry monkey. The new monkey quite quickly attempted to climb the rope and was stopped by the 11 wet monkeys. The experimenters continued to replace the wet monkeys with dry ones until all 12 monkeys were now dry. None of these monkeys had ever experienced being drenched by the shower. Yet, no monkey was allowed by the others to climb the rope.

We have a tendency to watch other people to draw our conclusions about God and his promises. I have heard people say, “You never know what God will do, I have seen people try to believe and they died anyway”. What does that have to do with me?

When Peter walked on the water, the thing that caused him to sink had nothing to do with him walking on the water. He considered the winds and the waves. What do winds and waves have to do with walking on the water. Is it any easier to walk on the water on a calm day than on a stormy day? What caused him to sink was that he got his eyes off of Jesus and started considering the circumstances around him.

Faith doesn't look to see if the mountain has moved, it just continues to believe. In that belief there is a knowing that we call victory. You are on a faith march, a faith walk. Continue to walk. Continue to believe. Continue to speak. You don't consider how other people have failed, or those that sink around you. You act on the word from Jesus that

said, “Come”. You don’t look at circumstances as impossibilities. Nothing is impossible to him that believes.

The scripture in Romans chapter four said, “Abraham considered not”. How do you do that? Do you just say, “I am just not going to think about it? I am not going to fear”? It doesn’t work like that. Fear cannot be displaced; it must be replaced. You can’t just “not consider” something. You must replace that with something higher, something bigger. I don’t consider my circumstances, I consider Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. I consider what He said.

Hebrews 12:1-3

“¹ Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

² “Looking unto Jesus” the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ For “consider him” that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

The feeling that we are not progressing causes us to stop. The feeling that our prayers aren’t being answered causes us to stop. Offences cause us to stop. Looking at anything as a replacement of God’s word causes us to stop. You have to protect your mind from outside circumstances and at the same time keep yourself from the limitations of the mind. The mind is like an overprotective parent who never lets their child experience life because of reason. The mind demands change but lacks the power to bring change to pass. The mind is designed to define our limitations, and it certainly does that. It is trying to protect us, but in the process it is bringing us into captivity. Reason apart from the Word of God always produces

unbelief. This is why you must capture the thoughts of your mind and bring them into captivity.

I want to encourage you to maintain your stride. Don't abandon your race. Don't faint. Don't lose heart. Don't quit. Don't call your faith off of the job.

Galatians 6:9-10 (NKJV)

“⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”

Proverbs 24:10 (NKJV)

“¹⁰ If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”

Isaiah 40:28-31 (NKJV)

“²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary.

His understanding is unsearchable.

²⁹ He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength.

³⁰ Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,

³¹ But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.”

Don't be deceived by your emotions

Emotions are a wonderful part of our life but they can really run you into the ditch during times of change and transition. Uncertainty turns to worry and that plays a devils dance on your emotions. Emotions and imaginations are linked like a hand in a glove. You have to rein them in. You have to make the decision that fretting and worry is not going to become a part of our life when things look uncertain. Jesus said “*Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*” In other words, do you grow by worrying about it? Can you change things by worry? Of course you can't.

Emotions are a gift from God. They are the part of you that should taste and savor the sweetness of life. We are unfortunately guilty of *Emotion Abuse*. Worry is imagination abuse, much in the same way that when you smoke you abuse your lungs. It is a poor and misguided use of the imagination. It causes you to stall out in your race and be sidelined prematurely. God never intended imagination to be used for worry. Imagination was a gift from God to empower you to see good things that haven't happened yet. We can see this in how God used Abraham's imagination to open the door to his future.

Genesis 15:5 (NIV)

⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

The word to Abraham was that he would be the father of many people. To help Abraham wrap his mind around it God used his imagination. He looked at the millions of stars, more than he could begin to count and his imagination allowed him to see what God was saying. This is what God intended. Like an architect we use imagination as a tool for seeing the next good thing. God wanted us to see possibilities like healing, restored relationship, marriages being healed. If we give place to worry and fear we

see just the opposite. This is why Jesus said “Don’t take a thought”. This is significant. Not one thought. Don’t let it get started because when it does it will take root, and the fruit of that tree will be poison to your future.

Paul said pretty much the same thing in 2 Corinthians 10:5

2 Corinthians 10:5

⁵ Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Casting down imaginations, dark imaginations that contradict what God has for your life. It must be cast down. Why? Deep rooted strongholds grow out of imaginations. What you think about takes root in your heart and from that abundance your conversation will draw its boundaries around your life.

If you give a resting place to the thoughts of worry, you will shrink back and never advance. Although you have great dreams, you never see them realized. People get talked out of blessing because of fear. Their imagination was used against them.

Here is the bottom line. God has a plan for your life. It is obtained by faith. It doesn’t matter what you think or feel about it. It’s not up to your emotions or your mood swings to bring his plan to pass. Your circumstances can’t stop you. They can fight and kick against the dream, but they have no power to stop what God has planned for your life. The plan and purpose is still there, and faith’s consistent stride is moving you forward with each step you take.

We should take a lot of comfort in that. Isn’t it incredible that first of all God would even think about you? That He would care enough to sit down and devise and orchestrate a plan with you in it. You are at the very center of all of his thoughts.

What is sad is that people live their life as though there was no plan, reacting to change as though uncertainty or luck was all they had. They live with a sense of aimlessness, hopelessness and despair. Their emotions rule supreme in their life. They look in their emotions and make decisions based on how they feel at that moment. If faith is not at the helm, then reason and fear will soon be. You can't trust your emotions to make quality decisions to guide your life. They will vary and vacillate from day to day. Every day you feel different. Your emotions can change between breakfast and lunch. Sometimes you feel like a strong Christian and sometimes you just want to quit. Sometimes you feel prayerful, on top of your game, sometimes you don't. To judge your circumstances by your emotions is like judging how much gasoline you have in your car by looking at the oil gauge.

Can you imagine Joseph judging his circumstances by how he felt? His emotions had to be all over the map.

What you see and hear and feel should not be at the steering wheel as you take your journey. You have to trust the fact that if something doesn't happen the way you thought it should, that most likely was not in the plan. God is in control of your life. If you are not as far along in your life as you hoped, it probably wasn't in the plan. We must be careful that we do not complain about the things that are out of our control as if we knew what was good or bad and we find ourselves fighting against God's plan that is positioning us for assignment.

I have tripped over my own feet on more than one occasion and I formed opinions about people and circumstances that were simply uninformed and untrue. I made mistakes in the past by drawing conclusions based on my emotions. But over the years I have determined that I don't know as much as I thought and my trust in the Lord is the only thing that keeps me stable when I am confronted by a storm.

God is at work in your life and he is in the process of positioning you.

Genesis 2:8

⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

First of all, he didn't put the man in the place until he had prepared the man for the place.

The word "FORMED" is that process God takes us through to make us what we ought to be. God forms you and then he positions you. We became flustered not realizing that we were still in the formative stages. After the forming came the positioning. There is an impatient, entitlement mindset that this generation has. I don't want to wait; I don't want to pay the price. I deserve it and I want it now. That is emotion driven. With each "time saving device" we become more impatient. Whatever it is, it is not fast enough. The phones have to be faster. Our previous generation was glad to just have a phone. I remember the rotary dial. I remember rotating the dial and hearing it click back in its rotation, next came the push buttons, speed dial, voice command and we still stand impatient.

We want success fast, careers fast, great marriages fast, wonderful, successful children fast. We want everything quick, get in get out, get it over with. QUICK. ... and then you die and wonder why you were in such a hurry? Preparation takes time.

It takes a while when you work with dirt. Of course I am speaking about you and I. God is forming us and preparing us for what he has in our future. That process may be painful, revealing, you may have to deal with debris and inconsistencies. It is possible that your preparation could go through the bulk of your life. 20 – 30 – 40 years. I don't know about you but I assumed that someone would come in and give me a magic formula and somehow I would bypass all of the steps that equip me for what God has in my future. That is not real life. Preparation is critical. It is a process. It takes a long time. It takes longer to prepare a good meal than it does to eat one.

When it comes to our purpose and position we are dealing with personality conflicts, areas of defects, distrust, child abuses, intimidation's,

scars, burdens, flaws, and you may deal with them for a long time. It takes a long time to grow up. If you knew this you wouldn't have had so many children. You birth them, feed them, raise them, you find out that 18 means nothing, 21 means nothing. 30 may mean nothing.

Let's be honest. How many of you even at your age still recognizes childish tendencies in yourself? Anybody else would have given up on the project, but not God. He is so committed to your life that He is committed to the process, even if it takes a whole lifetime. Even if your parents quit, He picks up the process to help you continue to get what you need.

What a wonderful reason for worship! We come to Him knowing that we are not finished, that we are a work in progress, and He lovingly continues to form and develop us.

We need to carry a sign that says, "work in progress".

- If you hire me, you have to know that.
- If you marry me, you have to know that.
- If I am your friend, you have to know that,
- If I am your child, you have to know that.

How long will it take? I don't know.

I wish every engaged couple could grasp this. I don't know how many people I have stood in front of and said, "I now pronounce you husband and wife"... PHUUUEEEEE. I can pronounce you man and woman, but husband and wife probably won't take place for some time. The ceremony simply started a process, a journey.

You leave the wedding ceremony and head out for your honey moon, and then you have to go home to the real brick laying process of turning her into a real wife and him into a real husband. Now that may take years. It is a process. One of which you are forming a marriage and a family. The process of becoming is just that ... a process.

Let's look at the safe guards that God set in place for that process to be facilitated. There are four things in Genesis chapter two that served as the framework for a blessed life for Adam: Within this framework, the blessed life could be cultivated and walked out. These are the check points that we measure our progress by.

- Relationships
- Responsibility
- Authority
- Boundaries

Relationships:

God is a God of relationship. That is deeper than fellowship. Relationship is a bonding, a union. It touches us at our core and is expressed through devotion and love, through commitment and service.

Where do relationships come from? You don't start out in relationship with anyone. Relationships are birthed out of fellowship. Fellowship is the path to something deeper. At our church we provide the opportunity for fellowship

- With the Holy Spirit
- With the Word of God
- With one another

We are primarily created to be in relationship with God and man. You will never know blessing, as God intended, without that connection to other people. Relationships reveal your assignment and gifts.

In relationships to other people, you should always have someone on both ends; someone you are over that you disciple and speak into their life and someone who speaks into your life.

In Search of Purpose

If you only have people that speak into your life, you will develop insecurity.

If you only have people under you that you speak into their life, you will develop an arrogance.

To be balanced, you need both. You need to know how to lead and you need to know how to submit.

Responsibility:

You are in a garden and you will answer for the condition and keeping of your heart. Those who do not contribute of themselves or take any responsibility are out of balance with life.

They become takers. You have a responsibility to the Lord, to the Word of God and to those who are around you. There are no volunteers in the Kingdom of God, only faithful and unfaithful stewards.

Anything that truly has value demands responsibility from you. TAKE responsibility.

Authority:

I have heard people say, *"No one is going to tell me what to do"*. That should be a Red flag to all of us. I need to ask you two questions.

Can you name the people who are in or under authority in your life?

What does that mean to you?

To truly recognize authority is to recognize God's plan and his delegation.

Boundaries:

Do you have boundaries set for your life? I know that there are people that have suggested that you should do anything that you want and whatever makes you feel good. But the good part of life, the way God intended, is walked within the framework of discretion and boundaries. It is seen in what you say, where you go, how much you eat. Literally everything that is precious functions within boundaries. That is where we express its value. What are boundaries for you? Without them you are lost.

Is temperance or restraint even in your vocabulary? You are free indeed, but not to do what you want. We have a responsibility to God and those around us.

You need Relationships, Responsibility, Authority and Boundaries. When you have these foundational components active in your life the result will be fruitfulness.

I want to give you the "The Blessed Life Challenge" for the next 21 days ...

- Cultivate relationships,
- Take responsibility,
- Find authority, both through submission and service,
- And finally show respect to boundaries.

In the same manner that God is committed to the process, we must be committed to the process of what we are becoming. He formed man from the dust of the earth. Do you realize what God had to work with when He got a hold of you? Your formation isn't just a physical form. It is also who

you are becoming. The tools that God uses to form you are the experiences that you confront in your life? Everything that you confront is shaping and altering you in some way? The pushing and shoving takes you out of your comfort zone and positions you to become a complete person. Life is squeezing you, God is forming you!

This is why you can't be emotion driven. You live in an environment where you face the day to day honking in traffic and people getting on your nerves. Either you or someone you love faces the loss of their job, or a broken heart. You face a crisis that hit you so hard that you thought you could not survive, and you are still trying to figure out why you survived and how you made it. Your inner compass must have the ability to tune out all of the noise of the world.

I know that you want to ask, does it have to take so long? I truly believe that you could cut down the forming process by years, simply by your reaction to the things that you encounter. We have resisted the process of transformation in our lives through our response to the things that confront us. The negative response of the children of Israel in the wilderness delayed their process by forty years, and eventually kept them out altogether. They kept failing the test. What was their test? How they responded when they were confronted by problems. In contrast, you pass the test by how you respond when you are confronted by problems. You must respond to everything that you face with the assurance that whatever man may intend as evil against you, God turns it for good. That is simply trust.

Are emotions bad? Of course not! God has emotions, but he is not controlled by them. Emotions are a wonderful addition to who we are as created beings. They are the spices that bring flavor to our experiences. I have always felt that unemotional people are missing out on the zest of life. Laughter should be a part of your life. Anger should be a part of your life. Emotions should be a part of what you celebrate and what you repent of. They should be a part of our memories and our dreams. Emotions bring the human element into our existence. But don't let them deceive you and cause you to over react when you face tests and trials.

So how do I keep my emotions in check when I face a storm? You have a weapon to use when it comes to your thoughts and emotions. You have to use this weapon when something happens and your thoughts and emotions want to take control of your life.

Ephesians 6:17

*¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the **sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:***

The weapon is the Word from God. Not just “the” Word, but more accurately “a” Word. Most people think of the whole bible when you say the Word of God. That would be the translation “Logos”, which is the sum total of the Word of God. But that is not what he is saying here.

This word is translated “Rhema”, or the spoken word of God. It is not a reference to all of the books or whole chapter; it is speaking about a specific word for a specific situation. Just one verse will do it. Never underestimate the power of an individual scripture. Like the seed, each word of God has enough power in that word to bring it to pass. You are born again by the seed of the Word of God. You are healed, delivered or blessed by that same seed.

1 Peter 1:23

²³ Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.

That is what Jesus did when he was confronted with temptation from the devil. Jesus knew hundreds of scriptures from the Torah. Every Jewish boy learned to quote the Torah. They could quote Numbers or Deuteronomy word for word. But when Jesus was confronted by legitimate temptation he used one individual scripture as a sword, as a weapon. It

wasn't just to keep the devil off of him, but it was also to keep his thoughts in check.

I want to say it again. Never underestimate the power of "One" scripture. We need to learn battle verses that pertain to confusion, fear of dying young, losing children, having a healthy mind and saving relationships.

A tragedy in my home

When my middle daughter was just two weeks old, I was carrying her down the stairs early one morning and my feet slipped out from me and we both went straight down. I had her head cradled in my left arm and the force of my elbow hitting the ground caused my arm to close and it fractured both sides of her head. Everything about me went into panic and shock. I knew the moment that we hit the ground that she was hurt. I didn't know what to do. I took her back upstairs and just handed her to Angie. I didn't know what to say. I was terrified to my very core. The thoughts were flooding my mind that I have killed or seriously injured my daughter. I was paralyzed. I remember saying to Angie, "I hurt her". I didn't know what else to say. Her head began to swell and we rushed her to the children's hospital. For a week she was in intensive care. Day and night we lived at the hospital.

The thoughts that I battled during that week was like a tsunami. I wasn't just wondering if she might not get to play ball next year, or wondering if this might inconvenience us for the holidays. It was ruthless. Thoughts like, I had mishandled our new born baby and now she would never have a normal life. I couldn't be trusted with the safety of my family. She would suffer with this injury for the rest of her life and I was the blame. After we were there for a day or so, the doctor pulled me aside and said, "Sometimes bad things just happen and you can't blame yourself". His intention was to comfort me but that was not a comfort to me because I assumed he knew something that I did not know. I believed for the best but I battled for every inch of victory I walked in. I fought every negative thought

that you can imagine and the best I could do was refuse to let it cross my lips.

I believe people fail because they give expression to everything that comes and speak every negative thought that comes into their mind. I want to encourage you, find out what God said and speak the Word of God. Take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God and let it respond to the tormenting voices that come your way. When I speak the word, I gain a handle on my thought life and cast down wrong thoughts. After a week they released her from the hospital and assured me that from what they could tell that there was nothing wrong with her. And they were certainly right about that. She is perfectly healthy with no side effects from the accident. God is good. But for years after the accident, the memory would paralyze me and I would have to battle for some level ground. I would physically feel tenseness when I would think about the accident. I would have to once again gain control of what that was doing to me. I did it with the Word of God.

With that in mind, I want to pause in the middle of our lesson and give you a few scriptures that can be used during times of crisis in your life.

Thoughts of Anxiety

Psalms 4:8

⁸ I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

Philippians 4:6-7

⁶ Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Encouragement in Times of Loneliness

Hebrews 13:5-6

⁵ Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

⁶ So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Thoughts of Protection

Isaiah 54:17

¹⁷ No weapon forged against you shall prevail.

Thoughts for Guidance

Jeremiah 29:11

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not harm you. plans to give you hope and a future.

Psalms 25:12

¹² Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.

Psalm 31:3

³ Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.

Psalm 32:8

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Psalm 37:4-5, 7

⁴ Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.

⁵ Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.

⁷ Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him...

Thoughts of fear

1 John 4:18

¹⁸ There is no fear in Love, But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Deuteronomy 28:7

⁷ The Lord will grant you that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one

direction but flee from you in seven.

Isaiah 26:3

³ *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*

Isaiah 26:12

¹² *LORD, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.*

Isaiah 54:1

¹ *Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

Isaiah 55:12

¹² *You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*

Isaiah 57:19

¹⁹ *Creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to those far and near, "says the Lord. "And I will heal them."*

Malachi 2:5

⁵ *My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.*

Matthew 11: 28-30

²⁸ *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

²⁰ *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

John 14:27

²⁷ *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

Hebrews 13:5-6

⁵ *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

⁶ *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

Thoughts of fear for my children:

Psalms 102:28

²⁸ The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

Psalms 112:1-3

*¹ Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,
Who delights greatly in His commandments.*

*² His descendants will be mighty on earth;
The generation of the upright will be blessed.*

*³ Wealth and riches will be in his house,
And his righteousness endures forever.*

Psalms 91:1-16

*¹ He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*

*² I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust."*

*³ Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
And from the perilous pestilence.*

*⁴ He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth shall be your shield and buckler.*

*⁵ You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
Nor of the arrow that flies by day,*

⁶ *Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.*

⁷ *A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.*

⁸ *Only with your eyes shall you look,
And see the reward of the wicked.*

⁹ *Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge,
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,*

¹⁰ *No evil shall befall you,
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;*

¹¹ *For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.*

¹² *In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

¹³ *You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.*

¹⁴ *Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver
him;
I will set him on high, because he has known My name.*

¹⁵ *He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.*

*¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him,
And show him My salvation. ”*

Isaiah 54:13

*¹³ And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall
be the peace of thy children.*

Isaiah 43:4-8

*“⁴ Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I
love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in
exchange for your life.*

*⁵ Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from
the east and gather you from the west.*

*⁶ I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not
hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from
the ends of the earth*

*⁷ Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."*

*⁸ Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are
deaf.”*

Jeremiah 31:16-17

*¹⁶ Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine
eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and
they shall come again from the land of the enemy.*

¹⁷ And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.

Thoughts of dying young:

Psalms 91:16

¹⁶ With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

Psalms 61:6-7

⁶ Thou wilt prolong the King's life: and his years as many generations.

⁷ He shall abide before God forever: O prepare mercy and truth which may preserve him.

Psalms 21:4

⁴ He asked life of thee and thou gavest it him, even length of days forever and ever.

Thoughts of Healing or Health

Exodus 23:25

²⁵ Worship the LORD your God and his blessings will be upon your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you.

Exodus 15:26

²⁶ He said, "If you carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.

1 Peter 2:24

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

Thoughts of being poor

Deuteronomy 28:8

⁸ The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Isaiah 41:10

¹⁰ Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

I am sure that these are all scriptures that you know, but you need to say them. They are individual verses that become a sword in your hand.

The Purpose for Confession

What is actually happening when I confess the word of God and use the scriptures as a sword?

Confession works on two fronts. First it is setting things in motion and second, it comforts and assures the heart. Like a beacon in the night it keeps me on track. When things get really rough, I have to get my head to shut down and listen to what my mouth is saying.

Speaking the word will not just calm your mind it will also train your mind. Most don't train their minds. Your mind will follow what is coming out of your mouth.

Effective confession comes when you make a decision to look at life instead of death. You have to make the decision to do that. Once the decision is made, confession is just incidental. I will say what I see, and then I will see what I say.

Being a doer of the word

(A look into the book of James)

Let's go a little deeper about what it means to embrace a single scripture for your life. This is essential when you are facing problems and need to speak God's word. The book of James addresses this when he talks about looking into the perfect Law of Liberty. The Word of God is the perfect law of liberty. When I look into that word, and continue there, I am transformed into what I see.

I want to give you a verse by verse commentary of these six scriptures.

James 1:21-26

²¹ *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.*

²² *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

Let's take this verse by verse and break it down.

21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Therefore, or because of what I just said to you; lay aside improper attitudes, also the impure and unholy affections as well as wrong speaking that have gripped your heart. Get rid of the remainder of wickedness that lies in you, “the filthy garments”. And with a heart of humility, receive the word that has already been planted in your hearts. That Word is what will be your salvation in these sobering times. The word is the seed. When the seed is planted in your heart, it grows and produces after itself. (For further study on the seed of the Word, see Mark 4)

Lay aside the things that have been in your heart. It is out of the abundance of the heart, the overflow of the heart that these things spring forth. As garment, these attitudes are taken as a covering.

We put them on. Wrath is the overflow of wickedness. Thanksgiving is the overflow of trust. Giving is the overflow of love.

When the implanted Word sets in the soil of your spirit man, it will grow producing after its kind. If salvation is planted, that is what it will produce. The same is true of healing and deliverance of all kinds. Signs follow the Word that is sown in the heart.

²² *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

Since this word has been planted in your hearts, do the word. Don't just hear it, act on it. Romans 2:13 Paul said, "*For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*" How is deception tied to just being a hearer of the word instead of a doer? You forget what the Lord has made you into the law of liberty and start living by another law, the law of the flesh (*Romans 8:1*). You are deceived because you think you are something that you are not. You forget what you are and start living by the law (*Which will take you to the filthy garments of your own righteousness and attempt to keep the law without Christ*) of what you are not. You are fallen from grace.

Simply hearing God's word does not mean that we believe it. To act on it is a response of the heart.

²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;*

The natural face. *Lit. "The face of his birth with his physical features."* Now James describes in more detail the downfall of a person who is only a hearer of the word. He uses the illustration of a mirror when talking about the Word of God. If you only hear, you are like the man who looks at himself in the mirror and walks away and can't remember what he looked like.

The reflection of our life, who we are, and what God has made us to be is only seen in the word of God. Our whole identity is wrapped up in the

plan and purpose of God that is revealed through His word. We cannot know who we are if we do not look into that mirror.

²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

It takes a decision before you look into the mirror to retain what the image looks like. I could ask you what you look like and most of you would have difficulty describing what you saw. You should know. You look at yourself every day in the mirror. You may know the general outline or shape of your features, but how many teeth show when you smile? How many freckles are on your face? How wide are your eyes? How many wrinkles show up when you smile? It takes a decision in advance to see those things. If you don't make that decision when you look into the Word of God, you forget the details of the covenant, and all you remember is the general outline of baptism or sanctification. You see whom you are when you look into the Word. You see the man that God wants you to be. Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith the image of a healed man, a delivered man, a man of the Kingdom of God. You see Jesus, you see yourself in the family.

As the mirror is held up before us, we see where we stand in light of it, both in righteousness and in conduct. In righteousness, we see Jesus as the finished work. In conduct, we see the nature and tendencies of God that we grieve or offend through our deeds. At that point we should do something about it and attempt to align ourselves with what we see. We should address the defects and blemishes in our moral character and bring ourselves into conformity to the heart of God so that we do not grieve the Holy Spirit through our use or abuse of one another.

²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Better it is “*the perfect law, even the law of liberty*”. When you look into the Word of God and stay there, you continue day after day in His Word, and determine not to forget who He said you were, but act on it and integrate it into your life; you will see what true blessing is all about. The Word of God is the means of our regeneration as we see in verse 18. The Word of God reflects His image as a mirror and when we continue to look into that mirror are changed into that same image from glory to glory (Verse 23). It shows us the way we as believers should live (1:25, 2:8). It is the standard by which judgment will come (2:12). The Law of Moses is not the perfect law of liberty because it was imperfect and unable to save or deliver ultimately. Therefore, it was not the Law of Moses. Otherwise there would be no cause for the second covenant to come into being.

²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

Here is the heart of the issue James was dealing with. What was coming out of their mouth was in direct contradiction to the Word, heart and nature of God. They thought they were being religious about it. This is where deception comes in. When you are deceived, you can do something in the name of God and call it right, but God says it is useless and vain. Before long they would be killing people themselves and convincing themselves that they were doing what God wanted just as their predecessors did.

The restraining of the tongue is the evidence of one's religion. It is probably the most evident. To position yourself as a religious person, which is designed to bring the whole man under control, and yet violate the evidence of that religion is to prove that you are truly empty.

Overcoming Disappointment

Let's turn our attention back to Joseph for a moment. Finally, a breakthrough. but this is followed by more disappointment.

Genesis 40:14, 15, 23

¹⁴ But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house:

¹⁵ For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.

²³ [even after all that] Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forget [all about] him. ”

Disappointment is a huge thing. It really weighs a lot. It is the feeling of dissatisfaction that follows the failure of expectations or hopes to manifest. We have all been there. It is similar to regret, it differs in that a person feeling regret focuses primarily on the personal choices that contributed to a poor outcome, while a person feeling disappointment focuses on the outcome itself. Although Joseph had done nothing wrong, he had a certain sense of expectation that was continually deflated. About the time he would get on his feet, something would go wrong.

There is no telling how many times Joseph struggled with disappointment. In all of the setbacks that he faced in his life he had to struggle with questions that he could not answer. It seems that with each advancement he achieved, he had the props kicked out from under him. This is dangerous because continual disappointment steals your hope. It destroys your optimism. You find yourself living in a grey, hopeless existence.

Proverbs 13:12

“¹² Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But desire fulfilled is a tree of life”.

Another way to say it is, "Unrelenting disappointment leaves you heartsick." When the heart is sick you begin to spiral emotionally and can come to the place that there is no way to recover. In this verse the heart speaks of the core of your being, the place where life originates. Disappointment has a gravitational pull about it that is very difficult to escape from. It is one of the most dangerous obstacles that we face because it will cause you to eliminate yourself from the race. You will just sit down. It happens when our circumstances fall short of our expectations. I wish we could avoid it altogether but no matter how great your faith, there are times when you are confronted by disappointment of some kind or another. Why? There are times in your life when something will not go your way. People are caught up in their own gravitational pull and they fail in their commitments and promises. Sooner or later you are going to ask this question; where is God and why did this happen to me?

It could be something simple as:

- *Not getting the sale*
- *Not winning the tournament*
- *Not getting the break*
- *Someone you trusted let you down*

Or something more serious, such as:

- *One of your teenagers have gone astray*
- *Marriage problems*
- *Disease or illness of some kind*
- *The loss of a loved one*

Disappointment by itself has the potential of derailing your life simply by getting you to stop! Your circumstances seem greater than your ability to overcome. However, if the life of Joseph tells you anything, it is that circumstances can't stop you. Nothing can. Only you can stop your forward progress. That is why it is vital that you recognize it and make the decision in advance how you will respond when disappointment comes.

Joseph had an understanding that God was involved in his situation. Listen to Joseph as he unveils God's purpose in verse 7 below.

Genesis 45:4-8

⁴ And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt."

⁵ Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

⁶ For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earning nor harvest.

⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

⁸ So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."

This is huge. Let me repeat what Joseph said about all of the disappointments he faced.

⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

Notice that this is not a statement of blame but rather someone who sees the blue print. He did not come up with this statement on the spur of the moment. That was his meditation when everything was going wrong. Somewhere his father Jacob had engrained this truth into his consciousness. He didn't look to man, he looked to God. That is what brought him through.

When you realize that God is in control you can put difficult situations in their proper perspective.

Your response to your circumstances is not about your circumstances. It is about your belief and trust. How you respond is a declaration of where you are in your belief. Is it possible that you are just at the end of your understanding of your situation? The only reason that you get mad at other people is because your ability to see is limited.

I realize disappointment hits us emotionally. God made us that way. Why would He expose our emotions to the roller coaster of life? It is tied to our emotions because it does something in us. We grow and develop in the midst of these things. Our hearts are exposed in the midst of the things we face.

There are so many people who have faced disappointment and became negative in their view of life. Those who tend to dip their brush in the darker paint of life; their spirit is heavy and dark. Negative people find it very difficult to see beyond their circumstances.

How you respond to your circumstances determines the work that your circumstances do in your life. I believe that is actually the positioning tool that determines the level you rise to. If one door closes for you, you know that God has another open door with your name on it. Joseph looked at all of his setbacks through this lens.

Joseph had five major setbacks. But in all of these, he held to the statement, "What you meant for evil, God worked for my good". That was his meditation. He did not worry about the things that he could not change. He applied himself to what he could change. That is what you have to do. Focus on what you can change, dump that, "*could of, should of*" mentality. Because of this attitude, Joseph's disappointments were the stepping stones to his future. The difference between a stepping stone and a stumbling stone is how high you lift your feet.

Difficulties around you can be the very thing that ushers you into the plan and purpose of God in your life. Pharaoh wasn't looking for a number two man. The difficult situations that Pharaoh struggled with were the things that opened the door to Joseph's future in Pharaoh's court.

Since you believe this, praise should be seen in every situation that you face. Praise is an expression of your faith. Don't curse your situations. Give thanks in the midst of it. Let thanksgiving be the seasoning in all of your conversation. We don't thank God for the problems; we thank God in spite of the problems.

I understand that disappointment is hard to overcome when the people around you are not behaving as they should. This is especially true when you believe for a broken relationship to be restored. God will not change another person's will. He won't make anyone do anything. In spite of this you have to trust the Lord. Continue to persevere, and don't quit. You can't be responsible for what other people do, but you can be responsible for what you do. If you let rejection fester in you it will poison your present and your future. Overcoming disappointment requires us to let go of the past. I am not saying that God won't deal with their heart and send people and circumstances their way to encourage them to change, but your life and future cannot be held hostage to the inconsistencies of another person's character.

You might ask, "In that case how can I ever trust anyone again?"

I would like for you to look at trust from a different point of view. Trust is not "being able to predict what other people will do". Trust means knowing that I can handle what other people do. I know that I am going to be alright and I can enter a relationship because I know what to do if something goes wrong. I set myself up for disappointment if I place my trust in other people. I think you should have confidence in other people and give them the benefit of the doubt but it is misplaced to put your trust in other people. You should trust in the Lord and trust in yourself.

If you have unrealistic expectations about other people, they will most likely fall short of them and in the end you will be disappointed. That can result in an emotional wound that is felt on some level by everyone that you come in contact with. If you bring negative trust issues into a new relationship you will sow seeds of suspicion, fear and rejection into everything you do together. These things are toxic to new relationships. Your new relationships should not have to pay for what your old relationships did to you. That's really not fair.

- Don't hold on to your failures.
- If you fail, admit it, repent and move on.
- Being quick to let go of mistakes, failures, hurts and disappointments.
- Trust that if something happens outside your control, there is a reason.

It is normal and expected to feel remorse or sorrow over loss, broken relationships or disappointment. But if you are still grieving a year or two down the line, something is wrong. You are hindering your future. Everything is set in motion by a decision. Make a decision to move forward. Listen to this scripture about God's attitude over someone else's failure.

1 Samuel 16:1

¹ Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons."

God doesn't carry regrets. Neither should you. The plan of God is always moving forward. I have a quote that I like to use. "*Quit looking back so often. You are not going that way*". You can't embrace your future with your head turned to the past. I am not saying that it is easy, and it certainly isn't automatic.

In Search of Purpose

You have to rise up and say:

- *“This is no longer my address”*
- *“I am moving on with my life”*

No longer will I make room for:

- *Self-pity*
- *Disappointment*
- *Feeling sorry for myself*
- *Carrying a chip on shoulder*
- *Wondering why did this happen?*
- *Why did my business fail?*
- *Why did my marriage fail?*

These are valid questions... for a season. After that, they are stealing your future. Rest assured that God doesn't have a plan B for your life. He is not caught off guard. His great wisdom takes your situation and brings out His perfect plan for you. You are right on track.

Philippians 3:13-14 (NKJV)

“¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Refuse to be trapped in the past. Determine to press on. Strain to move forward. Start right where you are. Don't disqualify yourself.

The mercies of God are new every morning:

Lamentations 3:20-25

*“²⁰ My soul still remembers
And sinks within me.*

*²¹ This I recall to my mind,
Therefore I have hope.*

*²² Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.*

*²³ They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.*

*“²⁴ The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“Therefore I hope in Him!”*

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him,”

One final statement in regard to disappointment. Overcoming disappointment requires forgiveness. If you are going to avoid getting trapped in the past, you must learn to forgive yourself and be willing to forgive others. Unforgiveness doesn’t make sense when you really believe God is in control.

There is one more reason for you to let go of offence, all of the offence that you hold on to will eventually turn toward God. You will eventually turn the blame to him. "God, why did you let this happen?

Chapter Three



Here we go again

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”

- Maya Angelou

Joseph's first step onto the sands of Egypt was an important step in the direction he needed to go. Even though he could not see it his journey was guided by the hand of God. God placed the need in Potiphar's house for a servant that caused him to be at the auction that day to connect with Joseph. Potiphar was merely two steps away from the court of Pharaoh. And that was the destination for this young man. Potiphar was merely a pawn in the hand of the Lord. How often we are so close to our destiny and simply don't recognize or appreciate it. Unfortunately, many people slow down or even abort their forward progress because they complain about the things that they don't understand. They either offend or drive away the divine appointments in their life. They don't understand that they may have been fired from one job because they are being positioned for another. One door closes unexpectedly so another one can open.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"¹⁸ In everything (not for everything) give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you".

That is to be our set attitude. No matter what we encounter we trust that the Lord is guiding our steps. So when something arises that we were not prepared for, we live with a sense of thanksgiving that the Lord is pulling the strings in our direction. Proverbs 3:5-6 gives us strong assurance that the Lord is in control.

Proverbs 3:5-6

"⁵ Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

⁶ In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths".

It is our understanding that is the culprit here. We are told not to lean on our own understanding. Unless we can see the whole picture, which

is usually the case, we don't understand. So we are instructed to lean on Him. Acknowledge him in the midst of your fear and uncertainty by recognizing God's faithfulness and strength. I am not leaning on what I don't know; I am putting my trust in what he has promised. I acknowledge who He is and what He has done. I refuse to complain about my situation. Actually it is a subtle form of atheism for us to complain because the circumstances of our life do not look right.

We see a little bit of Joseph's character beginning to shine through when he is taken in to be a household slave. There was something in Joseph that caused these Egyptians to notice him and trust his work ethic. He showed character in captivity. He showed diligence with his responsibilities. He had the faith qualities of a man who had a deeper source within him and he was eventually placed in charge of all of the household affairs.

There are immature, disinterested people who won't perform any more than they are obligated to do. This says so much about us. I would say that besides our spouse and children, there are few things in our lives that expose our character and launch our reputation more than our work ethic. It is seen by everyone. As believers, it is also important to realize that not only is our reputation evidenced by our diligence in labor, it is also God's reputation! Our public behavior, among those who "*see your good works*," may be the catalyst for unbelievers to be open to the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But Joseph seemed to have qualities that opened doors for him. I can only guess what those qualities might be. I imagine that they would be things like positive attitude, enthusiasm, readiness and ability to work well with others, humility, modesty, dressing properly for the job, friendliness, showing up to work on time, honesty, loyalty, efficiency, willingness and desire to learn, working toward continuous improvement. Doing what you are supposed to do, in the manner that it is supposed to be done, and taking the time to do it right the first time, all while being approachable, respectful, well organized, ethical and honest. I think that about sums up what this young man brought to the table. In short, it is character.

There are four pillars in decision making that sustains this kind of character. I think we need to occasionally do a self-evaluation to see if we are maintaining character. When you are confronted with a decision or action, ask yourself the following questions.

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build goodwill and better relationships?
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

On top of everything else that was seen in his character, the bible says, *“The Lord was with Joseph”* and *“In everything Joseph did he prospered”*. This shows me that he was not pining away in self-pity. He carried a grace and anointing on his life that was the back drop for his daily conduct. It was a wonderful combination.

Now we come to the part that we don’t understand when we find ourselves in Joseph’s shoes. Genesis 39:7 says that Potiphar’s wife said to Joseph, “Come sleep with me”. It appears that she grabbed hold of him because Joseph sprints away leaving her holding his cloak. Furious, she screams rape. This is going to cause a problem. I must caution you about something here. There are times in your life when a door slams shut. Don’t anchor your heart in the way you think things ought to be done. Some doors although they look good are not the final direction of your journey and they must be slammed shut. God was now permanently closing the door of Potiphar’s house so he could move Joseph on to his next divine appointment. We too often think it is the devil that is hindering our lives and closing doors in front of us. We need to stop serving two gods. Satan is not the Lord of your life, Jesus is. If he closes a door in your life, there is a reason.

Potiphar obviously doubts her story. Maybe someone came to his defense, or Potiphar himself could see through the accusation because he knew the integrity of Joseph. When honor is a priority to you it cannot be hidden. I believe this to be true because their law allowed a slave owner to instantly execute a violent slave, but instead Potiphar simply sends him to prison. It also seems evident to me that Potiphar may have said something to

the keeper of the prison to suggest that Joseph was a man of honor and integrity. Because the keeper of the prison pretty much gave Joseph the run of the affairs of the prison. He didn't even check up on the things that Joseph did. That was a little out of the ordinary.

There had to be a sense of disappointment and maybe even self-pity that Joseph was dealing with. Kind of a *"here we go again"* scenario. *"First everything falls apart at home and now here. It just seems that people don't like me for some reason"*. I wonder how many of those questions Joseph had to deal with. I am at a dead end job. I have been demoted and downgraded. Here is the question. What do you do when you are downgraded? This is because what you do there determines when or even if you move to the next level for your life. Sometimes the downgrade is where the door of access to the next level is found.

Joseph is now in prison. We see one of his success secrets. Joseph sets in to a routine. He was busy. That is what God wants you to do. He was taking care of his job and doing ministry whenever he had the opportunity. It is out of "doing" that God promotes you. People who are just sitting around waiting will never get the opportunities. Joseph has now been moved to the launching pad. He is ready.

The time has come for the next connection in Joseph's life. Here is how it all came down. Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker. Since this was both butler (cup bearer) and baker it suggests that Pharaoh came down with an acute case of indigestion, or worse, food poisoning. Many kings were brought down by a simple act of food poisoning. As a result, those who cooked the meal and those who placed it in the hand of the king were under suspicion. Those who were in charge of the king's food preparation were the most important officials to the king. Any mishap or even suspicion could be deadly. I am sure that the Lord gave Pharaoh a little belly ache and arranged for these men to be placed in Joseph's care. God is about to show off a little bit.

It is clear that this was no accident. God staged this whole scene where these men would displease Pharaoh. God had to get someone who

actually stood in the presence of the King in the same place with Joseph so they could carry the message that they had personally witnessed how God was with him. So Pharaoh put these men in the custody of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph to care for them. This is really important. You don't have to fight to get into position with God. All you have to do is serve and be faithful. Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

Psalms 75: 6-7

⁶ For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south.

⁷ But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

Proverbs 3:5-6

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

While in his care God began to give dreams to these two men. They were reoccurring dreams which was troubling to them.

Joseph said, "Don't interpretations come from God? Tell me the dreams."

The head cupbearer told his dream to Joseph:

In my dream, behold, a vine was before me. And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and squeezed

them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand.

And Joseph said unto him, this is the meaning of the dream:

The three branches are three days: Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up your head, and restore you unto your old job: Everything that you used to do will be restored into your hands.

But remember me when you are restored to your position, and please make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this prison: For indeed I was kidnapped from my father's house in the land of the Hebrews: and since I have been here I have done nothing that they should put me into this dungeon.

The head baker saw how good Joseph's interpretation turned out, he spoke up:

"My dream went like this: I saw three baskets on my head; the top basket had assorted baked food from the bakery and birds were picking at them from the basket on my head."

Joseph said to him, this is the interpretation:

The three baskets are three days; Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head but will have you beheaded and hung on a tree, and you will not so much as be given burial, but the birds will eat your flesh.

And just as he said, the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. And he restored the chief butler unto his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand, but he hanged the chief baker as Joseph had interpreted to them. The head

butler was fully restored to his place but never gave Joseph another thought; he forgot all about him.

Are you serious? He forgot all about him? Why did this happen? The answer is simple. The timing wasn't right. Everyone is in position but the time isn't right yet. Be patient. It is coming.

Trust God's Timing

Setbacks are opportunities to rethink your position, re-position, re-invent, re-tool.

The hoopla is now over. The baker is dead and the butler is gone. Joseph sits and waits. Actually as the Butler left the prison God spoke in his ear and said, "Forget". Why? Timing is everything when it comes to the plan of God. But Joseph must once again according to 1 Peter 1:13 gird up the loins of his mind. He had to roll up his sleeves, and put his mind in gear. Two years pass. Once again he had to fight discouragement. Did you ever feel that you were at the point of change in your life and God said "Forget" to the people that you thought would help you?

Genesis 41:1

¹ Then it came to pass, at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh had a dream;

Now it is time for the final leg of the transition for Joseph. God was timing the three components of famine, Pharaoh's dreams and Joseph's interpretation. God is never too soon nor is he too late. If it had been too early there would have been the opportunity to question if the famine was coming. If it had been too late they would not have time to gather the grain as they should. So Joseph waits. That is the hardest thing to deal with. You wait and you wait. You can't make it happen, but I assure you that it is going to happen. Discouragement hasn't changed him one bit. He was

anchored in the understanding of God's faithfulness. Finally, an unexpected call comes.

God gave Pharaoh two dreams to show him what was about to come on the earth. The first dream went like this.

"I was standing by the Nile River and seven cows came up out of the Nile, all of them were healthy, and grazed in the meadow. Then seven other cows came up and they were all skin and bones, they came up out of the river after them and stood by them on the bank of the Nile. The skinny cows ate and devoured the seven healthy cows".

Then Pharaoh woke up.

Then Pharaoh dreamed a second dream.

In this dream he saw seven ears of grain, blossoming out of a single stalk. It was lush and flourishing. Then seven more ears grew up, but these were blasted and dried out by the east wind. The thin ears swallowed up the healthy ears.

Then Pharaoh woke up. He was really troubled. He knows that this means something. They had a great deal more respect for dreams in those days than we do in our day. But no one could interpret these dreams for him.

Many people are like this. They see the problem but they don't understand it. They run in circles wringing their hands and trying to give a reason for the problem they are facing. Pharaoh certainly didn't know how to analyze the problem. But Joseph was someone who understood the problem and understood the solution. He was a problem solver and could bring things to a conclusion. These kinds of people are so valuable.

The head butler suddenly remembered his experience with Joseph and communicated that to Pharaoh. Why hadn't he remembered earlier? The

timing wasn't right. God doesn't open the doors for you until everything is in position. This had been orchestrated by the hand of God like a conductor with a symphony.

Pharaoh immediately sent for Joseph. He is ushered into the presence of Pharaoh. A sense of urgency filled the room. He wasted no time. "I had a dream," Pharaoh told Joseph. "I've have been told that you have a gift that just by hearing a dream you can interpret it."

Joseph did as he always did, he gave glory to God. "I can't, but God can".

After hearing the dream Joseph began to explain,

God is telling Pharaoh what he is about to do. The two dreams both have the same meaning. The seven healthy cows are seven years and the seven healthy ears of grain are seven years. They're both the same dream. The seven sick cows that followed them up are seven years and the seven thin ears of grain dried out by the east wind are the same. You are looking at seven years of famine.

God is showing Pharaoh a picture of what he is about to do. There are seven years of plenty coming to Egypt. But on the heels of that bounty will come seven years of famine, leaving no trace of the abundance that Egypt had just experienced. As the land is scorched by famine, there won't be even a scrap left of the previous abundance. The scourge of the famine will be crushing. The fact that Pharaoh dreamed the same dream twice means that this will happen soon.

Here is a look at Joseph's business skills. It just makes sense to him. The wisdom of God will enlarge the capacity of what you see. So, he boldly speaks up and says,

"Pharaoh should look for a wise and experienced man and put him in charge of the affairs of the nation of Egypt. Then Pharaoh needs to appoint administrators throughout the country of Egypt to

organize it during the years of plenty. Their job will be to collect all the food that was produced during the good years and stockpile the grain under Pharaoh's authority, storing it in the appointed cities for food. This grain will be held back to be used later during the seven years of famine that are coming on Egypt. This way the country won't parish during the famine."

They all loved it. Pharaoh immediately recognizes that Joseph has a spiritual gift to hear from God on important matters and he also feels that Joseph's plan was sound. Where are we going to find anyone else like this?

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "You're the man that can do this job. I don't know of anyone who is as qualified as you in experience and wisdom. From this day forward, you will be the Prime Minister over all of Egypt. All of my people will report to you. Only in the throne will I be over you."

Joseph was in charge of the entire country of Egypt. No one comes in or goes out without your knowledge and approval. Then Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, Zaphenath-Paneah (*God Speaks and He Lives*). He also gave him an Egyptian wife, Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On (Heliopolis).

Joseph was thirty years old when he took the position for Pharaoh the king of Egypt. During the next seven years of plenty the land produced hand over fist. Joseph gathered up the food of the seven good years in Egypt and stored the food in cities that had been prepared to receive it. In each city he stockpiled the excess from the surrounding fields. Joseph collected so much grain it was like the sand of the sea. He had so much abundance he finally quit keeping track.

Joseph had two sons born to him before the years of famine came. Asenath, daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, was their mother. Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, (Forget) saying, "God made me forget all my toil and adversity and my father's house." He named his second son

Ephraim (Double Prosperity), saying, "God has prospered me in the land of my affliction."

Then Egypt's seven good years came to an end and just as Joseph said, the seven years of famine arrived. It was wide spread. All countries experienced the effects of the famine; Egypt was the only country that had grain set aside. When the famine spread throughout Egypt, the people called out in distress to Pharaoh. He told them to, "Go to Joseph. Do what he tells you to do." Each year the famine got worse all over the country, Joseph then opened all of the store-houses and sold the grain to the Egyptians. The famine increased and soon the whole world was coming to buy supplies from Joseph.

At first the people were coming with their money. After a while they no longer had money so they bought grain with their land, then they gave themselves in trade. Pharaoh was no longer just the governor or king over the city, He owned everything. And it was all because of Joseph.

Now at the end of the story you get a glimpse into how all of the movement in his life was positioning him to be a blessing.

Our need for one another

Understanding promotion

This brings us to an important question. Why was it necessary for all of these other players to be in the story of Joseph? His brothers, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, the butler, the baker: Why didn't God just fix the situation or move Joseph into place without all the drama?

All of the movement in your life comes through other people. Although promotion comes from the Lord, He brings it through people. When God wants to bless you, he sends someone into your life. When Satan wants to curse you, he sends someone into your life. This shows the importance of our connection and relationship with other people. The reason goes back to the blessing that God placed on Abraham, "I will bless you and

you will be a blessing". My life and the blessing on my life are discovered in my connection to others. That is where my doors are opened, and my gifts are unveiled. Actually to understand your mission and purpose you need to have an understanding of the people that you connect with.

We are linked in more ways than we comprehend. The meaning in every facet of life is found in its connection to something else. All of our differences and diversities, although they seem unrelated are really connected. The strengths of one contributing to the weaknesses of another. Diverse, different, yet the same. We are many parts that make up one whole. The Apostle Paul said, we are many members of one body.

Romans 12:5 (NKJV)

"⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

The meaning of life is summed up in that connection. It is in that connection that you really find yourself and your purpose. Without the understanding of that connection, you will never find the meaning behind the plan for your life because your purpose is always revealed in your relationship to other people. You are called to be a channel not a reservoir. The reason the Dead Sea is dead is because it is the lowest point in the earth. It takes in, but never gives out. As a result, nothing can live there. You are not an island to yourself. Sooner or later, everything that happens to you eventually affects the lives of the many people that you have never met. It reminds me of the movie "It's A Wonderful Life" with Jimmy Stewart. He couldn't imagine how his absence would alter the complexion of every level of relationship in his life. Even those he considered insignificant.

In the same way, everything in this physical world is charged with divine life and has a higher purpose and connection than we can see with our natural eye. This is especially realized when someone gives their life to Christ. God's purpose for their individual life takes on greater meaning and direction. That is when you truly begin to understand the purpose of life. Or

at least you should. It is unfortunate that the Body of Christ, who should be alive with a full sense of purpose, is for the most part aimless in their pursuit of it.

Just as each cell of your body is a part of you, we are all a part of God and His wonderful design. Each of us has our own individual personality. We have the power to exercise our will to embrace or reject the virtues and principles of life that are used to bring us into God's perfect order. Isn't it exciting to know that we are all part of His plan? How settling that is. God has a plan and I am a part of it. He has a plan for you and he is always calling you to that plan.

So how do I know what to do? What do I do to get my life back on track? Purpose and the understanding of that purpose will not come from some outside place or event. It starts from within. It is not when you line up all of the ducks in your life that you suddenly arrive at your Utopia. You can have complete peace and live with purpose in the midst of chaos. It is in you now. Just like Joseph, everything that you are and will ever be has already been planted in you. Like a seed, the purpose and plan of God has been buried deep within us, and like a magnet, it draws us. With each step it reveals where we fit and the part we will play in the overall scheme of things. We all have a purpose, reason and intention. It doesn't matter who we are or what we have been through, each of us fit in the plan of God like a hand in a glove. It's a perfect fit.

When I speak of purpose, I am not speaking of the prime general call to worship God and serve one another. I am referring more to the individual, commissioned aspect of who you are and what you are personally to accomplish while you are here.

The purpose of God for your life is not decided. It is discovered. As you walk out your stewardship, you catch glimpses of the big picture. Like thirst for water, your desires draw you to it. Each thing that you go through unveils something more. The interesting thing is that God has given us a will of our own which empowers us in the process to move forward or backward. This is where most of us get into trouble. But even through the

difficulties that we go through, He is purging our hearts and using those difficulties of life to grow and develop us. With every act of submission and faith, we are moved to another place. Each decision that we make takes us down a road that makes us what we are.

Set aside the struggle for your acceptance or your worth. Start serving where you are and become a source. You must have a connection to create a flow. It is out of serving that direction comes. You have great value to the plan of God. There is no one like you and no one can complete your part. Relax in the knowledge that you fit in the plan and wisdom of God. You have job security. You are not a “*left over part*” like the pieces you forget when you assemble something. You are a key player. You may not be walking in or realizing the full extent of the part you play yet, but it is real. You have great value toward the Kingdom of God.

Our connection with other people

Our life and purpose fits like a puzzle

Ephesians 2:18-22

¹⁸ For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

¹⁹ Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

²⁰ And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

*²¹ In whom all the building fitly framed together **growth** unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

²² In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

One day I was watching my daughter work a puzzle. She would study each piece. She would try one and search for another, try again and search ... That is the way our life is. In light of the purpose of God, your life looks like a puzzle. And you have the single piece that represents you or at least a part of our life. It may not always make sense by itself, but remember that God has the lid to the box. He knows what the end product is going to look like. I have seven observations about how your life works like a puzzle. The similarities are amazing.

1. Each piece is specific and unique in its assignment

No other piece can replace it. I always thought, *"If I don't do it, God can get someone else"*. The fact is, most of the time He can't. No one else fits. That is how unique you are in your design. Other pieces of the puzzle look very similar but they cannot lock into place. When you are not in your place, others suffer. Many times the assignment is lost. I don't know how it is possible but out of the billions of people on this planet no one has your finger prints. Yours is completely unique. Even so, what you bring to the table is uniquely you.

2. Each piece has its own personality

You bring out a part of the picture like no other piece can. That is why it is so important to be true to you and trust being yourselves is enough. Authenticity is essential for you to find and fulfill your purpose. We lose ourselves many times by looking at someone else's beauty, someone else's strengths. But the fact is you are the completion of the picture. You bring out a part of the story that no one else can tell.

What this means is that there are no unimportant pieces. Each piece has its own uniqueness. Don't try to change who you are, or try to be like someone else. Celebrate the unique qualities that you alone have.

3. Your piece of the puzzle is like, yet unlike the others

As with all puzzles, there is a blend and flow that ties all of the pieces together to tell a story or show a picture. The cut of the pieces are very similar...of the same tribe and body... The bottom line is that you don't fit with just any puzzle. Within each puzzle, there is a kindred of color, form, style and message. Did you know that you are geographically assigned to a group, a place and a mission? You have an assignment to the location or part of the country that you live. I have seen people try to fit into churches or groups that did not match their DNA or style. They are good people. They just don't fit. They seem to look just like you and like some of the same things that you like. In the same way, you can hold two or three pieces up and cannot tell the difference, but when you try to plug them in, there is not a fit.

4. Its identity is discovered in others.

Only when the pieces come together do you see the big picture. You are only made complete in relationship with others. You make them complete and they make you complete. One of the greatest lessons that you will learn is that isolation is a trap. It is a mistake to stay away when you are hurt or discouraged. When people get out of joint or dismembered, you will see swelling, pain, and loss of limb. Even though each member (body part) is individual, yet it is empowered by it's coming together. There is strength and power that only comes from our connection. This is the danger of division. We lose ourselves as well as one another when we allow something to divide us. We need one another.

Hebrews 10:25

²⁵ Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together.

5. It is an effortless fit.

Each connection causes you to be locked into place. You are what you are with no effort. I don't struggle to be a pastor. That is my design. I am what I am by the grace of God.

Romans 12:3-8

³ For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

(Let me interject here that the subject of this chapter is the many member body of Christ. The subject here is not faith. It is the many member body where we all fill our place. You have been dealt THE measure of faith to fill that place and be what you are called to be.)

⁴ For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

⁵ So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

⁷ Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

⁸ Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity (liberally); he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

So the bottom line that you have been given the measure of faith that you need to be everything that you are called to be. There is not struggle in just being you. Most all of our struggle comes when we forget who we are and strive to be someone we are not.

6. It is beautiful when it is in its place

When you are in your place, there is such beauty that manifests from your life. When you are in your place, your life says something. We must also remember that our life is not about us; rather our part contributes to something bigger than us. The story of the bible was not about Abraham and David and others. It is a story about God and His faithfulness. The bible is the menu but Jesus is the meal. When we all get together and find our place, the image we see is the love of God through Jesus Christ poured out in us.

7. What happens to a puzzle when pieces are lost?

This is when a person gets full of themselves. They lose their way and believe that it is all about them. This is the danger of pride and strife. It separates you from the body. You must remember that the blessing of Abraham was not that you would get a blessing but rather that you would be a blessing. When you stop hooking up and stop being a blessing, you lose your way and the whole picture suffers.

These are the instructions for us in relationship to the other pieces of the puzzle. This is how you are supposed to act.

1 Corinthians 12:18-31

¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

²⁰ *But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.*

²¹ *And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

²² *No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*

²³ *And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,*

²⁴ *but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,*

²⁵ *that there should be no schism (discord or dissension) in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

²⁶ *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

²⁷ *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

²⁸ *And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*

²⁹ *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?*

³⁰ *Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*

³¹ But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Incidentally, that more excellent way is in the next chapter. 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that it is love.

When we connect, we grow

The Body is designed to grow as is fitly framed together

So now the focus turns on you as an individual piece of the puzzle. You are a single member of the multi membered body of Christ. Like the puzzle, Paul relates our position in life to the many members of the body and how we grow through our relationship to each other. In that sense, without one another we may never see the fullness of what we are to become. The whole picture of our purpose is revealed through our coming together. Just as there are many working parts in your body, each one is essential. Each is individual and cannot be replaced by another.

In the same way, you are vital in your position to everything around you. We cannot grow or flourish independently of each other. Listen to this scripture.

Ephesians 4:16

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Each joint supplies a part and when it hooks up and does its share, the body grows.

Ephesians 2:21-22

²¹ In Him the whole structure is joined (Bound, welded) together harmoniously; and it continues to grow and increase into a holy temple in the Lord – a sanctuary dedicated, consecrated and sacred to the presence of the Lord

²² In Him and in fellowship with one another, you yourselves are being built up into this structure with the rest to form a fixed abode and dwelling place of God in the Spirit

This is an interesting thought.

There are some parts of the body that never get complimented. Yet try to live without that part. No one ever compliments your liver, yet, unless your liver hooks up and does its job, you could certainly die. But who ever thinks of the liver? The only time it gets attention is when it stops working. Can you imagine your mate saying to you, “The first time I saw your liver, I knew you were the one for me.” Of course not! Maybe you feel like no one notices you. Maybe you feel unimportant, unnoticed and unappreciated in the big scheme of things. But the truth is that the rest of the body would suffer without you in your place.

Let’s look at it from another perspective. The eye which always gets complimented is only beautiful because of the covering of the rest of the body. An eye ball by itself is not something that you would get any pleasure looking at. It is only with the covering of the eye lid that you compliment someone on their eyes.

So your true beauty and worth is actually discovered in your relationship to others. They become a sort of covering for you. And it is in that relationship that you discover your place and your purpose.

I have discussed the need for your relationship with others but now you must understand the need for your relationship with God. What is the highest purpose of a human being? You can’t always define it by the outward appearance. Look at electric wire. What is electric wire? I can’t tell

you what it is without introducing electricity. Its meaning can only be explained by introducing something bigger than the wire itself, and that is electricity. That wire has no other meaning than to receive, conduct, and express electricity. I can't tell you what a human being is without introducing God. We are in His likeness and have the capability of receiving, conducting, and expressing the full nature of God. We are incomplete unless we are hooked up with our creator. The only way to describe a human is to introduce something greater than himself. You know that because you are never satisfied with the "things" of life. If they made you a king, it wouldn't be long until you said, "Is this all there is?" Why? We are made to contain something bigger than ourselves. Let's suppose the electric wire declared itself independent of electricity. What would be left? Maybe we could use the wire as a rope. Sure we could do that, but that would be an insult to the inventor of the electric wire. It would be a great waste. What is the wire going to do now that it does not contain and conduct electricity? Maybe it can discuss how the brown wire is better than the gray wire. That is what happens when man loses his way. The purpose of man in his fullness can only be defined in his relationship with God and with those around him.

Our purpose is three fold. It is all summed up in the word "Fellowship".

- Fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit
- Fellowship with the Word
- Fellowship with one another.

Why You Fit Where You Do

Cells with and without a genetic code

Like a single piece of the puzzle, the cells of your body come together to tell a story. Even though the entire picture is encoded in each cell, the real picture is seen when they all come together. Even in a single kernel of corn under a microscope, you can see how many ears will grow on the stock that kernel of corn produces. In the same manner each cell in your

body has a pictures or blue print of what the whole body is supposed to look like and where each part fits. It is already there. I'm never surprised to see the nose on the front of the face. We are like cells in the body. The genetic code in each cell, known as DNA, contains the blueprint for the function and formation of the entire body. It tells why you have blue eyes – big ears – baldhead.

Let me make a point to say, when you have a cell in your body without a genetic code, whether it be damaged, deformed or abnormal, it causes deformity and can be cancerous.

Let's relate that to church for a moment. I have heard people say "I just float from place to place". So do cancer cells. If an area of the blueprint is rejected or changed, abnormalities and deformities occur. An Albino for instance lacks the cell information to produce skin pigments. This is so important. Each section of cells is responsible for the translation and forming of one area of the blueprint. Just like you, they are carriers of the genetic code.

Everything that you need is already in you to become all that you are called to be. It is expressed through your desires and interest. You are called to what you are drawn to. Like a thirst it draws you to everything that you are supposed to do and become.

It is not a surprise to see you develop the way you have. You were born with that DNA and it has been embedded in you for your whole life. In the natural we would say that is why your face is shaped as it is. But in this case we say, this is why you are loud, or quiet. You are a Sanguine or Choleric. They are all indications of why you fit where you do. It is the spiritual, social and physical DNA that you were birthed with. So the best thing to do is be yourself and let it happen.

A deeper look into life as an Assignment

Once again, let's look at our difficult situations through the lenses of it being an assignment. Here is how God sees it. Darkness cries out in its desperation and God always hears the cry. At the core of his nature he is a savior. His love compels him. As a result of that cry from the darkness, he sends light (That is you). He will never leave the world without a savior. Even to the point of giving himself as a sacrifice in our place. John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him shall not perish but have everlasting life". When you cry out to the Lord for help He hears your cry.

You are commissioned to express the love of God into a world that is dying for lack of that love. We have given them religion. We have given the rules. But it doesn't quench their thirst.

Can we now see ourselves through the eyes of Joseph? What was he thinking about? At the end of the day when everything got quiet, how did he process the events of his life? He is tired. His hands are callused and worn. The heat of the sun blistered against him. It is hard after a while to remember what everyone looked like. I am trying to remember what their voice sounded like. Was his father still alive? These thoughts weigh a lot. Joseph sits on the floor and leans his head against the wall and stares forward at nothing. But at night God would speak to him through dreams and he would remember the dream God gave him about his father and brothers bowing down to him. Under his breath I hear him say, "God has not forgotten me". Joseph was a blessed man and he knew it. What does a blessed man think about when it looks like everything is going wrong? It is true that after his father died he told his brothers "What you meant for evil against me, God worked for good". But I wonder if it was that clear in the jail? I believe he never lost that sense of trust that told him that somehow even though he did not understand it God had not forsaken him. Somehow God was at work in his life. That had been his meditation. It didn't matter if feeling or appearance gave no indication of the blessing. "His blessing is on me. I am kept by His blessing."

Let there be no misunderstanding. There are times when evil men plan evil things, and they exercise their evil desire through their free will.

God allows them to do that because He gave them their free will. And out of the evil treasures of their heart, they plan their evil against you and me. How can they do that if I am so blessed?

We must remember that all things, including those things that are used as instruments of change were created by the hand for the purpose of God. They are all the handy work of God. He is the creator and designer. Satan doesn't want you to know it, but he is also a product of the Word of God. And to this day he will still respond to God's Word. All of the men who devise evil against you were created by His powerful hand, and it is in Him that they live and move and have their being. In other words, they are not independent of God.

Through his wisdom and his love he actively oversees everything in your life. When enemies get together and have an agenda to plan evil against you, God sets in on that meeting. He is not intimidated. He alone is God. He is Jehovah. He is the Lord of Hosts. God looks over their plan, and makes it work for your good. He makes it work to help you fulfill your divine purpose in this life.

That is how you can say, *"no weapon formed against me shall prosper."* There is no situation, no condition that can move you away from your purpose in Him. It is in Him that you live and move and have your being. You are where you are by divine appointment. This is your assignment. You are here to bless somebody.

Kidnapped? No. Joseph was sent. A slave? No. He was free. This is the same thing that Paul said when he wrote, *"I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ."* How could he say something like that when the chains on his wrist were stamped with the imperial stamp of Rome? When Rome says you are free, you are free. No. When Jesus says you are free, then you are free.

In the book of Philippians, Paul said, *"I have been appointed to this jail."* He looked at everything that happened to him as an appointment. That word *"appointment"* is a military term for *"day duty."* When you truly understand this, faith can arise in your heart to bless others. You consider

every situation that you face as a commission to introduce the spiritual into the natural. *"I'm imprisoned in this situation. What do I do?"* Bless your captors. Bless your bars. Open the flood gates of your heart and allow God to pour light through the flood gates of your heart into the darkness that surrounds you. This is your purpose on this earth. You are empowered at a deeper level to loose your enemies. You are commissioned as a blessed man to bless them. That's why you find scriptures like these:

Romans 12:20

²⁰ *If your enemy hunger feed him. If he thirst, give him drink.*

Luke 6:27-29

²⁷ *Love your enemies. Do good to those that hate you. Pray for those who mistreat you.*

Matthew 5:44

⁴⁴ *Love your enemies. Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you, in order to be like your Father.*

Romans 12:14

¹⁴ *Bless those who curse you, bless and curse not.*

1 Corinthians 4:12

¹² *When we are reviled, we bless.*

JESUS said "Forgive them". He separated them from what they did because there was actual purpose in what he was experiencing.

PAUL was totally alone and deserted. He wrote and said "Make every effort to come soon." He is a lonely man. "Demas hath forsaken me." "At my first defense, no man stood with me."

Does this sound like anything that you might be facing? "Nothing is going right for me." But notice what Paul does. In this darkness, he brings light. He blesses. He prays for them. He said, *"I pray it not be counted against them."* Stephen said the same thing as men picked up stones to kill him with. He prayed, *"Lay this not to their charge."*

These are people who understood the higher purpose. They are well grounded in what their prime directive is; to "be" a blessing. It doesn't matter what they face, or what kind of hole they find themselves in. They are focused on spiritualizing the natural and introducing the Kingdom of God into their dark situation.

That is also your commission. You are where you are by divine appointment. It all has purpose. There is such freedom in this. Now everything that you face, you expect the flood of God's grace to come through you. This happens in a way that it would have never happened before, if you not been placed in these circumstances. But unfortunately, many times we get into situations that are uncomfortable and we begin to complain. We murmur, find fault, quit the church. We miss the divine appointment that we were commissioned to. If you are going to back up and quit every time you face difficulty, then God is never going to be able to put you into a place where men are crying out for a savior.

Let's look at it again. Darkness cries out to God for help and God commissions you as light to go to darkness and minister life and encouragement to them. He will never be able to position you in the way he desires if you blow up every time you get in an uncomfortable place. If God can't trust you, he will have to use someone else. As a result, your life is thrown into idle. You begin to live to yourself.

I know there are Christians who would take you to court if you bumped into them. If you cross them they will punch you in the nose. Those

same people have bumper stickers that say “Honk if you love Jesus”. Don’t believe it. You might honk and get more than you bargained for.

A lady in our church was driving home one day, and the guy driving in the vehicle behind her ran into her. It wasn’t a serious wreck, but it did a little damage. The man’s name was Ken. Ken was at the end of his rope. He just lost his family, his job. Everything was going wrong. When he ran into her, he thought, this is the last straw. Before she had time to get out of her car the Lord spoke to her to go back and pray for this man. This seemed very odd but she was obedient to her instructions. She walked back to Ken and asked him, “are you alright?” then asked him if she could pray for him. She opened her heart and became an expression of light into darkness.

As Ken was relating the story to me, tears were running down his face. He said, “She came back and laid her hands on me and prayed for me”. As a result, Ken got saved. The last I heard of him he was going to bible school in the Dallas - Fort Worth area.

That was a divine appointment. You might say, “God would never cause a wreck”. I by no means am suggesting that God goes around causing wrecks and destruction. I am saying that God is more interested in Ken’s life than he is your fender. This is not a story of God bringing destruction. It’s an intervention. It is a story of God breaking through Ken’s world with a lifeline. Ken was at the end of his rope. He needed help right now. Even though it was uncomfortable, there was a need that had to be addressed immediately. God sent a messenger from our church and when they got together, his life was changed.

But if you don’t understand that sometimes you are sent into uncomfortable situations for the purpose of changing someone’s life, you will respond in an inappropriate manner and miss the divine appointment. It is hard to pray for someone when you just punched them in the nose. It is hard to minister to someone and be a blessing to them when you just gave them a piece of your mind and threatened to take them to court and sue them.

1 Peter 4:19

¹⁹ Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator.

Do you hear that? He is faithful. This scripture is speaking of the things that you endure in your journey of life. The discomfort of being in a difficult place is your assignment. God is not trying to make you suffer. He sent you as a messenger into a place of suffering for the purpose of introducing the authority of the Word of God into that difficult situation.

There is a two-fold purpose in suffering. For them, you are sent into an uncomfortable place to help. For you, difficulties and hardness matures and settles you. That is why you endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 5:10

¹⁰ But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

The things in your life don't just happen. You are a purchased possession and He owns you. He is guiding your steps to be an expression of his love and mercy. When you see yourself like this, Satan is afraid to even look your direction because if you get bumped, you will start laying hands on people around you. You see everything as a divine appointment. Everything that you face becomes a potential miracle. You are a flood gate from the world of the spirit into the world of the natural.

Trust God. The one thing that the Lord wants from us is the one thing that we refuse to give him and that is our trust. My life is in the hands of God. The blessings of Abraham are on my life. I'm blessed coming in

and going out. I am blessed in all that I put my hands to. The enemy may come in one way but he will flee seven. As a result I give thanks in all things for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. *1 Thess. 5:18*. Thanksgiving characterizes my faith. The greatest faith words I can speak are, “Thank you”.

Sometimes it appears that your substance is compromised for your assignment. Don’t get your eyes on substance when measuring the fact that you are blessed. It is true that you will be blessed in your substance, but there are times when you face things that you can’t explain. Abundance and lack are merely tools to bring you to, and equip you for something greater. Trust in the Lord. Anything that seems lost will come back to you before it is over. Stop struggling in your circumstances and start serving. Stop cursing your circumstances and look for someone to bless.

Proverbs 3:5-8

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.

⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes: Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

⁸ And it shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones.

Remember that success is not a destination, it is a journey. Success is to live your life to its fullest potential regardless of what you face. If you will be faithful you will live the life of success every day. And this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Victory is faith's positioning in the midst of your difficulties. In other words, my circumstances don't have to be perfect for me to have victory. I walk in victory in spite of my circumstances because I walk by faith. With I have it all or lose it all, my position of victory never changes.

Chapter Four



Understanding the road I travel

“Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty... I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life. I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.”

- Theodore Roosevelt

"It's not a matter of eliminating trials from your life. That is not going to happen. It's a matter of learning to confront and overcome them."

- Jerry Edmon

Problems tend to keep us turned inward. The result is too often self-pity and blame. I can't see your problems because I am in too much pain myself. I have been mishandled and done wrong. We ask questions but they are usually the wrong question. "If I have great value, why is my life in the shape that it is in"? That question is much more common that you would think. We live in a society where our self-worth has been depleted by bad judgment, failed marriages and failed business ventures. Some of you have been told that you were of little value, sometimes by friends, sometimes by family. The result is that many people come to believe that they have little or no purpose. They are left with the feeling that because of their failure or mistakes, whatever they were intended to become has been aborted and lost. What feeling could be more empty and miserable than that? *"I have no more purpose in this life. I am a "throw away individual"*.

Is there any truth to that? Has God given up on you? Absolutely not! No matter what you have been through, you can find and fulfill your divine purpose in this life. I know that you may have faced disappointment and failure. Maybe you have had the feeling that God was angry with you, and that you were in a position where there was no hope. Maybe you have been told that if God was to use you he had to go to "*plan B*", because you messed up "*plan A*" so badly. It's the suggestion that if God is going to use you that he had to come up with a different plan for you.

Yet we stand with our hat in our hands longing for purpose to find us. It is a dilemma because we have to judge purpose against the back drop of misunderstandings, misconceptions and even lies that we were handed during our childhood.

These things have the potential to turn us away from our purpose, and hinder our momentum. They are not just things that we hit. They hit us. We also encounter beliefs that we have had about ourselves that caused us to sit down and quit.

It is unfortunate that for the most part we have felt that there was nothing that could be done about these things. You know what "things" I am talking about. "I could never amount to anything because... and here it

goes. *"I was born on the wrong side of the tracks."* *"I just don't have a good education."* *"I don't have enough money."* *"I'm ugly."* *"20 years ago I made some bad decisions and lost my family and business, therefore my life is over."* *"If only I could be like them."* Or worse, *"If I were them instead of me, everything would be good in my life."* There are many, many more dream stealers, and they are all deadly to your life. They steal from you. They drain you. They take all of the beauty from your life, and offer nothing in return but emptiness and disappointment.

I know that you might be saying, *"Yes, but isn't that normal to feel that way at times? Because it certainly seems that they have a better life than I do."* That kind of thinking might be normal in the sense that a lot of people are like that, but it isn't the way it is supposed to be.

It might be that you cannot do anything about where you were born, and it is true that you can't do anything about yesterday, in the sense that it is in the past. But you can do something about today. And all of these things that I just mentioned, money, education, bad decisions, failed marriages, have no power over you unless you allow them to.

These are not the things that dictate to us whether or not we succeed in life and find and fulfill our purpose. That decision is ours and ours alone. God did not make your purpose in life contingent on people or circumstances. The things of life may hinder, but they cannot stop you. God's plan is broader than that. Be faithful and obedient and it doesn't matter what other people do. God will bring your life into divine order and completion.

So let's establish this fact that maybe because you blew it, or were born on the wrong side of the tracks, or whatever excuse might be use, has nothing to do with fulfilling the purpose of God in your life. It is the decisions you make right now that positions you to move forward.

The excuses you use produce a deceitful and destructive mindset. It will cause you to sit down simply because you have encountered something in yourself that you don't understand. They will keep you from pursuing

your future. The trophies of life are not to the slow to move or the weak of heart. They must be attained. You cannot stop now.

The divine plan and purpose for your life has never changed since the day that you were born. Don't blame your inability to be perfect as the reason for not moving forward. The dynamics of the big picture are many times greater than your failure. Somehow God factors that in. Even to the point of using the negative to not only do a personal work in you, but also to arrange circumstances in your favor. That is how Joseph of the book of Genesis could say, *"What you meant for evil, God meant for good"*. God's divine purpose is overwhelmingly intact, but as people become deceived by their struggle, they lose their way. As a result, many just sit down and cease to strive forward. You can't stop now. Don't quit. When I was a young man, when I became discouraged, my father would quote this poem to me. Through it he was telling me, "Don't quit because things look bad. Don't stop. Don't hesitate.

*Upon the plains of hesitation,
Bleached the bones of countless millions,
Who at the point of victory,
Sat down to wait,
And waiting died.*

- Sam Ewing

There is a Master designer who deposited a purpose within you when you were conceived. Proverbs 16:1 said, *"The preparations of your heart are from the Lord NKJV"*. What this scripture is saying is that the desires and intentions that pull at your heart have to do with your purpose and are there by design. It has never left you. God has plans for you. Jeremiah 29:11 said, *"Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope"*. God doesn't vacillate. James 1:17 says, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of*

lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning". His thoughts are for your "good" has never changed from this.

This brings up a good question. What if it appears that because of failure on your part of some kind, it changed the dynamics of your life and knocked you off track? What about someone who has just sat down and quit the race? Can they find their way back?

There are many routes to your destination in life. Some routes are longer than others. One is beautiful and scenic while the other may be barren and dry. However, it is the same destination. All roads lead to it. You only have one destination in life. You either arrive or you don't. Obedience and a holy life keep you on the track to the shortest and most direct route. What is next for you is your obedience to rise to meet the needs of others. There are those who get lost and lose heart and sit down. They never seek to fulfill the plan for their life. They don't realize that if they will keep moving they will eventually reach their destination and fulfill the plan for their life.

When I look through the scope of eternity and time, I find that it is unimportant that I lived. Many have accomplished that. More important is what I said and what I believe. That is what remains when I am gone. I must understand that all the purpose of life is summed up in walking humbly before God keeping his commandments, and serving one another. It is not difficult. Do what you can with what you have. Listen to your heart and a sense of passion will arise when you get close to your purpose. A cause is the key to a one's passions. It is here that we find our prime directive. You must find the cause in everything that you are facing. Don't feel that you do not have what you need. You are equipped with everything you need to fulfill your assignment.

No one should use poverty or wealth as an excuse to not fulfill their purpose in life. God uses you where you are, not where you think you ought to be. The key is to listen to your heart.

When we get off track, we tend to wander aimlessly like a blind man groping about in unfamiliar pathways. There are two major pitfalls in

life, ignorance and aimlessness. I have found that just as ignorance is a destructive force in your life, so is aimlessness. This is where much of society is today. You can see it on their faces. It is not because of a lack of desire or sincerity on their part. They want to move forward to the point that they will bankrupt themselves looking for that something that will bring fulfillment. They have been confused and deceived. The pursuit of lower things has crowded out the understanding and embrace of higher things. As a result, they stalled out and their higher purpose was lost.

You must see there is a higher purpose at work in your life right now. I am not talking about the achievements you accomplish. This is where many get lost. They pursue things thinking that is the purpose for life. The end is predictable. They live an unfilled life.

The idea of accomplishment by itself is one of the great illusions in life. It leaves the impression that to achieve and conquer brings you to a Utopia of completeness and fulfillment. This deception comes when you are drawn into measuring your life by material standards. True accomplishments are measured in people you touch and not in the possessions you gather. Some of the most wretched people I have ever known have gathered an abundance of material possessions. That is certainly not a declaration of their worth. Achievement and purpose is not the same thing.

One purpose and many accomplishments

I know that there are those who feel that their life was an accident, and to them life consists of reacting to what crisis is going to arise today. But this is completely off base. God designed your life to fit into the overall plan, His plan. God is a master designer. He doesn't work off the cuff. He has plans for you that you haven't even seen yet.

He has given your life a prime directive. And everything else that you do in life hinges on that prime directive. There is a planned purpose for your life and along with that purpose are many achievements or

accomplishments. If you don't understand this, you will think that achievements are the purpose for life. Before long you will be saying "Is this all there is?"

You will be like Alexander the Great who wept because there were no more worlds to conquer. To conquer other armies was simply one of the achievements. But that wasn't the purpose for his life. He was pursuing the achievements as though they were the purpose of life. Certainly he was driven by it. In the book *Alexander the Great and His Time* by Agnes Savill, it said that Alexander was "seized with a longing" an expression denoting that he was compelled to attain some apparently impossible goal and must translate his emotion into practical achievement. There is no evidence that any of his generals, strong and brilliant men, were ever "seized with a longing as he was. Many of you have been driven by your pursuits, but that is not going to bring the fulfillment that you desire and need.

Making Right Choices on the Road you Travel

Generally speaking, things happen to you in life because of the choices you make. We make our decisions and then our decisions carry us to our future. I know that there are some exceptions, such as when life throws you a curve and there is nothing you can do. You appear to be a victim of circumstances, but as a general life pattern, most things are a result of our choices, for the good, or bad. The pop culture "*buzz words*" for kids who are in trouble today are that they are making poor choices. As we look at society we can see that these are obvious bad choices, and there are consequences to those choices.

It was under extreme hardships that Joseph made choices. He made choices about how he was going to respond when everything went wrong. You will make those choices consciously or unconsciously.

Most people today are making good decisions, but too often, we are like the man who eats butter out of a spoon, smoke three packs a day and says, "Hand me the chips and the remote" then wonders, "why does my

chest hurt?” He is a stroke and heart attack just waiting to happen. It may be that God had other things in mind for your life but you must accept the responsibility for what you do and the decisions you make. God won’t make anyone do anything. As a matter of fact he will protect your right to go to hell if that is what you choose, but that is not his will. Scripture tells us, “It is not his will that any parish”, but we know that they do. He will send people into their lives, he will give them dreams and visions, strangers will pop up and say something to encourage them to choose the right path, but at the end of the day it is up to them to make decisions about themselves. Sometimes that is the only thing you have any control over your decisions. What am I going to say, how am I going to respond? Then God will show up in the midst of that and move you forward.

How do we make right choices when we aren’t faced with the immediate pain of the ACME giant hammer that falls on the coyote’s head? What if the disaster is not apparent or imminent? What empowers us and keeps us from telling the lie, spreading the gossip, or refusing to accept an offence? What empowers you to make the right choice? There are two things and I think both of these are seen in Joseph’s life. The first one is His core values and the second is the wisdom that comes through the promises of God. He had promises that came in the form of words his father had spoken to him and dreams that no doubt gave courage to his heart.

Out of Encouragement Your Gift is Expressed

Certainly Love is the motivation to all of the spiritual gifts being expressed, but more practically, it is expressed through encouragement. When you reach out to someone in need through encouragement; the love of God hooks up with you and his gifts and power engage.

When you encourage those who are down, you create a flow that facilitates the love of God and His love produces many powerful things.

There are a couple of things that happen when you become an encourager.

You spiritualize the natural

Isn't this an interesting way of describing your purpose? Here it is in a nut shell. All of the other things in your life will fall in behind this. Your assignment is to spiritualize the natural. The human being is the only thing that can do that. God brought both worlds together in one vessel to give man dominion and access into both worlds. We are made like a dam. We are dry on one side and wet on the other. One part of us is spiritual and one part is natural.

All of the sensory tools of our bodies are merely vehicles for the expression of the spirit to fulfill our assignment and purpose in the natural. All of the strength and abilities of our body are to assist the pursuits of your call and purpose on this side of the dam. The flesh and spirit work in a partnership to commit virtuous acts, thereby spiritualizing the natural. That is to bring the world of the spirit into my natural circumstances.

That may sound strange to you, but let me show you how we do that. I spiritualize something in the natural by doing spiritual acts through natural, physical means. To encourage someone to open themselves to the will and purpose of God, to play a musical instrument in spiritual worship brings both worlds together.

When I give money, I spiritualize my resources by doing a spiritual act using natural resources. I give time, a cup of cold water, I dance. I clap my hands. In other words, I use natural things for a spiritual purpose, whereby, I bring the spiritual into the natural. I am the flood gate. I bring the two worlds together. When you realize this, everything you do will have new meaning. You will approach everything as an assignment. We become the channels from the world of the spirit to the natural. Too much of the time, all we have seen was a trickle through our life, when God wanted to bring a flood through the gates of our heart into the natural.

This is why it is important to have special gift ministries come into our fellowships. The flow is very strong when they are there, because they

are anointed to channel a specific thing into our midst. They are anointed to facilitate a flow.

Jesus properly lived in both worlds. His life was a mission. Everything that He did in this world was to introduce mankind to the world of the spirit. Do you remember when the woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of his garment? He said, "Someone has touched me because I felt virtue flow from me. The origin of that flow was the world of the spirit. His life was a life of divine appointments.

When I remember the woman that was taken in adultery, the woman at the well, the meeting He had with Nicodemus. Every act of Jesus was filled with divine purpose. Like a master craftsman, He utilized both worlds. Like Him, we all have a right and access to both worlds, which brings purpose to all of our deeds.

Divine appointments, divine contacts

Now, in that light, we can properly look at what God said to Abraham. "Thou shall be a blessing." This puts it in a whole different light. You no longer compare yourself with others. The pursuit of "things" loses its grip. It doesn't matter what kind of pit you get thrown into. Your commission as a blessed person dictates that you become a channel from the world of the spirit into the world of the natural to allow His love and His purpose to flow through you to change the natural with the spiritual.

Now that is purpose, your purpose. You need to look at your life through this light. This is why God gave you the gifts and talents that you have. These aren't fire place mantle pieces. God allowed you to be born where you are, whether it be good or bad, to become a floodgate of the spirit into the natural where men cry out for help..

What a privilege to be born there. God needed you there. I want Him to be able to trust me with what He has given me to do. I won't

complain about my assignment. He trusted me with an assignment. What a privilege.

My Assignment

Pouring myself into others

In our search for purpose and destiny, we must not underestimate God's intention for us to pour ourselves out into the lives of others. This is a mandate and responsibility God has given to us in this life. Whatever you are, whatever God has given you to do, you are never complete unless you are depositing something of yourself into someone else. Along with everything else, you can't escape being a mentor. You should be reaching behind you as a mentor and reaching in front of you to be mentored. If you only reach behind you, you will become inflated with pride thinking that you answer to no one. If you only reach in front of you, you will develop insecurities and doubts about yourself. You must have someone at both ends of your life to truly find a balance.

Our society is crying for leadership like never before. As a result, many books have been written and courses developed on the making of a leader. Yet the leader's role has not been filled. You would think that all of this information would serve the need in building leaders, but it hasn't. I believe the principle stands that say, "Values are caught more than taught." More information does not always make leaders. Leaders are grown by example. Your spirit is communicated to them one day at a time. Not just your ideas, but your character, how they see you responding to need in your own life. That doesn't come through the tape of the month club. When you mentor someone, it exceeds your teaching. You invest in them a portion of yourself. I might also say that I have seen the flaws of men communicated to their students. We must be certain and aware of the lives and character of the men we allow to speak into our lives.

Jesus said, "A student is not above his teacher" (Matthew 10:24 NIV). Jesus lived this example in the training of His disciples for over three years. They actually lived with Him. He made them copies of Himself by

living the example before them. He taught them, prayed for them, corrected them and commissioned them. He invested Himself into them. He is still doing that today through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He is daily leading and guiding us in our decisions and movements. As a result, He is still mentoring our lives and ministries through our obedience and His leading. This is the example. You mentor those around you by personally touching and speaking into the lives of the students that God has given you.

I am not suggesting that you should control the life of your protégé'. As the matter of fact, that would be a terrible mistake. I have seen mentors refuse to release them to do what they were called to do, and it turned to disaster. For the circle to be complete, they must eventually move out with your blessings. Your job is not complete until they are released. Your students and children are arrows in your quiver. You must polish their shafts and sharpen their edges to prepare for the day that they will be released from your care. One day you must draw back the bow and explode them into the world with all of the values and principles that you have invested into them. The whole purpose of the arrow is to be released. Help steer them. Instruct, but let them make their own decisions, which is essential for every leader. In other words, don't make them dependent upon you to the point that they are unable to make a decision on their own. Speak into their life with the principles of wisdom, truth, faithfulness and honor. That is the foundation for all decision making in leadership. Develop these traits in them, and you won't need to make their decisions. The quality to do what is right will be instilled in their hearts. That is the essence of core values.

Your responsibility as a mentor is to root out any seeds of rebellion or other defects that might lay dormant in their hearts. Dig out their character, and like a potter, slowly mold them into the vessels of honor that God intended for them to be. Spend time praising them for their successes, communicating to them the principle of how to be a mentor themselves.

I believe that every believer should have a protégé'. There should be someone who looks at and draws from your example. Look around you. They are probably right under your nose. How many times has God brought people in and out of your life, but you were so busy serving yourself and

your own ministry that you let the window of need pass you by. God wants to bring someone into your life that you can help shape and mold. Develop Godly relationships with them, and take them on your heart to pray for them and help them as they grow in the Lord. In reality, to be a good mentor to them, you must become a servant to them. Jesus said, "I did not come to be served but to serve and lay down my life for others". Your students must be a priority. Remember, it is a father's responsibility to lay up in store for his children. If you are going to be a mentor, you must take time to lay up in store for them and minister to them. Learn the importance of washing their feet so that they might know how to follow your lead into leadership. Upon washing His disciples' feet, Jesus said, "Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you." (John 13:13-15)

Chapter Five



Equipped for the Journey of Life

“When you are going through hell, keep on going. Never, never, never give up.”

- Winston Churchill

“The gale blows on everyone's life. It is not the gale but rather the sail that determines the course your ship will take.”

- Jerry Edmon

You were never designed to just sit on the sofa and wait for retirement. You have a race to run, and a journey to complete. The good news is that God has already equipped you for that journey. God has given you three commodities. This is the great equalizer in life. You have:

Time - Talent - Energy

You can do two things with what God has given you. You can SPEND these resources or INVEST them.

I know that you might say, "Yes, but I don't have as much talent or time or energy as someone else." Before you get too far in that, how do you measure what someone else has?

The point is God did not call you to be them. You are not expected to have what others have because you are not called to be them. If you don't stop trying to be them, you will live a life of disappointment. You are unique to your situation and you have what no one else has. Your abilities in life are tailor-made for what you have been called to be. One of the first steps in understanding and embracing your purpose is to stop comparing yourself to others.

Comparisons

This is the problem with comparison. It brings your life and purpose to a standstill. In essence, you cease to strive for your own full potential. You believe the lie. You sit down. You become dissatisfied with your lot in life. You see the beauty of others, but you cannot see the beauty in you. The next thing that you will do is to murmur and complain. You will complain about the government, the telephone company, or the kid who sacked your groceries. But the bottom line is that you are mad at yourself for being what you are, and mad at God for designing you that way. You have to make the decision to come out of that darkened way of thinking.

Comparisons are never fair. When it comes to people, you are not comparing apples and apples. You don't have the same abilities because you don't have the same calling. You don't have the same talents because you don't have the same commission.

To despise what you are, is to not understand who you are. To not understand what you are is to fall short of the mark for your life. This is the problem we have in always comparing ourselves to others. It keeps us from ever really looking at all that we have been given. We only see what we have "not" been given. When this happens; when you turn your eyes away from your life and purpose by wishing you were someone else, all of your spiritual energy is turned away from your commission, and you stop striving for what you were called to be.

I know you may feel that you don't know what you were called to be, so how are you ever supposed to get there? We have all felt like that. Even though your mind may not know or understand, your spirit is being pulled toward your purpose like a magnet. This is why you shouldn't be distracted by comparisons. Your special abilities and talents match your assignment. The quickest way to steal your momentum is to turn your attention away to something else. The best way to kill a vision is with another vision. I have seen men in business succeed until they became distracted by something else. The life force and energy that flows from us turns away to something else and what we have been doing begins to wither and die.

Faithfulness and right plans, obedience and right living, integrity and honor are moving you toward your goal.

You actually have an inner compass. Just as the needle of the compass is always turning toward the north, your inner man will always be pulled toward your purpose. If you will just continue, you will eventually reach your destination. If you will get out of the seat of despair and refuse to quit, God will bring you to your divine purpose.

Let me explain it like this. There is only one destination or purpose for your life. There are not five destinations for you. I said it earlier. God doesn't have a plan "B". Can you hear God saying, *"He sure blew that one. It is a good thing that we had a back-up plan here"*. His purpose is the center piece of all creation. It is not something that changes simply because of our inconsistencies. **The plan of God is not tailor made for you, in the sense that He is trying to fit His plan around your decisions and deeds.** You might say, "Well I blew it, God will have to change His plan for my life." NO! You are tailor made for the plan of the ages. Like a piece of a puzzle, you fit in the overall plan of God. God's plans do not change. They don't need to. They are perfect. The adjustments are in you. Sometimes it takes a whole lifetime to build a life. You don't decide what you are, you discover it. You are unsure of yourself when you start. But as life progresses you discover how you fit in the over-all scheme of things.

In God's Kingdom, there are no extra pieces to the puzzle. He has no throw-away kids. Each piece has its own uniqueness. This is why you should never try to change who you are, or try to be like someone else.

Realize the qualities that you have; your personality, abilities, your gifts and talents. God put them there. They are the tools that take you to your God given purpose. That is why you were given the talents that you have. That is why you were given the energy and time that you have been given. God was fitting you into the big picture.

There is only one destination for your life, and you have everything you need to get you there.

Now, before you look at how you have gone down the wrong road of life and supposedly aborted the plan and purpose for your life, here is something else for you to think about. **There are many roads to your destination.** Some of you have made mistakes in your life and felt that you had completely ruined God's plan for your life. *"It's over!"* Isn't that an edifying thought to be chained to for the rest of your days? *"Well, I messed up ten years ago. There is nothing left for me in this life. I hope I can just make it to heaven. He sure can't use me here anymore."* No, this is not true.

The purpose of God is the destination of your journey, not the road that you take to get there.

The road you take and the destination are two different things. Some of you have gotten messed up, made wrong decisions, and failed. You took a wrong turn. Granted, it was a stupid mistake. And your decision is going to take you down a wrong road. So, what happened to your purpose when you did that? It may take you longer to get there, but you are still moving toward God's perfect will or His purpose for your life. There are many roads in your life. Each decision that you make in your life determines what road you will take. The high road or the low road. If you make a good decision, the journey is good. But if you make a wrong decision and continue down that road, it promises to be a rough, dangerous and long journey. Proverbs 13:15 *"The way of the transgressor is hard"*.

The children of Israel turned a twelve-day hike into a forty-year lifestyle. When they faced confrontations in life, they made the wrong choices. That took them on a road that was not previously planned for them. Your decision in the time of temptation chooses the road you travel. Some roads are longer than others, but all of the roads in your life have on-ramps that lead to the same destination. It is obedience and a holy life that keep you on the track to the shortest and most direct route. It is the best road to travel on. This road isn't as rough, and it is not desolate.

One road is scenic, beautiful and peaceful, while the others are barren and dry. I've seen people spend years on a long road in the back side of the desert because of greed, pride or moral impurity.

Greed, pride and moral impurity are the root cause of all failure in our lives. They take us places that we don't want to go. They lead us down roads that are dead ends. As a result, we spend years going in circles. Your decisions either choose the road that is toward the fulfillment of your purpose, or to the back side of the desert.

I've seen people spend their whole life in an unfulfilled state. They are like a man who has lost his map and his sense of direction, but he just

keeps going down the same road over and over and over. That person is usually very angry and full of resentment. Actually he is frustrated.

You must understand that fulfillment only comes from embracing and moving toward your purpose. When you find that, there are no difficulties that can stop you. That is why someone like a Mother Theresa can spend her whole life completely fulfilled in a leper colony with none of the modern luxuries of life that we would consider necessary. Understanding your purpose is seen with the eyes of your heart. You are drawn toward it, one act of obedience at time.

This is the problem with what the Bible calls an evil heart of disobedience. It hardens you. This is the person who has hardened his heart, or closed his ears to what his heart was saying. "Hardness of heart" actually means to dull your senses. It is like a thick layer of skin that keeps you from being sensitive to what your heart is saying. This is the person that has had his heart seared with a hot iron. Your conscience is the voice of your spirit. To be seared with a hot iron is to have the old impression replaced by another until you almost can't see the old anymore. It is like getting your pants back from the cleaners and realizing that there is now a new crease and the old one is difficult to see. The impressions of your spirit are difficult to see or feel anymore. Pretty soon, you are lost in life, and you have become so thick that you cannot respond because you can no longer hear or feel that inner impulse. People who operate in this mode can't purposefully act, they can only react. They are like blind men in a swarm of bees, running in circles. They can never get a foot hold or handle on the higher purpose in life. They die on some lonely back road, far away from their purpose and destination. As a result, all of creation has lost, because they were not in their place. I know that sounds like a downer, but we have not understood the gravity of this situation.

We have somehow thought, "Well, if I don't do what needs to be done, someone else will do it." They may do it, but they cannot do it like you can. Your life is a special design, and no one else, no matter how great their talents may be, can fulfill your commission. They can only do what

they were designed to do. They don't have the same programming that you have.

That person that you have compared yourself to could never be what you are. Psalms 139:14 *"You are fearfully and wonderfully made"*. I am not just talking about your physical body. I am speaking about your whole design. Look at your personality; the goofy little way that you do things. No one is like you. God doesn't make clones. What a privilege to be who you are. So stop throwing your life away by comparing yourself to others. Stop making excuses. You have everything you need to be all that you are called to be. Right now I want you to make the decision to embrace God's plan and walk in God's plan. Don't sit down because you have been faced with obstacles in your life.

Don't Give Up

Let's get back to "the road of life." This will help answer a lot of questions for you. Maybe you have taken some trick turn, and now you are out in the middle of nowhere. Nothing looks familiar to you. You keep thinking, "What is going on in my life? Everything seems to go south on me. It seems that I cannot get along with anyone. I'm dissatisfied with my life. I feel lost. What do I do?"

Here is where many have chosen to end their life. They feel that they have ruined everything, and there is no road for them anymore. They cannot see any way out. They have no concept of their destination. So, in total frustration, they try to abort their program by ending their life. My heart goes out to them. There is a way out for them. Someone just needs to tell them about the highway that will lead them back on the road to God's purpose. Just remember that there is hope. There is a road that leads from the backside of the desert to your final destination, which is the fulfillment of your purpose. There is a road right now that leads from where you are to a place of fulfillment and meaning.

The trick is to not sit down. Don't quit. Continue with your life. Remember that all roads of obedience eventually take you to your destination. The right decisions will bring you right back to God's interstate highway.

Let's stop for a moment.

Right now make the decision to do what is right.

Make the decision to get off of the road you have been traveling on.

If you are in sin, decide now to turn from it.

If you have unforgiveness, make the decision now to forgive.

Change the way you have been thinking.

Be thankful for the things that God has given you.

Look for opportunities to serve, and be obedient to the voice and purpose of your life.

God is not finished with you. The very fact that you are breathing air should tell you that. If you will turn, God will meet you on the spot that you cry out to him.

Jeremiah 33:3

³ Call unto me and I will answer thee and show you many things that you know not.

Do you remember the story of the Prodigal son? He took his father's inheritance and completely squandered it. We could all say, “Hey! That is a *wrong road*”. It led to the back side of the desert. It led to the pig pen. In that condition, most people would have just cast him away. There is no hope for him. But notice the father's heart. He watched down the road. This young man made the decision in that pig pen to get out of that mess and go

back to father's house, which was the direction to fulfill the purpose in his life.

When his father saw him coming, he ran to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him. What is interesting is that the father did not know if the boy was actually coming home or not. He just loved him. He put shoes on his feet and a ring on his hand. He restored the authority of the house to him. He said "We must rejoice for he was dead and lost but now he is found".

That is how God looks at you when you are in the pig pen. When you feel that you have messed up everything. You may have taken a wrong road but there is a path back to the father's house. All you have to do is make the decision right now and you will leave the place that you are in and your situation will change.

Over the years I have watched people wander from pillar to post as though they were groping in the dark for something to stabilize their life and reason. I have also seen them stand on the sidelines of life thinking that because the unexpected arose and knocked them off track that they somehow get a pass from life. They either made the wrong decision or in the face of transition made no decision, and in the process lost their inner compass. They lost their way and sat down on the sidelines. This is more common than you think.

And then we have people who live their life walking toward mirages that disappear as they reach for them. As a result, many come to the end of their life with a sense of dissatisfaction or incompleteness. Maybe that someone is you. It is important that you hear this next statement.

No matter how misdirected things have gone, or how bad things might seem.

No matter how much you feel your life has been wasted, God has never stopped thinking about you.

Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”.

He still has a plan for your life. That plan has never altered. It is just that the path or road that you have been on has led you to the backside of the desert. Don't despair. There is a road from where you are right now, that leads to God's interstate highway. It's really a short trip. All you have to do is make the decision that you are going to move forward and embrace the life that God has given you. If you feel that you have gotten off track, then repent and turn in the direction of love and service.

You can't always back track to some place you think that you might belong. You can't unscramble eggs. But you can start where you are right now. At that point you start back on the path to God's purpose for your life. I know that sounds over simplified. You might say, *“You don't understand all that has happened to me”*. But I assure you, your problem is not greater than God's desire toward you. You are a part of Him in more ways than you could ever imagine.

Everything seems to operate in patterns, in seasons. Sometimes you are in a season. Do you remember when it was so dry and hot that the earth cracked open and most of nature was burnt, parched and dusty? It felt like we had lost it, that life might never be the same. Today I am sitting here looking out my window at beautiful green foliage, flowers blooming and puddles of standing water. Beauty and abundance. LIFE HAS SEASONS! Don't give up, don't lose hope, and don't give in. Life has seasons. This will soon pass.

Don't Quit

Luke 18:1-8

¹ *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart,*

² *saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man.*

³ *Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Get justice for me from my adversary.'*

⁴ *And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man,*

⁵ *yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.' "*

⁶ *Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said.*

⁷ *And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?*

⁸ *I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"*

This is a great parable about our need to not be swayed by our circumstances. It isn't just staying persistent in the midst of the problem; it is standing in faith with persistence in the midst of those difficulties. Sometimes those circumstances don't tell the whole story. But we take a snap shot and try to determine the outcome by that one picture. You don't know how it might turn around on the next quarter of your life. I love college football. How many last minute comebacks have we seen? How many times have we seen people leave the game early because they thought they knew the outcome and as a result they missed the great finish?

Missouri buried in the first half of the Holiday Bowl 2005 by South Carolina. 10 min into the 4th quarter they went ahead to win the game. In Pro ball we have seen that so many times with quarterbacks like Joe Montana, Tim Tebow and Payton Manning. If we could draw any lesson from them it would be that we should not judge our circumstances by the way things look right now. Don't quit. That is what all great people have in common.

Champions are measured in the 4th quarter.

People get a bad call and want to quit. Sure, sometimes life isn't fair. But I have determined that my response to difficulties determines my outcome. People get behind and want to quit. I will never forget my first golf tournament. This was just a little tournament at our local golf club. I was so nervous but still very excited to be competing. I bogeyed my first two holes. I cannot tell you how overwhelming the feeling was to just quit. I just wanted to go home. The discouragement felt tangible. I made myself forget what was behind me and continue to play. The next hole was a par. I felt better. It turned out to be a decent round. To my shock and amazement, I came in 2nd place. Now 2nd place may not seem too great to you, but it was huge to me because of the discouragement I had overcome to get there. If you will just continue to play it will surprise you how things will fall in line for you. Never stop growing or giving simply because you do not see the fruit that you expect. God has a purpose in your life and that purpose is at work whether you see it or not

Don't quit. Don't stop. Don't hesitate. Continue to believe. Continue to press.

Here are seven statements that you need to know when you get off track or lose your way.

1. Even if you got off to a rough start.

Sometimes it feels like you have tripped up right out of the gates. You get the feeling that you have failed before you even get started or we disqualify ourselves because we have had a dark past. Look at the past of the Apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 1:12-13

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

¹³ Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

2. Even if unexpected surprises show up in your journey

The journey is where life is lived. Too many are so focused on the destination that they forget that the journey is where you live and love and succeed and fail and give and receive. Of course there is going to be unexpected surprises pop up in your life. In most cases that is what makes life so interesting. Don't be afraid of it. Confront it. At the end of our days, it is not that it was perfect. What made life wonderful is that we laughed and cried together. We had experiences that we would not now miss for anything in the world. We will confront all of those experiences whether good or bad with faith, optimism and courage.

2 Timothy 2:3

³ Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

How does a soldier endure hardness? He confronts it.

3. Even if it takes a long time to realize it

I have found that it takes a whole life to build a life. Many years ago the Lord gave me a word. He said, "The one thing that I want from my children most is the one thing that they have the most difficulty giving me, and that is their trust."

If the life of Joseph tells us anything, it is that God is looking at the big picture and he is slowly, methodically moving everything according to his plan. He is not in a hurry. You have to trust his wisdom and his love. When I first started in the ministry, I pressured the Lord because I wanted something to happen right now. All he would say to me is, "Walk in the light as you have the light". That was not what I wanted to hear. But it was right.

If it seems slow, do not despair for these things will surely come to pass. They will not be overdue a single day. Wait for it...

Habakkuk 2:3

³ For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

4. Even if family and friends are not supportive of you

It is a wonderful thing to have the support of family and friends. But sometimes it is not there. During these times you must have an inner compass that gets you past all of the negative noise and traffic that comes with that kind of opposition. Sometimes you have to make changes and hard decisions to alter the course of your life. Even Jesus faced this from his family.

Mark 6:3-4

³ *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

⁴ *But Jesus, said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

5. Focus on what happens in you and not to you.

This is what the Lord is focused on. This should also be your focus. What have I learned? How have I grown? Can I only take care of myself or do I have the capacity to take care of others? You have a role not only in how fast the process goes but also in the work difficulties do in you. Here is a good question for you. God, what do you want me to learn?

1 Peter 1:6-7

⁶ *So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while.*

⁷ *These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

James 1:2-3

² *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds,*

³ *Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.*

6. Your response to offence will determine your future.

I have found this to be one of the great tests in life. You miss your future because offense keeps you looking behind you. You can't see where you are going, you are just mad about where you have been. No wonder you end up in the ditch. No wonder you take a wrong exit in life. That is what offense does. How unfortunate. Trust enables you to lay aside offense and see the bigger picture. It is possible that offense was used by the Lord to move people out of your life. Look at this verse that shows how God used it in Joseph's life.

Genesis 50:20

²⁰ You intended to harm me but God intended it for good.

7. Every dream has tough times, but remember that God is always with you.

Why do we remember that? Because we don't feel it.

Psalms 139:8-10

⁸ If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there.

⁹ If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

Psalms 46:1

¹ God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.

Jeremiah 1:19

*¹⁹ They will fight you, but they will fail.
For I am with you, and I will take care of you.
I, the LORD, have spoken!"*

Romans 8:26

²⁶ And we know... (Do we really know) that all things work together for good...

Psalms 18:6

² But in my distress I cried out to the LORD; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry to him reached his ears.

God's wisdom in creation

We can clearly see that that God was orchestrating all of the movement in Joseph's life, but how can we trust that God is truly at the reins of our life? How can we know that his plan is really at working? For a moment, let's look at the purpose and design in each level of creation in this life and compare that to the simple movements in our own personal crisis? If I look at the stars, this planet, the chemistry of this planet, and it's cargo in general, I can only come to one logical conclusion. It is a beautiful design. To say that it just happen by accident is laughable. Only a fool who has purposefully and maliciously closed his eyes to God, and has made up his

mind in advance, will embrace the fantasy that it happened by accident. To recognize a design is to acknowledge a designer.

I was in southern Oklahoma, waiting for my time to speak. I stepped outside to just catch a breath of fresh air and looked at the ground. There was a blanket of small flowers that covered the field. I looked closer and the detail on the small flowers was amazing. The idea that this could just happen by accident is unimaginable.

Consider the creation of the human body. The intelligence that is connected to the creation and planning of our bodies is staggering. The human heart beats approximately one hundred thousand times a day. Although our modern day scientists have tried to duplicate this magnificent pumping system, their success had been very limited. The six quarts of blood that it pumps travels through over ninety-six thousand miles of blood vessels. You are looking at over sixty-three hundred gallons of blood pumped a day through your heart. That adds up to millions of gallons pumped over your lifetime. The six quarts of blood is made up of over twenty-four trillion cells that make several thousand trips throughout the body each day. Seven million new blood cells are produced every second. This wonderful creation called the heart can work an entire lifetime without missing a beat.

The skeletal system provides a frame that produces mobility, protection of vital organs, and works in perfect harmony with the muscular system. With all of its activities, which are almost too many to mention, it maintains a constant temperature of around 98.6 degrees.

The skin has almost five million pores that act as a cooling system for this wonderful machine. The lungs provide a perfect balance of oxygen for the blood.

Look at the complexities of the five senses and how they operate in perfect harmony. And running this amazing network is the brain. It consists of over twenty-five billion cells, and oversees the entire physical network

with such perfection and precision, that all we can do is stand and watch with amazement.

Consider the handy work involved in the making of a single cell. Except for your brain cells, 50,000,000 of the cells in your body will have died and been replaced with others, all while you have been reading this sentence.

The wisdom of the cell is said to exceed all of the knowledge that the entire human race has accumulated to date. How could we even count all of the components in each cell? DNA, genes, chromosomes, hormones, enzymes, amino acids; the list goes on and on. We cannot even explain what makes the cell work. Yet they work; all seventy-five trillion of them. All of these different functions of the body work at pin point accuracy, performing quadrillions of processes at the same time in perfect harmony and balance with each other. This is the stroke of a master designer.

I think you get the picture. Everything that is in existence on this planet is a design and has a purpose, including you! Everything has its own design and runs its course. That Master designer is the one who has your life in his hands. And as a beautiful instrument, you are singing in harmony with him.

God is tuning your heart like an instrument

Have you ever listened to a group of instruments as they played and you realized that one of the instruments was out of tune or in the wrong key? I will never forget, onetime I was in a theatre with a group of musicians and as they started playing I could hear that one of the musicians was playing in the wrong key. They were a half step off everyone else. You can't always spot them immediately, but you hear it and it is difficult to listen to. Everyone is sitting there smiling at you and they are all using the same chord progressions, but someone is tuned about a half step off. It makes your eyes squint when you hear it.

This happens when a person gets out of tune with life. Through disobedience or anger or strife, they have taken a wrong turn. They are not hearing anyone else now. They are self-absorbed and isolated. They are beginning to tune to their own agenda. As a result, they become tuned to themselves and no one else. They are in tune, but not in tune with others. As long as they are by themselves, they can play any song that they want for a while. They are in tune but not to pitch so that they cannot work in harmony with others. You know what kind of person I am talking about. They have great abilities but they never seem to fit anywhere. They can't join in. They are doing their own thing.

When I was a boy, we had an old upright piano. It couldn't hold a pitch. It was below standard. A sharp mind could improvise and transpose. We know people like that. Someone is always having to explain, "*What they meant to say was...*"

God is not going to leave you comfortably in that state. He is going to squeeze you until you turn. Romans 1 said, "*It is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance*". God is trying to lead you some place. He is trying to get you out of the low road and onto the high road. Sometimes we don't recognize that the frustration that we feel is from the Lord. God is trying to tune you up so you can be a part of his orchestra. It is His doing. When an orchestra is tuning it sounds like disarray. It is terrible. But they are all getting in tune. There are times when everything in your life sounds terrible. But don't despair. It is God who is tuning you, not the devil. Jesus is the Lord of your life.

So God begins to tune our hearts to fit what he is doing. He twists you and pulls you until your life comes in harmony with His purpose. Nothing works when our pitch is off. Our finances, relationships or health.

The mouth is the amplifier. It tells your pitch. It strums the strings of your heart. Our life, actions, words and attitude have a certain pitch or sound to it.

Every decision you make and deed that you do gives off a sound. It is so important that we get rid of these mistaken tones of distrust and disharmony from our lives. Do you realize that hatred and prejudice are destroying the chemistry of our life and peace. Harmony is essential to our existence. Harmony is part of our design and is used to get us onto the road that we choose to travel. Your life is a work of art and a thing of beauty.

Psalms 89:15

*¹⁵ Blessed is the people who know the joyful sound, they shall walk
oh Lord in the light of thy countenance you.*

Our life gives off a sound

From chaos He transforms our life into a beautiful symphony. I love the symphony. Each instrument contributes to the whole. Our life is like that. Everything that we do gives off a sound. Our actions give off color and sound. God hears that sound. Obedience and charity brings our life to its fullest potential. On the other hand, the things I mentioned earlier, greed pride, moral impurity. Gossip, strife and division give off a tone and sound that is distasteful and against the grain of life.

Our life is no less an instrument than our voice is an instrument. All that we do gives off a tone or color, but to God it is all musical. The human voice is an instrument that is higher in order than that of a hand held musical instrument, one that expresses meaning and thought. Now consider that our entire existence is a score that either brings beauty and resonance or confusion and disharmony. Each decision and act strums a cord. When God heard the children of Israel murmuring, he heard a sound. The word murmur is the idea of a lot of people gathered together and you can't hear what they are saying but you hear a sound. It's very off key and out of harmony with what God had designed. What is the color that people see when you walk in the room? It radiates and affects the environment of every place that you go.

Take responsibility for the energy that you bring into this room. Surround yourself by good people. You can't change if you surround yourself with people who keep negative energy. What you put out is coming back to you. How people make you feel is the brightness of the energy they put out.

Your surroundings are always reflecting the light that you put out. Just as the moon reflects the light from the sun, how you make people feel is a reflection of the light you emit into your surroundings.

What if I blow it?

One final thing. Sometimes we think we "Blow It" when really that is not the case. What I mean is, because of some unfortunate event or foolish decision, we think we have aborted our opportunity in life and God has no more use for us. Our perception of acceptance or rejection from the Lord is too often based on self-imposed performance which is linked to the culture of manmade rules that we have been raised in. As a result, to fail in some measure produces self-hatred, self-loathing and disappointment. We easily fall into the trap of thinking we earn God's approval by being mistake-free. In our failure we ask ourselves, does He accept me? Does He disapprove of my actions or decisions? What if I get out of His will? What if I lose my way? What if I blow it?

"I got a divorce. I went to prison, I filed bankruptcy, I lost my way". You know the rest. But here is the question. How does failure or sin affect my journey?

For too many people, these are fears that they must negotiate on a continual basis. As a result, they just fall by the wayside and stop in their journey.

Let's talk for a moment about the calling we hear which is simply an invitation or commission. In the scope of a lifetime, there can be many callings. A calling is a commission to accomplish something while you are

on your journey. It calls you to something. A calling is what you do and what you respond to. It is calling you toward your destination or purpose.

Joseph took many roads to get to his destination. His journey started at his father's house, his brother's betrayal, the Midianites who sold him. He was a servant in Potiphar's house which held him in position as he waited for his purpose to unfold, and finally the prison which was a launching pad to enter the house of Pharaoh. These experiences were all roads that took him to his destination. They were all in God's will and none of them fit the bill that Joseph would have expected as a blessed man. If you asked Joseph, he thought most of them would be considered failures. All he could see was problems.

Problems are not always a bad thing. Do you want to know what our biggest problem with problems is? We think we shouldn't have them. But the reality is that problems make us grow. Problems sculpt our soul. They make us become more. If we could realize that life is happening for us and not to us... game over. All the pain and suffering disappears.

Somehow we have believed that if you felt a call to be something, or to do something, and you "blew it" for some reason that everything in life would be lost. It was like a very small window of opportunity, and only one road would take you there. If you missed that road, or messed up somewhere in life, you might as well go on to heaven because there was no more need for you here.

Then for the rest of our lives, the opportunity that we missed is still hanging over our head, but there is nothing that we could do about it. That opportunity passed us by years ago. The result has been bondage, bondage and more bondage.

Let's clarify what a calling is. A calling is simply an invitation that we can either take up or lay down. There might be many callings on your life in regard to your one purpose or destination. God uses the calling that you feel and the road you are on to move you to a different level. You get

confused because your calling may not always seem to fall within the frame work of what your destination is.

Simply because I get bumped off of the road that I am on, it won't affect my purpose. God has a plan and he is moving me in that direction. But accepting the call is an invitation to a higher road and higher expression of my purpose. Every time Joseph was knocked off track he embraced it as an assignment.

Let me quickly say something about purpose or destination. It's not going away. Do you remember when Moses killed the Egyptian before he disappeared for forty years? He was born with that purpose. It burned in him even when he did not understand it. That event was a fore shadowing that he was the deliverer for the children of Israel? Moses felt that he "blew it" and ran off into the desert to hide.

The best way to define your purpose is to find out what really turns you on. What's in your heart? What trips your trigger? What are you continually drawn to? A calling is the road to take you to that. If someone is standing in the distance calling your name, that is drawing your attention. It is the compelling to a higher life through decisions that confront you. We only move through our calling to the degree that we yield to it. God will invite us into deeper realms through callings or invitations. These callings are the higher road to fulfill His purpose for your life.

Do you remember when Jesus told the story about the man who sent out the invitations to his supper? He said that many are called, but few are chosen. The chosen ones are the ones who accepted His invitation. There are many invitations. The calling went out to all of the Lord's friends. Those who did not appear were not chosen. Many were invited, but the chosen are the ones who said "I'll come." Those who press in and touch Him are the chosen.

Let me give another example. Let's say the teaching of the Holy Spirit and speaking with other tongues is an invitation. And in reality, it is an invitation to move toward your purpose on a higher road. To reject the

teaching of the Holy Spirit and speaking with other tongues doesn't do away with your purpose. It is just an invitation to arrive on a different realm. But you will still arrive. Rejecting the invitation of a calling didn't take away your purpose. So I want you to see that there are many callings in regard to one purpose. There are many roads involved in your destination. They all are the result of your decisions. Each decision chooses a road. But because you miss it or fail in some area does not eliminate you from God's wonderful purpose for your life. Accepting or rejecting His invitations or callings simply makes your life easier or harder. A path that is well watered or more dry.

Ephesians said, "the eyes of your understanding be enlightened that you might know the hope or purpose of your calling." There is a hope in your calling. That calling takes you some place. In other words, to know the expectations of the invitation that has come your way. The invitation personalizes your purpose. The invitation consists of how He's anointed or equipped us for life.

So many are called, but not everyone will accept it. Accept what? Accept the opportunity to arrive at their purpose on a higher road. You might say, "Lord, I'm happy where I am at. I don't want that other stuff in my life." But the invitation is still there. You can accept that invitation to walk with Him on a higher plane.

The tribe of Reuben and Gad in Numbers 32 said they were content to stay in the land just outside the promised land. Moses said, "That is fine, but you must help the rest of the children of Israel enter their provision first."

Whatever you are satisfied with, that is what He will give you. So, the forks in the road are invitations. They are one of the many callings that you will feel in your life.

Purpose, on the other hand, is not just general. You have a purpose. Yours might be in business. Once you establish that, then you get over into the realm of invitations or callings. Romans 11:29, in the amplified tells us

about the callings that are without repentance. Verse 29 says that He sends out a call. In other words, He gives out a calling or invitation and never takes it back. He has given an invitation, and the invitation is irrevocable from His stand point.

Now you might ask, "Where does obedience or disobedience come in?" I am a minister. That doesn't tell me anything about my invitations or callings. Where am I a minister? When am I a minister? These are invitations. If I refuse one of the invitations, my name is not stricken from the book of life. I just take another road.

Accepting an invitation deals with our quality of life. It doesn't change our purpose. Abraham was the Father of many nations. He took the wrong road with Ishmael. That choice is still a source of problems for them today. It introduced a whole new circle of problems for them to deal with, but his purpose still remained.

When looking at purpose, look at what Jesus said to the church of Sardis. "You haven't brought to completion one thing before the Lord your God." It is not enough to be called. You must bring your calling to completion, one act of obedience at a time. Your calling must be walked out. Now is the time to act.

You have a wonderful journey ahead of you. There are many twists and turns in the road, many decisions to make and paths to take. It is going to be a wonderful experience. Trust that in each thing that you encounter, will be a ministry opportunity. You face each one with the understanding that you are there to be a blessing. Even if you feel it was a wrong turn. You are there to be a blessing. Even if you feel that decision costs you everything. You are there to be a blessing. Start serving right now. Start blessing right now. Introduce the love of our heavenly father into that dark situation and you will find the Lord at every turn. He will enjoy this journey with you.

Conclusion



Don't become overwhelmed with the enormity of the journey today!

The "goal" and the "win" for you is that you continue to take a step forward.

Victory rarely comes as a quantum leap... but rather steady, faithful, faith-filled steps in the right direction.

Trust is the one thing that God wants from us most and it is the one thing that we have the most difficulty giving to him.

God has divine appointments for your journey today... get on the road!