

WATER WIND & FIRE

THE NEXT STEPS



Developing Your New
Relationship With God

MAC HAMMOND

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Developing Your New Relationship With God***

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Introduction

Welcome to the family of God!

I want to personally rejoice with you that you have been born again and filled with the Holy Spirit. Not only will you live for eternity with God in heaven, but you have begun the Christian life here on earth, one of the greatest adventures a human being can experience. However, the richness of that adventure depends upon how much you grow in your faith from a newborn babe to a mature Christian. Paul writes in Philippians 3:14:

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The life of a Christian is a press that ultimately culminates with the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. What is that press? How do you press forward? What things are you reaching for, especially as a new Christian? That's what I want to show you in this book. The Bible outlines a path for you to walk as you grow in the Lord, and this book will show you what steps are on that path.

Your new life of faith will require commitment, change, and courage; but it will also provide rewards in this life and in the life to come that will go beyond your wildest dreams.

Chapter 1

Hearing and Doing God's Word

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for
correction, for instruction in righteousness:
that the man of God may be perfect, thor-
oughly furnished unto all good works.*

2 Timothy 3:16,17

In your Christian life are many necessary elements, but nothing is more important than God's Word. It is the foundation upon which your life must be built; it is the light that shows you how to navigate life successfully. (Ps. 119:130)

The Bible reveals the general will of God for all believers of all ages. Its timeless truths and practical principles provide the doctrine, correction, reproof, and instruction you need to become everything God has designed you to be.

In the simplest of terms, it is the owner's manual for life given by the Creator of life! To begin growing in God, you must embrace the Bible's importance, hear it on a regular basis, and yield to its direction by becoming a "doer" of the Word!

Hearing but Not Doing

In James 1, God reveals to us a major hindrance to our spiritual growth and a doorway to self-deception. Verse 22 teaches us, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

As important as it is to read and study the Bible, you must keep as your aim and focus living out what it teaches. Every time that you read or hear the Word of God and fail or refuse to act on it, you leave the door wide open for deception. In effect, you say by your actions that you don't believe God's Word is true for you and that you have a better plan.

Remember: James 2:17 declares that faith without action is dead. Yes, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, and James is talking to you who have heard and believed. But without corresponding action, that faith is powerless to help you. In fact, the word translated *hearers* in verse 22 is the same Greek word translated *hearing* in Romans 10:17,1. So James is not talking about

hearing with your natural ears but rather hearing with your heart, which is how faith comes. But if you don't do that Word, you can still be deceived.

Closely related to this form of deception is the way Satan stops people's spiritual ears with religious tradition. Jesus told the religious leaders of His day—the scribes and Pharisees—that their traditions had made the Word of God of no effect. (Matt. 15:6; Mark 7:13.) Since the Word of God is intended to have the effect of bringing faith, Jesus is saying that the tradition of man will stop faith from coming because traditional people don't have ears to hear what the Spirit of God is saying. Folks steeped in religious tradition have no capacity to receive revelation knowledge from the Word, so faith can't come to them.

Jesus defined tradition as the commandments of men. You'll find that the commandments of men have no root in the Word of God and many times even contradict God's Word. An example would be the teaching that if you were sprinkled as an infant, then your eternity in heaven is secure. Those who have accepted this tradition have a difficult time accepting the truth that they must be born again. They simply don't have ears to hear that truth.

Why Would Anyone Hear and Believe, and Not Do?

There are three main reasons why believers hear but don't do His Word even though they truly believe that it would be best for them to be obedient to it.

The Lust of the Flesh

The first reason is simply the lust of the flesh. Lust is any powerful desire of the flesh; it is usually thought of with a sexual connotation, but it really includes anything that your flesh strongly craves or wants to do.

Addictive behavior is a form of lust that illustrates this truth quite well. I'm sure that everyone who has ever used drugs or smoked cigarettes for any length of time knows deep down in their hearts that they are slowly killing themselves. They may even believe that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost and are to be presented as a living sacrifice to God, but the desire is so powerful that they can't overcome it.

Others may hold onto a grudge and refuse to forgive someone who hurt them. It feels good to their flesh to exact vengeance and to try to repay the wrong that has been done, even though they know that they are to walk in love and forgive as Christ forgave them.

Selfishness is another area where people's flesh can give them trouble. Their spirits have received the revelation that they should tithe and be givers and sow to the Spirit to reap life everlasting, but the flesh has other things that it wants to do with that money to satisfy itself.

Fear of Man

The second reason people don't do the Word is fear—and perhaps I should say, more specifically, the fear of man. God has called all of us to preach the Gospel, lay hands on the sick, and cast out devils; but most Christians don't tell folks what Jesus has done for them because they are afraid of being mocked, rejected, or persecuted.

Many don't walk in love because they are fearful of being hurt in some way. And how many don't receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speak with other tongues because of what their families and other church members might think.

Procrastination

The third, and possibly most prevalent, reason for not doing the Word is procrastination.

If you have ever said, "Lord, I'm going to do what Your Word says about this—tomor-

row," then you have fallen for this deception. It is always easier to say, "I'll quit smoking tomorrow," or "I'll start tithing next month," or "I'll go witnessing next week." And the thing is, you'll always have a seemingly good reason to put off being obedient.

The Amplified Bible's rendering of James 1:22 clarifies how this happens. It says, "Be doers of the Word [obey the message], and not merely listeners to it, betraying yourselves [into deception by reasoning contrary to the Truth]."

If you don't do the Word that you know you ought to, then in order to still that guilty conscience, in order to live with yourself, you have to engage in something called self-justification. You start reasoning contrary to the truth to come up with an excuse for your failure to act. You say, "I can't do that now because..." and then give some reason that keeps you from feeling too bad about it.

The moment you do that, you open a door to deception, and Satan immediately begins to promote death and cursing in your life. Death and cursing seldom become evident overnight; and the longer you reason against the truth, the more comfortable you become living opposed to it. Therefore, by the time you realize the touch of death in your life, you

may not make the connection that it is there because you are not doing the Word.

Then you'll begin reasoning, trying to figure out why that death is there. "Why is this happening to me? Maybe this faith stuff doesn't really work all the time. Is God trying to teach me something? Did I do something to make Him angry with me?" And the deception will deepen, and the death will become more and more manifest.

...betraying yourselves into deception by reasoning contrary to the truth.

James 1:22 Amp.

How to Do the Word

Without a doubt, psychologically or chemically addictive behavior, selfishness, fear, and reasoning can be powerful forces in a person's life. Even secular studies demonstrate that most people cannot consistently change these kinds of behaviors. And from them, we can see that just exercising willpower and self-control is not going to effect permanent change in most lives. Government drug rehabilitation programs with their 10 percent success rate clearly show that.

So how do you begin to close the common doors to not doing the Word? As always, the

answer to this is found in the Word of God. In Ephesians 2:19, we are told there is an exceeding greatness of His power toward those who believe. The same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead is certainly more than enough to overcome any fear or contrary behavior in our lives.

I should say here that since none of us has achieved perfection, until Jesus returns, we are all going to have to deal with these issues from time to time. What you must learn to do is to not just exercise your willpower but rather to tap into the power that is available to you because you believe. Don't ever let Satan deceive you into thinking that your faith isn't important. Believing comes first. But then what? How do you tap into that power?

Let's go back to James 1:22 and read on to verse 25:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. 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: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

In verses 24 and 25, the Greek word translated *forgetteth* and *forgetful* means "to put out of mind."³ If you want to be a doer of the Word, you have to do something about what's in your mind.

The Word says, "...being not a forgetful hearer but a doer..." (v. 25). A hearer of what? A hearer of the perfect law of liberty, or God's Word, of course. So you could say, "Being not a forgetful hearer of God's Word, but a doer." Insert the definition of forgetful and you read, "Not putting out of mind God's Word, but being a doer." Another way to say it, then, is this: "Keep God's Word in your mind, and be a doer of the Word."

Let's look at the next key to doing the Word, which is found in the next verse: "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" (v. 26).

The previous verses said that deception comes when you hear the Word but don't do it, and that you can only do the Word if you keep it in your mind. In the very next verse, God says that deception occurs when you don't control your tongue.

Don't we all eventually speak what we think about? Remember: "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34 NKJV).

The two principal factors that define doers of the Word are what they think upon and what they speak. If you think on God's Word and then speak God's Word, you will tap into the exceeding greatness of His power to those who believe—and that power can and will change your behavior. You will become a doer of the Word, not by your own strength and willpower but by the power of God that is in His Word.

In Joshua 1:8, God plainly tells Joshua how to do the Word. Keep in mind that if this worked for Joshua, it will work for you too. God is no respecter of persons. He recorded this so that you could benefit from His instruction as well.

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Notice that you observe to do the Law, or the Word, only after you've meditated on the Word and spoken the Word. Consistent behavior is always preceded by thoughts and words. Also notice that thinking the Word, speaking the Word, and then doing the Word lead to prosperity and success. On the other hand, not

doing the Word leads to deception; and deception leads to cursing and death.

Think It, Speak It, Do It

The connection between thinking and speaking and doing is so vitally important. We need to focus on the process so we can understand how it works.

You have the capacity to imagine yourself experiencing life in a particular way. How you see or imagine your life is how you will experience it. Your thoughts and imaginations will prompt and motivate your behavior to bring that image to pass in your life. Satan wants you to have vain (empty and foolish) imaginations. He wants you to fantasize about sinful things. He wants you to see yourself as defeated, sick, and broke. He wants you to only think about yourself and your needs. He knows that as you dwell on those kinds of thoughts, your life will go in that direction. If you are there now, Satan can keep you there with vain imaginations running loose in your head. As it says in Proverbs 23:7, "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Don't let Satan's thoughts stay in your mind. Cast down vain thoughts, and bring them captive to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor. 10:5) Begin imagining yourself doing mighty works for God. See yourself as being

more than a conqueror and able to do all things through Christ who strengthens you. (Rom. 8:37; Eph. 4:13)

Pray in the Holy Spirit and yield your life to His ministry, and God will begin to show you things that your eye hasn't seen, your ear hasn't heard, neither has entered into your heart. He'll begin to show you what He has prepared for you who love Him. (1 Cor. 2:9) Not only can you imagine God's Word being true in your life, but you can also receive by the Holy Spirit a grand image or vision of what God has specifically planned for you.

As you meditate on God's plan and then talk about that plan, you'll tap into the exceeding greatness of His power. The things in your life that would stand in the way of God's purpose for you will begin to fall away. You'll be delivered and set free from all of Satan's hindrances. Most importantly, you'll become an immediate doer of the things you've heard and believed. And when you do, a major door to deception in your life will be closed and you will become all that God intends you to be.

A Part of Doing the Word

Although much of this chapter has focused on how you can personally receive and act upon the Word of God, it is important

to recognize that a major component in this process is the local church.

There are many important topics on the subject of church attendance, and space does not permit me to discuss all of them here. However, Ephesians 4:11-16 reveals the central one: God has ordained ministers and anointed them by the Holy Spirit to equip you with the Word so you can grow up in all things. In other words, it is vital that you recognize and embrace God's planned process for your hearing and doing the Word. God's plan for your growth is eternally linked to your placing yourself under the influence and teaching of His gifted ministers—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

In practical terms, this happens when you commit to be part of a local church where the call of God on the pastor is designed to feed you the Word so you can "come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect (mature) man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Embracing God's strategy for your ongoing spiritual growth—becoming part of the local church—is your first step toward becoming a hearer and doer of the Word of God. We'll explore this important subject more fully in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Local Church and Your Role in It

Is church attendance really necessary? Is it actually that important?

Ask people these questions and the diversity of answers you will hear, even from long-time Christians, will astound you. Many people lack understanding concerning the benefit, purpose, and importance of the local church. As a result, church attendance has become a dead, religious ritual for many, and a casual and sometimes unnecessary distraction for others.

An in-depth study of the Word will reveal that God's directive for church attendance is actually quite specific in purpose. The Word reveals that "assembling" is a supernatural design orchestrated by God to interconnect believers with one another for the purpose of impact and increase.

In fact, Scripture reveals that properly plugging into the company of believers with whom God has connected you will position

you to access the power of God in a way nothing else can, causing increase and growth in your life.

A God-Ordained Place

Let's start with the most oft-quoted verse on the subject of church attendance and involvement. In Hebrews 10:25, we are told to not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together." Although many seek to minimize the direct connection between this verse and church attendance, the author of Hebrews isn't talking about gathering for dinner over at a Christian friend's house or about a spontaneous prayer meeting with friends. Both of these things are great and should be done, but this verse is addressing something different.

The meaning of the word "assembly" can be likened to an erector set, where pieces are designed to fit together in a particular group.¹ In effect, this verse might as well have said, "Don't forsake going to your local church," because that is what it means.

Moreover, according to the Word of God, attendance to just any church will not do. The Bible gives a clear indication that God wants to place each of us in a specific church where His power will flow to and through each one of us.

We see this truth demonstrated in Acts 4. After Peter and John were apprehended by the temple priests for preaching about Jesus, they were brought before the high priest, who interrogated them, threatened them, and then let them go.

Then Peter and John, after "being let go... went to their own company" (Acts 4:23).

Notice that it says they went to their "own company." That means there were other companies of believers available, but they identified a particular company as their own.

Now I want you to see what happened next. After Peter and John shared all that the chief priests had said and done to them, all the members in their company lifted up their voices together in one accord and prayed. The result? The power of God came in such strength that it shook the building!

What was the result of this release of power? The Bible says that the believers in their company were emboldened to go out and share the Gospel fearlessly.

...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.... With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:31,33 NIV

They had a powerful impact on their community. Furthermore, we see that this supernatural power affected their individual and personal lives as well. The Bible says that not one of them lacked in material need.

There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Acts 4:34,35 NIV

When they plugged into their company of believers, the power of God flowed through them to drive out insufficiency!

The power available to believers assembling with their “own company” is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 12:12-18, where the apostle Paul compares the body of Christ to the natural human body. This comparison is practical yet profound in its application, revealing how the Church is to operate and function in the earth.

First Corinthians 12:14 says, “For the body is not one member, but many.” Every time I read this, the picture of a jigsaw puzzle comes to my mind. A jigsaw puzzle may have hundreds of pieces; yet when put in their right places, all the pieces fit together perfectly to form a whole picture that is a blessing to

others. That is how you and I are to fit into the church body that God has called each of us to be a part of.

More specifically, I want to draw your attention to 1 Corinthians 12:18 NKJV, which says, “But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.” Notice it says God sets the members in the body as it pleases Him.

Without a doubt, there is a specific church in which God is pleased to set you. It won’t necessarily be the church that your parents and grandparents have attended for the last fifty years. It might not be the church that’s closest to where you live. It might not even be the church that has the biggest pipe organ that you like so much. It is a place—a specific place—where it pleases God to place you.

Finding Your Place

You may be thinking, *But how do I find that place I’m supposed to be in?* I can assure you, God is not trying to hide this place from you. He desires that you know which church He wants you to join. Let me share with you three foundational steps to finding your “own company.”

First of all, the Bible says:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach... But let him ask in faith....

James 1:5,6 NKJV

It's a simple but important step. Ask the Lord in faith, "Where do You want me to be?" God won't make this a difficult step, but be sure you haven't fashioned a list of acceptable answers beforehand. The book of James also reveals that selfish motives and desires will hinder us from receiving what we ask for. (James 4:3) So when you ask, be completely open to God's direction.

Take advantage of every opportunity that crosses your path, and view it as a possible answer to your prayer. When people mention their church or invite you there, don't write it off as a coincidence.

The next step is to follow your heart and pay attention to the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. The presence of God within a believer will always confirm a right decision. Visit a few churches, and when you walk into the right place, it will seem right. It will feel like putting on a pair of comfortable bedroom slippers or coming home to your favorite dinner.

The reverse is also true. If you visit a church that's not the right place for you, you'll

feel uncomfortable. It will be like dragging a fingernail across a blackboard; your spirit will know it's not the right church for you. That doesn't mean it's an ungodly church; it simply means that it's not the place where it has pleased God to place you.

The third principle for finding your place is revealed in John 10:4, in which Jesus says that the sheep will follow their true shepherd because they know (distinguish, recognize) His voice. Jesus is the Chief Shepherd of the body of Christ, and pastors are called under-shepherds. Because God's children know the voice of the Chief Shepherd, I believe they will also know the voice of their appropriate under-shepherd.

In other words, when you are in the proper church, the pastor will be someone whom you consistently receive ministry from, someone who feeds you spiritually—and maybe sometimes even steps on your toes. In other words, there will be times when the pastor's preaching will seem to be directed specifically at you. In fact, sometimes irritated husbands will come up to me after a service I've preached and ask, "Has my wife been talking to you about me?"

The reality is that when you are in your company of believers, the preaching and teaching of the Word will be right on target and what you need—not just what you want—to

hear! Your shepherd's "voice" will provide a balanced spiritual diet that will cause you to grow. This is simply another confirmation that you are in the church where it has pleased God to place you.

An Important Attitude Adjustment

There is one more important issue to address concerning finding the place where it has pleased God to place you. When you are in your company of believers—your church—you will submit to and flow with them, for as Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

Incredibly, I've talked to many people who actually attend churches where they are in direct contradiction with their vision, doctrine, and conduct. They believe God has called them there to be an agent of change and bring revelation to that pastor and congregation—to alter their vision, adjust their doctrine, and change the way they operate.

Though their intent might be for good, they are dreadfully deceived. They end up placing themselves in a position to cause strife, promote rebellion, or experience rejection because of their differences. These are definite signs of being in the wrong church or simply

that you have the wrong attitude toward church and your role in it!

As you search for the company of believers God has chosen for you, always remember that He will not place you in a church to straighten them out or instigate change. In fact, the opposite is true: He will place you in a church that does these things for you!

Getting Plugged In

Finding your church home where it has pleased God to place you is vitally important, but there is an additional step required to properly develop your new relationship with God. You must become a contributing member of the body of Christ. That means doing something more than becoming a member of a church and warming a pew every Sunday. Look at Ephesians 4:16:

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Did you catch it? The key is in the phrase "every joint supplieth." This is what will increase, edify, and build up the body

of believers in love. Every joint (or member) needs to give of its supply. Simply put, just coming to church every Sunday will not enable you to walk out your divine destiny. Your next step must be to get involved and share your “supply” as you have something that your church needs.

Not only will the church benefit when you give your supply to the body by plugging in and getting involved, when you give your supply to the church body, the church grows and increases, which means your life does too.

It's a fact. The normal growth process of the human body is that every part of a body grows in unison. You won't see a baby's arm or leg remain infant size while the rest of the body increases in size. All the contributing members of a body develop at the same time.

What happens when a member fails to contribute? Compare it again to the functioning of the human body. What would happen if you taped your arm firmly to your side, making it unable to move? In a couple weeks, it would begin to wither in strength and would eventually become atrophied.

Likewise, when members of the church body fail to plug in and make a contribution to the increase of the body, they are discon-

nected from the power source designed to bring them growth and increase.

This is why your focus needs to be plugging in and faithfully offering your supply within your company of believers. Being faithful is “where the rubber meets the road.” Sadly, every Sunday in churches throughout the world, far too few faithful people are in attendance.

Faithfulness involves commitment, consistency, and loyalty. Sadly, these values are declining and at times, even mocked in our current culture. This should not be the case with Christians, especially when the Scripture clearly reveals the rewards of faithfulness.

A faithful man will abound with blessings.... Proverbs 28:20 NKJV

Hebrews 11:6 says that God is a rewarder, and this verse clearly reveals that abundant blessings will be the reward at the finish line for faithful people.

So, is church attendance really necessary? Is it really that important?

To successfully develop your new relationship with God, you must solidify in your heart the Bible's answer to these questions. The answer according to the Word of God is a resounding and resolute yes!

But remember: simply sitting in a church isn't being plugged into a church. As you begin your journey to becoming a productive part of the family of God, it is vital that you recognize that faithfulness is a requirement. (1 Cor. 4:2) It is important that you not only find your God-ordained local church, but that you faithfully fill your place in it. How do you do that? We'll explore the ways in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Passing the Faithfulness Test

As we have seen, it is important that you not only find the church where it has pleased God to place you, but that you also faithfully fill your place in it. Taking these steps is crucial to your spiritual development. In this chapter, I want to address the next step in your journey by answering a question I have often been asked: "I found my church home; now what do I do?"

Considering the diversity of arenas in which we could offer our supply and be faithful, the challenge is knowing where to begin. The good news is that the answer is clearly revealed in the Bible.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? Luke 16:10,11

Here we see that the least God expects us to be faithful in is our handling of “unrighteous mammon.” (The phrase “unrighteous mammon” is a reference to worldly riches, or money. However, this is not saying that money is either good or evil. Mammon, or money, only becomes “unrighteous” when it is used wrongly.)

Mammon is simply another word for material resources or money. Thus, the clear universal starting line for plugging into a church and becoming a faithful member is managing our material resources in line with God’s Word. If we are not faithful with our financial supply, how can God trust us with anything else?

You see, the most basic call of God on our lives is to be His stewards. Stewardship is the one calling that we all have in common; it transcends all dispensations and follows us into eternity. We are created to manage creation on God’s behalf—to manage (or administrate) the household (or estate) of our Lord. The essence of the principle of stewardship is this: we don’t own anything. We are God’s stewards, and we need to see our lives as resources—of time, talent, money, and so forth—to accomplish God’s purpose in the earth.

As a steward, you need to be faithful to follow God’s commands, particularly in the area of finances. Faithfulness on any level is impossible until you become faithful in the use of your money. You see, prosperity doesn’t involve just your bank account. Prosperity also includes prosperity in your soul, an abundance of health, your every need provided for—body, soul, and spirit. That is why it is vital to understand that giving of our natural resources (money) is the least that we are called to be faithful in. It is intricately entwined with everything else in our lives.

Understand, however, that learning to be faithful with your money doesn’t automatically make you faithful in all the other areas of your life. Other steps must be taken to yield to faithfulness in those areas. What the Scripture does mean, however, is that you simply cannot become faithful in any other area without first taking care of the money matter.

How important is this? Look at the latter portion of Luke 16:11: “...who will entrust to you the true riches?”

What are the true riches? They are the gifts and callings of God, His power and anointing, and His divine endowments. These are the true riches that God desires for each of us to manage as His stewards on the earth—for the purpose of initiating change on His behalf.

This change is designed to happen through the local church. Yet even if we find the place where it has pleased God to place us, if we don't understand and function in this most basic of all callings, then nothing else will work properly.

God's Pathway to Financial Faithfulness

As you begin your journey toward financial faithfulness, the first thing that must be clear in your mind is that God does want you to prosper and is not against you having things. A wealth of Scripture clearly reveals this fact, while also showing us that He is against things having you! Things (money) have you when they occupy the place God is supposed to hold in your life and when you forget God by placing your trust in riches. (1 Tim. 6:17; Deut. 8:10,11.)

The issue is our perspective toward money and how we use it, not whether God wants us to prosper. There is only one reliable way to be assured of God's desire: by going to His Word. There is no shortage of Scripture that speaks directly to the issue of God's provision. Although space does not permit us to look at all of the relevant Scriptures here, a sampling will give us a clear picture of God's intentions.

In Deuteronomy 8:18, God makes a remarkable statement:

But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Ask yourself a question. Why would God tell His covenant people He was giving them the power to get wealth if He didn't want them to have any?

You may be thinking, *But Mac, that verse isn't for us! It was written to the Old Testament Jews!*

Many believers rob themselves of hundreds of wonderful Bible promises through such assumptions. They think that because the promises were originally made to Israel (the children of Abraham) in the Old Testament, they don't apply to them.

However, the New Testament says that we have a better covenant established on better promises.

But now He [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. Hebrews 8:6 NKJV

Also, if you are a child of God, then the blessings of Abraham are yours to claim:

That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:14,29

As a born-again believer, you are Abraham's heir according to the promise and are, therefore, entitled to the promises God made to Abraham and Israel. Part of your birthright as a seed of Abraham is the God-given power to acquire wealth. He placed that power within you. You won't offend Him by using it.

Does God really want you to prosper? Look to Psalm 35:27 and see:

Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.

According to this verse, watching His servants prosper doesn't give God heartburn; it gives Him pleasure! Think of it: God is pleased when you increase!

This theme is woven throughout the entire Old Testament and continues right on into the New. Look at 2 Corinthians 9:11, for example. Paul says Christians who give to the work of the Gospel are "being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God."

The New International Version translation of this verse is enlightening. It says:

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

In this verse and throughout the entire chapter of 2 Corinthians 9, Paul says to expect great financial increase if you are a giver to the work of God. The clear aim of this passage is to raise your level of expectancy concerning your financial harvest. Look at verses 6-8, for example:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having

all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.

Here is one of the clearest expressions of the will of God for your finances in all of Scripture! When you give cheerfully and abundantly, God wants you to expect Him to bless your finances. Why? So you can squander money on the desires of your flesh? No! So you may continue to “abound to every good work.”

It would take volumes to cover all that the Bible has to say about God’s desire to see His faithful ones prospered and successful. Just look at the lives of some of the great men of God mentioned in Scripture. God blessed Abraham, David, and Solomon with great wealth. We are also His children and heirs according to the promise. The blessing of God is meant to be a part of our lives.

Our Motive and Method in Working

Another foundational perspective we must embrace is that God expects us to earn our money and not rely on the lottery if we want to experience His blessing. Ephesians 4:28 says:

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the

thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Some people read this verse casually and assume it merely says that if you’ve been a thief, then you have to get a job and start living right. But Paul is actually giving us his definition of a thief.

First, he says that if you don’t want to be a thief, if you don’t want to steal anymore, then you have to get a job and begin to labor at that which is good. Labor involves diligent, consistent effort. This is God’s way for you to generate an income: He wants you to be hard-working and persistent in your vocation.

Unfortunately, a lot of folks punch the clock in the morning, do as little as they can during the day, and leave early in the afternoon. That’s not God’s way. He wants you to give it your most consistent, diligent effort. God says that if you don’t do that, then you’re a thief. You won’t have Him involved in your financial life if you’re not making a diligent, consistent effort at that which is good.

In Luke 10:7, Jesus said that the laborer who works diligently is worthy of his hire. Whatever you do, if you do it as unto the Lord, God will see to it that you receive a fair wage.

Ephesians 4:28 also shows us what our motive should be for laboring: “That [you]

may have to give to him that needeth." If this isn't your perspective, then the Bible says that you're a thief. I know that's a strong statement, but the reasoning behind it is this: you're God's steward. When you start laboring for motives that are self-centered, the income that you generate will be consumed on your desires instead of on God's. As God's steward, if you're consuming resources only on you, then He says you're a thief.

God wants our paradigm regarding prosperity to focus outwardly and not inwardly—to meet the needs of others and not to be consumers only for the sake of our own flesh. That outward focus, my friends, is the ultimate purpose of financial prosperity at the hand of God.

Understanding the Tithe

As I said before, God expects us to be faithful to Him with the money He has given us, His stewards. Being faithful with our money begins with the tithe. There are those in the body of Christ who argue that the tithe is not in the New Testament, that it was under the Law, and that Christians are, therefore, not required to tithe. These assumptions are wrong. The fact is that the tithe predates the Law and is in the New Testament.

Before you get tripped up with these erroneous teachings, let's see what the Bible says. Look at Hebrews 6:20 Amp:

Where Jesus has entered in for us [in advance], a Forerunner having become a High Priest forever after the order (with the rank) of Melchizedek.

Jesus' present-day ministry is as our High Priest. He is seated at the right hand of God. He is our Mediator, our Advocate, and our Intercessor. This Scripture says that Jesus is a High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is not a High Priest after the order of Aaron, whose priesthood was established under the Mosaic Law.

To better understand Jesus' high priestly ministry, we need to know more about Melchizedek, who is first mentioned in Genesis 14:18-20:

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him [Abraham], and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

Abraham had just been victorious in battle and was returning with the spoils when he met Melchizedek. Upon meeting Melchizedek, Abraham acknowledged him as a priest of the most high God and, therefore, paid him tithes of the spoil of battle. Abraham tithed before God gave Moses the Law, so we can see clearly that tithing is not under the Law.

In his meeting with Abraham, Melchizedek did two things. He received Abraham's tithes, and then he conferred blessing upon him. Like Melchizedek, Jesus too receives tithes. Look at Hebrews 7:8 NKJV:

Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives.

Just as Abraham acknowledged Melchizedek by paying him the tithe, we acknowledge Jesus as our High Priest by paying Him the tithe. And just as Melchizedek blessed Abraham in return, Jesus confers His blessing on our lives.

It is extremely arrogant and inconsistent with Scripture to expect the blessing of God when we have not acknowledged Jesus as our High Priest with our tithes.

Where Does the Tithe Go?

Does God need your money? No. But it is through the tithe that we acknowledge His sovereignty. God looks at the tithe as our recognition that He is the owner and we are the stewards. It is how we acknowledge His lordship and declare that we have submitted our interests in this material world to Him. Leviticus 27:30 shows us that God views the tithe as His.

And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord.

The tithe is not something we give God. It's something that we return to Him. Where and how to pay the tithe is a question for many people. Malachi 3:10 gives us the answer:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.

This verse clearly states that we're to bring all the tithe to the storehouse. (Notice that it does not say, "Divide your tithe up and send it to a number of different storehouses.") What, then, is the storehouse? In the dispensa-

tion of the church age, the word *storehouse* is analogous to the local church. In other words, you are to bring your tithe to the local church of which you are a member.

Too often, I hear of people sending off their tithe checks to their favorite traveling ministers. Although they are on the right track in giving to ministries that are doing God's work, they are doing it out of order. First, all the tithe (10 percent of your income) goes to your home church. After that, you are free to give offerings (monetary gifts above and beyond the tithe) to other ministries.

Malachi 3:10 explains why all the tithe goes to the storehouse:

Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse [church], that there may be meat in mine house....

The term "meat" here is a reference to natural provision. The tithe provides unencumbered, general fund income to pay for the cost of ministry. Also, the word "meat" is used in the New Testament to describe the Word of God. (Heb. 5; 1 Cor. 3.) When you bring your tithe to your storehouse, you will provide what is needed for the operation of ministry and you will position yourself to receive the meat of God's Word. (This is another confir-

mation of the importance of being part of a local church.)

This spiritual exchange is also illustrated in 1 Corinthians 9:11, in which the apostle Paul says:

If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

This verse indicates that there is an exchange of natural things for supernatural things—an exchange of money for spiritual provision. Furthermore, this exchange is made glaringly clear in the last part of Malachi 3:10: "...prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

To the tither, God says that He will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing so big that there won't be room enough to receive it all. That's quite a supernatural return for your giving, wouldn't you say?

But before you start jumping up and down, you need to understand that the phrase "there shall not be room enough to receive it" is not to be taken literally. God was not saying that you'd have so much money that you wouldn't be able to open enough bank accounts to accommodate it all. He was saying

that you wouldn't have enough room in your heart to receive all that He'd brought you, and the result would be that your heart's desires would change.

The tithe turns a hard heart into a sowing heart. Why is that? Jesus said in Matthew 6:21:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

When you begin investing your money the way God says a faithful steward should, your heart will begin to change.

Now, when people hear about God pouring out a blessing, sometimes they begin to conjure up in their minds pictures of winning the lottery, inheriting a million dollars, or catching a bag of coins dropping out of heaven. Don't hold your breath waiting for any of that to happen!

The blessing of God will manifest in your life through various means, such as God giving you witty ideas to save or earn extra money. Many people testify that before tithing they lived paycheck to paycheck, but after they began tithing, their current income somehow became more than enough to meet their needs.

Another interesting phenomenon that tithers experience is that their number of finan-

cial emergencies drastically decreases. They find that the lawnmower doesn't break down, the car keeps running smoothly, and the refrigerator keeps "fridging." Like the children of Israel wandering through the desert, they find that their sandals never wear out (figuratively speaking). For the tither, God opens doors of opportunity that no man can shut.

Meeting the Needs of Your Family

So far, we've learned that as God's stewards, we are at least to be faithful in the use of our money. We are to generate income by laboring at that which is good. From the fruits of our labor, we are to pay God the tithe, which is 10 percent of our income. We are to pay all the tithe to the storehouse, which is the church we attend.

Now, after we've generated an income and given God 10 percent, 1 Timothy 5:8 shows us what to do next:

But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

This verse says the next thing we do with our money is to take care of the needs of our families. Before we go on a vacation, before

we buy that boat, and before we give offerings above and beyond the tithe to the Gospel, we are to meet the needs of our families. If we don't, it's tantamount to being infidels, unbelievers.

Meeting the needs of our families is a serious matter to God. It's vital that they have the necessities in life. Food, clothing, and shelter are the barest essentials.

How do we define a need? We need to keep two things in mind. First of all, need is a very personal thing. Only you and God know what needs your family has. Don't let anybody else define for you what need is for your family, and don't ever get in the business of trying to define somebody else's need.

Furthermore, your level of need will change with the level of responsibility God entrusts to you. For example, a person who is single will have fewer needs in life than someone who is married and has children. The level of need rises drastically when someone becomes married and then rises again after he or she has children.

Secondly, God knows when you've stepped across the line and tried to define something as a need when it really is a desire. Don't try to con God. He knows the difference between genuine need and false need. When you're honest before God about it, He will see

to it that you will always have enough left over to meet the needs of others.

Do you know what we call money that is left over after all of your genuine needs are met? We call it seed. Seed is what we use to meet the needs of those around us. It is also the instrument God will use to bring increase into your life. So we will wind down our discussion about money by talking about the seed.

The Seed—Your Instrument for Increase

When we talk about using our leftover money to meet the needs of others, we need to have an understanding of how the needs of others are met. Do we use our excess money to purchase a bag of groceries for someone who can't afford any food? Do we fill up his car with gas? Do we slip him a twenty-dollar bill when we shake his hand?

Though these are all charitable things to do, they will not meet the greatest need in a person's life. No amount of money can purchase anyone's salvation. No amount of money can purchase a healing. The only thing that ultimately meets human need on every level consistently and permanently is the Word of God. So the seed that you have left

over is best used to get the Word of God into the hearts of others.

As a matter of fact, in Matthew 13, Jesus defines seed as the Word of God. The soil that the seed is planted in is the human heart. When the seed of God's Word concerning salvation, healing, or deliverance is sown into the hearts of the lost, the people who have sown the seed are entitled to a harvest from that seed.

You see, when you give your money to a ministry to help spread the Gospel, you are planting the seed of God's Word into the hearts that receive from that ministry. Galatians 6:7 says:

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Your experience of prosperity is based on how effectively you use what is left over to spread the Word to other people. Your harvest in life is not dependent on tithing. It's not dependent on how much you grow and mature in the knowledge of the Word. Your harvest in life is dependent upon how you use your life's resources to give the Word of God to other people.

The Multiplication Effect of Ministry

I want to show you a Scripture passage that illustrates this very point. It's the account of the feeding of the five thousand. John 6:5-7 NKJV says:

Then Jesus lifted up His eyes, and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little."

Phillip was puzzled by what Jesus said; he clearly didn't get the picture. He was trying to tell Jesus that they didn't have enough money to buy enough bread for everyone.

Then Andrew piped up and said, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fish..." But then his mind got the best of him too. He said, "...but what are they among so many?" (v. 9 NKJV).

Jesus then said, "Make the people sit down" (v. 10 NKJV). In Mark's account, Jesus had them all sit down in companies and ranks

to prepare them to receive a supernatural miracle.

The Bible says there were five thousand men there. Most Bible commentaries suggest that with women and children present, the number of people would have probably totaled fifteen to twenty thousand people.

After everyone was seated, Jesus took the bread and when He had given thanks, broke it and began to distribute it to the disciples. Then they, in turn, distributed it to the multitude. He did the same thing with the fish.

When the people had gotten their fill, Jesus had the disciples gather up the leftovers. After they gathered everything up, they had a total of twelve baskets of leftovers. Approximately twenty thousand people were fed with five barley loaves and two small fish, and they had twelve baskets full of leftovers!

Commentaries say that the baskets were most likely woven market baskets, and that one of those baskets would have accommodated at least thirty to fifty of the little boy's lunches. They ended up with twelve baskets full! That's six hundred lunches left over after one was sown!

So what is the lesson learned from this account of the feeding of the five thousand? It's this. The little boy could have given his lunch to someone who seemed to be hungrier

than he was. According to the Word, he would have received a return on his giving. But because he gave it to ministry (represented by Jesus), twenty thousand people were fed with the little boy's lunch instead of just one.

We see in this example that giving to ministry ordained by God multiplies the effectiveness of the seed sown. And I would suggest that it multiplies the magnitude of the harvest returned.

So again, we see the big picture of God's purpose for our natural resources.

Remaining Faithful in Your Finances

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, many principles in the Word of God contribute to our being empowered to prosper. I encourage you to study all of them because they work together and none of them can be disregarded.

I have shared with you the importance of financial faithfulness and how you can begin walking out God's plan for using your material resources to promote His purposes in the earth.

Allow the Bible to adjust your thinking in this arena. At this stage of your spiritual journey, you may not understand intellectually the connection between your use of

money and your ability to serve successfully in other areas within the body of Christ. Yet over the years, I've often seen the clear connection between a person's faithfulness with their natural resources and God's provision of spiritual resources in that person's life.

People who never get plugged in at church, never grow spiritually, and eventually disappear altogether are those people who fail this first test of faithfulness. But those who honor God with their possessions and the first fruits of their increase (Prov. 3:9) are the ones who are the most blessed and are set apart by God for various responsibilities and calls on their lives. God is not a respecter of persons. He'll do the same for you!

Chapter 4

Prayer and Intimacy With God

[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly].... Philippians 3:10 Amp.

Paul didn't say that his determined purpose was to be healed, to win souls, to feed the hungry, or to clothe the naked. He said that his primary pursuit in life was intimacy with God. If this was Paul's first priority, then it should be our first priority. Everything we desire is wrapped in intimacy with the Lord. Jesus came to restore us to intimacy with God. What is intimacy?

Pertaining to the inmost character of a thing ... most private or personal ... closely acquainted or associated; very familiar ...

resulting from careful study or investigation ... thorough ... knowledge of.¹

We cannot be intimate with someone we casually acknowledge or only call upon when it's convenient or when life is tough. Intimacy results from careful study and ongoing communication. Believers who want to be intimate with God study His Word, which reveals His thoughts, feelings, will, personality, and ways of doing things, and they communicate with Him in prayer.

Prayer is more than getting on your knees at bedtime. It is communing with God. You talk to Him, and He talks to you. Intimacy comes from an exchange of personal thoughts and feelings over a period of time.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

John 17:22,23

The pursuit of intimacy leads to oneness, the unity Jesus prayed for us to have with Him and with each other. We enter into oneness and unity as we pray and fellowship with Him and with each other. And that's powerful.

Matthew 18:19-20 and other verses declare that nothing is impossible to us when we are one. John 17:23 says that when we are one, the world will see that God sent Jesus and that He loves them. That's why the Devil fights to keep us from praying individually and corporately. He knows that all the power of heaven is unleashed in earth when we are one and agree in prayer.

Personal Identity

Something interesting happens to our personal identity when we become one with God. Paul said it this way in Philippians 3:9 Amp. "And that I may [actually] be found and known as in Him...." In John 14:9 Jesus referred to the same condition when He said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." When you are intimate with Jesus in prayer, people will see Jesus through your life. The greatest witness of Jesus is His followers' being like Him.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. Matthew 16:25

People of prayer lose their personal identity in Christ, but it is no loss! Being one with the Prince of Peace, they have His love, His

peace, and His joy. Being one with the Healer, they have health and healing. Being one with the Provider, they have all the provision they need. Being one with the Lord of the Harvest, they win souls for the kingdom.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matthew 6:33

The irony of the Christian life is that when we lose ourselves in God, we find ourselves. We seek His kingdom, and He reveals who we are in it. This is one of the great benefits of prayer and intimacy with God. Knowing who you are in Him gives you security, confidence, and rock-solid faith.

Change Your Desires

Prayer does not necessarily equate to intimacy, but you can't have intimacy without prayer. The highest quality prayer occurs when you are hungry for God. How do you get hungry for Him? You think about Him! You develop a taste for a certain food by eating it regularly, and you develop a desire for God by thinking about Him and His Word regularly. What you give your attention to is what you will desire.

If you do not choose what you think about, your flesh will supply plenty of ungodly thoughts. Thinking about how much fun all that drinking and partying was before you got saved will cause you to desire that life and eventually go back to it. But if you think about God, you will desire Him.

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians 3:2

The Greek word translated “affection” means “to exercise the mind.”² Exercise your mind in spiritual things instead of natural things. Think about God instead of why someone doesn’t like you or what the next terrorist act will be. Thinking about God causes a hunger for God. What you exercise your mind to think about becomes your desire, and what you desire is where you excel.

When I was in the Air Force, a friend asked me to play handball. I had never played and was soundly beaten, an experience I didn’t like! So I started thinking about handball, and then I was at the court practicing handball, and it wasn’t long before I became a handball advocate. Because I exercised my mind toward handball it became a desire of my heart, and I became good at it.

What is simple is not always easy. However, God is not telling you to do something you

can't do. It takes discipline to change your desires and pursuits from the things of the world to the things of God. But the more you read the Word, the more you want to read the Word. The more you pray, the more you want to pray. And the reward is intimacy with Him.

Quality Prayer

We assume that believers who pray a lot have an intimate relationship with the Lord, but prayer can become a religious, legalistic, meaningless exercise that has no intimacy. Intimacy requires quality time. If all you do is ask God for things, you will not become intimate with Him. You must share your life with Him and then hear what He has to say to you.

God is a person. If I want to pursue intimacy with a person, I study about the person and then I talk with the person. Intimacy between a husband and a wife is impossible if the husband is determined to be the strong, silent type or if the wife is determined to be so submissive that she never expresses her opinions or feelings. Likewise, intimacy is impossible if neither one will listen to the other.

The only way the deepest parts of people's nature can be revealed to one another is through communicating their innermost thoughts and feelings. Honest and open

communication is the means to achieve intimacy with another person. This is not a man-made system; it is the way God set things up.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth. Ephesians 4:29

The Greek word for "communication" means "something said."³ It denotes the simple exchange of information or ideas.

Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.
Philippians 4:14

Here, the Greek word for "communicate" means "to share in company with ... co-participate ... have fellowship ... be partaker of."⁴ This is more than an exchange of information and ideas. It is an intimate understanding.

Paul commended the Philippians for identifying with his affliction. They had shared their lives to the point that, though separated physically, they were one spiritually. They were one with God and one with each other.

Intimacy requires a mutual exchange of hearts and minds, experiences and dreams. If all you do is talk to God and never listen for a response, you won't get to know Him. But if all you do is sit and wait for Him to speak

and you never share what's in your heart, you will not know how He feels and what He thinks about you and your life. Quality prayer involves trust, and no one is more trustworthy than God. He already knows your secrets! In your prayer time, tell Him what is on your heart, and then listen.

Knowing God's Voice

The Bible mentions different ways the Lord communicates with us. He speaks in an audible voice, as He did with Saul in Acts 9; or in a still, small voice, as He did with Elijah in 1 Kings 19:12.

He gives us the inward witness in our spirits, when we experience peace or the lack of peace. This is the Holy Spirit's way of helping us make decisions in line with God's will.

God can also speak to us through visions and dreams; the preaching and teaching of the Word; the gifts of the Spirit; and as we read, study, and meditate on His Word.

*And when he putteth forth his own sheep,
he goeth before them, and the sheep follow
him: for they know his voice. And a stranger
will they not follow, but will flee from him:
for they know not the voice of strangers.*

John 10:4,5

As a believer, you have Jesus as your shepherd and you know His voice. You follow only Him because every other voice is strange to you. When you have a thought and it strikes you as strange, it is probably the enemy trying to influence you. The Holy Spirit is in your heart, and He speaks to you there; the enemy speaks from the outside, introducing thoughts to your natural mind. If your mind is renewed with God's Word, you will know that the enemy is speaking because the thought will not line up with the Word of God. It will seem strange.

*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear
heard, neither have entered into the heart of
man, the things which God hath prepared for
them that love him. But God hath revealed
them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit sear-
cheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

1 Corinthians 2:9,10

The Holy Spirit reveals the deep things of God, and He lives in your spirit. Your spirit communicates with the Holy Spirit when you pray—both in English and in tongues. When you pray in tongues, don't check out mentally!

Speaking in tongues can become a dead, religious exercise if you are not diligent to stay focused on God and His Word.

It is possible to pray in tongues while your mind is at the golf course or the mall, so it is important to remain attentive to the Holy Spirit and listen for His response. He may speak through God's Word, give you the interpretation of tongues, or just give you the inward witness that you have prayed what needed to be prayed and everything is going to be fine.

Effective Prayer

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Matthew 6:7

I am always amazed at how easy it is to fall into "vain repetitions" in prayer, repeating something without my heart being in it. This is ineffective prayer because it is a work of the flesh. When I pray like this, no spiritual exchange is occurring between my spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is more boring than vain repetition, and you'll notice before long that if you don't catch yourself doing it, you will have no desire to pray and will quit altogether. When you are fully engaged with the Holy Spirit, however, prayer brings great results.

James outlines other reasons our prayers are ineffective.

...ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James 4:2,3

We may not ask for anything, we may ask for something that is not in line with God's Word or will, or we may ask with the wrong heart attitude.

If you are frustrated, have you taken the issue to the Lord? Are you making a selfish request, not in keeping with His plan for your life? The Holy Spirit will alert you if you are asking amiss. Then you can pray correctly so that your prayers will be answered.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James 5:16

Once you know what to pray, then you need to know how to pray. This verse says that effective prayer is fervent, but first you need to make sure your heart is right. If you need to confess a fault or pray with someone else to get something straight, then do it. Why? Because then your conscience is clear and you

can pray fervently—with hot, boiling passion to see what you are praying come to pass. The Amplified Bible says, “The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working].”

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Mark 11:23,24

Effective prayer is a result of faith. To receive the answer to your prayer, you have to believe that you receive. This teaching has bothered a lot of the religious community, but this is what the Bible says. You must believe in your heart and have faith to receive what you are praying for.

Extremists have taken this verse to mean that you can have whatever you desire as long as you believe it in your heart, but we have seen from James 4:2-3 that you also must be asking with the right heart motive and

according to God’s Word. Believers who use Mark 11:23-24 to justify their own lust are not rightly dividing the Word of truth.

When we pray God’s Word and will with the right heart motive, we can pray in faith, believing that we receive. I believe the main obstacle to believing we will receive is sin. We saw this in James 4:2-3. John also talks about it.

Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him....

1 John 3:21

If there is sin standing between us and God, then we have no confidence to ask Him for anything. It’s very hard to believe we receive financial blessing if we just embezzled money from our company. I’m not talking about missing it now and then, or being in the process of overcoming a fault when we are keeping our hearts right. I’m speaking of habitually and knowingly sinning, while doing nothing to change our hearts or behavior.

God does not expect you or me to be perfect. Our righteousness is through the blood of Jesus—not anything we do. But rebellion breaks fellowship with God and prevents Him from hearing our prayers. If He cannot hear them, He cannot answer them. When

Jesus prayed for Lazarus to be raised from the dead, He said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" (John 11:41). Because He was one with the Father, Jesus knew His prayers would be heard and answered.

Maintaining intimacy with God in prayer helps us to resist temptation and overcome sin. We will not want to rebel against God if we are intimate with Him. And one of the rewards is that our prayers will be effective.

Corporate Prayer

...if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew 18:19,20

These are powerful verses. Jesus is right there, and whatever you ask in His name will be done. So don't ever be afraid to ask for someone to pray for you, and don't be afraid to pray with other believers. Praying together is one of the joys of the Christian life. But the key word is agreement. You need to know that the two of you are in full agreement about the issues being addressed and the Word that applies. Then you can lock your shields of faith together and pray with total confidence.

When a large number of believers pray together, it can shake a city for God. This is what happened when Peter and John were released from prison and returned to their company in Acts 4:31:

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Intimacy with God through prayer will change your life. At the end of this book, we will pray a prayer of commitment. Let that prayer be the beginning of your intimate relationship with Him!

Chapter 5

The Power of Our Words

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. Isaiah 55:11

What kind of power do our words hold? In Genesis 1, we see that the same God who spoke the worlds into existence made us in His image; therefore, our words possess that same creative power. When we believe and confess God's Word, we create a godly destiny for ourselves. When we believe and confess the enemy's word, we create an ungodly destiny for ourselves.

The power of our words begins with what we truly believe in our hearts. The Word equates the spirit to the heart, but it is not referring to our feelings; it is referring to our core belief system, what we base our lives upon. Every decision we make emanates from what

we truly believe in our hearts, or spirits. What we believe is the power behind our words.

What Do You Believe?

What you truly believe deep in your heart is the basis for every decision you make, from what you're going to eat at lunch to whom you marry. What you believe also determines the power of your words.

For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Mark 11:23,24

Believing God's Word is the dynamic power of our speaking. We can speak God's Word day and night, but if we do not believe it, our words carry no power to bear fruit. That's why people who habitually say, "That kills me" or "I'll die if that happens," don't drop dead. They don't really believe that what they are saying is true. The reason I bring this up is that many believers have taken the power

of confessing God's Word to an extreme. They are judgmental speech monitors, correcting and chastising anyone who says anything they disagree with or are afraid will happen. They are not acting in faith or wisdom; they are acting in fear and ignorance. They don't understand the full meaning of Mark 11:23-24: that you must believe in your heart what you confess (speak) with your mouth.

This doesn't mean you don't need to monitor your speech. Thoughtless, mindless talk is not pleasing to God or beneficial in any way. Believers are expected to mean what they say and say what they believe in their hearts.

Ephesians 1:19 says the exceeding greatness of God's power is released when we believe. By believing God, we release His power. If we find that we don't really believe Him, then confessing His Word over ourselves can help us to believe in our hearts what we know to be true in our heads.

Ask yourself each day if you really believe what you are saying. You may discover that you really don't believe God loves you, and that's why you can't receive His blessings. That's nothing to be ashamed of; we all feel like that at times. That's why the Holy Spirit wrote so many Scriptures that tell us how much God loves us. Meditate on those verses. Pray in tongues, and the Holy Spirit will make

God's love for you a living reality in your heart. It won't be long before you will know you are the apple of God's eye and can confess it with full confidence. Then, when you say, "By His stripes I am healed," your belief in His love for you will enable you to receive your healing.

Don't Get Weary

In Galatians 6:7-9, the Lord says we are not to be weary in well doing because God always performs His Word, and what we have sown we will reap at just the right time. One of the biggest challenges to believers is given in this verse: Don't get weary! Don't stop believing and agreeing with what you have sown, because one day you will reap.

As a pastor, I hear people complain that they have been believing God for years and He hasn't done anything. I asked God to show me what was holding back their blessings, and He gave me this verse.

*Your words have been stout against me,
saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we
spoken so much against thee?*

*Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and
what profit is it that we have kept his ordi-
nance, and that we have walked mournfully
before the Lord of hosts? Malachi 3:13,14*

Our words are powerful and can be the reason we're not reaping what we have sown. You may be obeying the Word, but then your words may betray a heart of unbelief, anger, or sometimes even bitterness. In essence, you come out of agreement with the Word of God that you have sown. You dig up your seed and throw it around. Malachi 3:13-14 says you are opposing God when you do this.

God cannot strengthen and encourage you when you oppose Him with your words, and without His strength you cannot persevere and overcome. Weariness and the words of your mouth go hand in hand. If you speak words of doubt and unbelief or anger and frustration, you're going to be weary and discouraged—and it may not be long before you quit.

It is hard not to become discouraged when you are waiting for the promise of God to manifest, but don't be like Job. He moaned and complained until God finally said to him, "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?" (Job 40:2). When we murmur and complain, we are essentially saying that God is not keeping His Word or performing it the way we think He ought to perform it.

When we feel discouraged and weary, we should not contend with the Lord; we should run to Him for help! He's our answer,

not our problem. Discouragement will only get worse and eventually lead to depression and other serious problems if we do not go to God—which we do by praying, getting in His Word, listening to the Holy Spirit, and then confessing the truth He illuminates in our hearts.

If things get so bad that you can't hear God, then I encourage you to see your pastor or a church counselor. Surround yourself with believers who can understand your battle and speak God's Word into you and over you, believers who will help you to believe and confess God's truth instead of Satan's lies. Confession of God's Word frees us from discouragement, gives us new hope, and keeps us in agreement with God's will.

This is something you have to be on top of every single day because it's so easy to fall into old patterns of speech, particularly if you rub elbows with the world and work a secular job. If you don't persevere in watching your words, the next thing you know you're speaking what the world says instead of what the Word of God says—and believing it!

James 3:2-13 is a passage of Scripture every believer should read before getting out of bed in the morning. It tells us how important, and difficult, it is to maintain control of our tongue. In fact, watching our words

is one of the most difficult challenges in the Christian life. We quickly see the importance of it, master it in some areas, then fail in other areas. However, if we are not weary in well doing, Galatians 6:9 says that we will win. We can, and will, conquer our tongue!

Word Seeds or Weed Seeds

When I refer to the power of confession, I'm not talking about the "name it and claim it, confess it and possess it, blab it and grab it" extremism some teach. I'm not saying that whatever you want you can have if you just keep saying it. I'm talking about you making your words line up with the Word of God, saying the things the Word says about yourself and your life.

You are planting seed every time you speak, and the seed is either the Word or a weed. You are either blessing or cursing. Therefore, after you read, study, and meditate God's Word, be diligent to see that your words line up with what has been revealed to you.

As a pastor, I know that some members of my congregation have said, "Yes, praise God, I'm healed by the stripes of Jesus" in church, then have gotten in the car and moaned about all their aches and pains. With their words, they have stopped God's Word from coming to pass in their lives and set in motion a continu-

ing scenario of sickness. Instead of keeping the Holy Spirit busy by confessing God's Word, their words have opened the door for the Devil to do his work. They have planted weed seed. If they had continued to confess God's Word, healing would have continued to flow toward them until they received the full manifestation of health.

Think before you speak. Are you about to plant a weed seed or a Word seed into your life and the lives of those you touch?

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.... Ephesians 4:29

When God sent Israel to conquer the city of Jericho, He didn't tell Joshua to make the people be quiet as they marched six days around its walls. Joshua did that.

Now Joshua had commanded the people, saying, "You shall not shout or make any noise with your voice, nor shall a word proceed out of your mouth, until the day I say to you, 'Shout!' Then you shall shout."
Joshua 6:10 NKJV

You might think six days of silence sounds extreme, but war is extreme. Lives were at stake. God's battle plan could not be compromised. As a commander, Joshua knew the weaknesses of the flesh, and an army

marching around the walls of Jericho in the hot sun day after day might begin to mutter, "What kind of hair-brained scheme is this? Does Joshua have sunstroke or something? This is stupid! Why don't we just scale the walls and get the job done?"

Joshua knew that murmuring and complaining could spoil the plan of God, so he required silence. As soldiers of the cross, we need to be like Joshua, especially when we are in the heat of a battle. If we can't speak words of faith and encouragement, we should remember the battle of Jericho and have the wisdom to be quiet.

Don't let corrupt communication come out of your mouth. The phrase "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me" is a lie! That is not what God's Word says. Again, we must think before we speak. We want to be certain that our confession is planting the Word, not a weed, into our lives.

Speak the Answer

Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Proverbs 18:21

The words of your mouth that come out of your heart determine your state of mind,

your physical well being, and your destiny. Your words can be the difference between life and death. Sometimes when people come to my office for counsel, I want to shake them and say, “Be quiet! The best thing I can do for you right now is to sew your lips together.” Their confession is only making matters worse. They need to speak the answer and stop giving power to the problem.

When you make it a habit to confess the Word of God, the Word of God possesses your heart and flows out of your mouth, even when things go wrong. When you hit your finger with the hammer, you declare that by the stripes of Jesus you are healed. When your children rebel, you confidently proclaim that they are taught of the Lord, they love Him, and they will never depart from Him. This is giving God authority over the situation and releasing the Holy Spirit into it because He watches over His Word to perform it.

My wife, Lynne, has a special call to prayer, and for a long time, I believed her call made it easier for her to pray. This was my confession: “Lynne, it’s easier for you to pray. You’re called to do it. I have to work to get the time to pray. It’s something that I have to labor in. A lot of times, I just pray in faith. It’s bone dry.” Needless to say, I experienced everything I was confessing!

One morning in prayer the Holy Spirit said, “Change your words.” For the first time, I believed my prayer time could be different. Then I started speaking it. “I can’t wait to pray. It’s my first priority. I’m going to be filled with the glory of God. I’m going to be refreshed and revitalized.” Guess what? My confession became reality, and that’s the way it will work for you too.

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.
James 1:26

Is your faith in God real? Are you born again and filled with the Holy Spirit? Then you should talk like it! Everything you believe will become empty and you can even get to the place where you deceive yourself with lies if you do not tame your tongue to confess God’s truth. You must refuse to give power to the enemy, and persevere in speaking what God says. Confess the answer.

I pray that you now have the clear understanding that the words you speak today create the environment in which you will live tomorrow. It’s that plain and simple. Tomorrow you step into the words you speak today. If you say you’re afraid that the ceiling is going to collapse the next day, get ready

to move out of the way. If you confess God's Word, then you're creating an environment of blessing and prosperity to enjoy tomorrow.

The book of Proverbs has many verses regarding the power of confession. Here are just a few for you to meditate on.

The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked. Proverbs 10:11

He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction. Proverbs 13:3

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit. Proverbs 15:4

There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health. Proverbs 12:18

The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips: but the just shall come out of trouble. Proverbs 12:13

As you continue to meditate on these Scriptures, they will help you to speak the answer and defeat the problem.

Chapter 6

Walking in Love

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:1,13 NASB

You have just read the first and last verses from one of the most famous passages of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 13, known as "The Love Chapter." What is interesting is that the Holy Spirit placed this chapter in the middle of His teaching about the gifts of the Spirit and how the church is to operate in them. Right in the middle of a discussion of the supernatural power of God manifesting through believers, He stops to talk about love.

If you hang around believers very long, you are going to hear about the power and glory of God. His manifest presence in our lives is what takes Christianity out of the realm of religion and into a dynamic relationship. This is what we all want because when

God comes on the scene, everything gets dealt with. But in comparison to her scriptural capacity, the church as a whole is living well below her means in power and authority. Why is that? I believe 1 Corinthians 13 gives the answer: We're not walking in love.

What Is This Love?

The Greek word translated “love” most of the time in the New Testament is agape. It’s generally referred to as the God-kind of love.

In respect of *agapao* as used of God, it expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being toward entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them toward the Giver, and a practical love toward those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver.¹

John 3:16 says, “God so loved [agape]... that He gave.” *Agape* gives unconditionally, without expecting anything in return and without selectivity. God loves you no matter who you are or what you’ve done. His love is based upon His goodwill and not emotion. It is decision driven, not feelings driven. *Agape* gives and gives. If you are walking in *agape*, you are not thinking of yourself; your life is a gift to God and to others.

Another word translated “love” in the Greek is *phileo*, which means “tender affection.”² Feelings are important because they are the primary motivator for consistent behavior. You can make a decision to act lovingly regardless of how you feel from time to time (*agape*), but most of the time you will act lovingly as a result of your emotions (*phileo*). If you want to change your behavior (to walk in the love of God), then you need to cultivate the feelings that produce that behavior (tender affection for God and His people).

For example, if you make the decision to give to a minister (*agape*), you need to get your feelings to line up with that decision. You need to cultivate a tender affection (*phileo*) for that minister, and you will be more consistent in your giving. It is much easier to give to someone you have strong feelings for, is it not? We base our relationships and decisions on the *agape* love of God, then develop affection—or *phileo*—for those with whom God connects us in the body.

Remember: God has chosen specific people for you to be in relationship with. It’s easier to walk in love and stay committed when you know God has connected you to a person. So when you meet someone new, listen to the Holy Spirit. Let Him tell you if you are to be in relationship with that person and what the nature of that relationship

should be. This will save you a lot of needless pain and suffering!

Love Moves Everything in the Kingdom of God

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 1 John 4:7,8

If you want to experience and know God, then you must learn about love and walk in love because He is love. Love describes God's person and character, His essence and nature. He chooses to love, and He loves unconditionally.

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Galatians 5:6

When the early church disputed over whether or not new male converts should be circumcised, Paul settled the issue by pointing out that everything in the New Covenant is based on faith in God, which works by love. You have faith in God and His Word because you know He loves you. To be filled with faith, you need to be filled with His love. Again, the

power of God works by love. Faith works by love. All things in the kingdom work by love because God is love.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:37-40

When I started getting serious with God and reading the Bible, it was almost overwhelming. Everything I read, especially about love, told me how far I was from living the truth. All I saw was what was wrong with me and all these new rules I had to live by: "Do this," "don't do that." But then I found out that if I just concentrated on loving God and loving my brothers and sisters in the Lord, I would do all right. Walking in love simplified my walk with the Lord.

You actually fulfill the Law by simply walking in love toward God and other human beings. Most of what God does in your life is through and with people—by love. When you get discouraged, He will send somebody to exhort you and build you up. However, if they refuse to walk in love and exhort you,

or if you refuse to walk in love and receive them, nobody is blessed and God's will is unfulfilled. Walking in God's love is critical to believers' functioning as a productive, healthy body because love moves everything in God's kingdom.

The Mark of a Believer

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:10-12

These verses show the origination and progression of God's love. He loves us first; then we can love Him and others. He revealed His love for us by sending Jesus to die for us, and His love for us incites us to love Him and love others the way He loves us.

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 5:5

If you have any doubt that you now have the capacity to walk in God's love, then you need to meditate on this Scripture. When you

were born again and the Holy Spirit came to reside in you, so did God's love. His love for you and working in you gives you the ability to love Him and love other believers.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:34,35

Jesus gave a new commandment to the church: We are to love each other the way He loves us. That is the mark of the believer. Our love for one another tells the world that we are His disciples.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:2,3 NIV

We are nothing without love. We can flow in the gifts of the Spirit, feed the poor, and even die as martyrs, but if we don't grow up in God's love, all our good works amount to nothing. This doesn't mean we should not

do these things. What it means is that they are worthless to God if they are not done in love.

Christians get so busy doing what God has called them to do that they often forget to grow up and walk in love. Instead, they walk all over each other, causing hurt and division, using the excuse that they must fulfill the vision God has given them. However, the Word says that none of it will mean anything without love.

The Bible never says that all men will know you are a Christian if you go to church three times a week, if you pray and read your Bible every day, or if you spend all your time and money feeding the poor. The mark that you are a true Christian is that you show love for other Christians, that you love and take care of your own.

How do I know that a brother is truly a member of the family of God? I know that brother is real because he spends time with his immature brother, counseling him and encouraging him in the Lord. He's over at his house helping him clean up his yard and teaching him the Word about how to be a good husband and father. If the guy offends him, he forgives him, prays for him, and provokes him to love and good works. (Heb. 10:24.)

If you are a Christian because you want some order and structure to your life and a

good value system to live by, then you have a problem. Why? Because being a Christian means the Holy Spirit fills your heart with God's love, and all you want to do is love Him and love His children. If you don't walk in love, then you don't know God and you aren't a Christian—because the mark of a believer is love.

Perfected in Love

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18

As we are perfected in the love of God, we are going to be less tormented by fear. Every believer is touched by fearful thoughts. Many people—especially men—don't like to admit they've tasted fear, but it's a fact. Some people are fearful of failing in business; others are afraid of being in poor health. They spend all their time at work or at the gym, driven by fear, because they neglect and disregard the love of God in their lives. If they knew how much He loved them, they would not be so frightened!

Worry and complaining are expressions of fear, and fear brings torment. Fear's torment can incapacitate you in your relationships,

your work, and every area of life. In truth, fear is the opposite of faith in God and is rooted in self-interest. You will not be afraid if you aren't thinking about yourself, especially if you are so in love with God that He consumes you. The love of God is the miracle cure for any phobia!

Love forces your attention outward because love is always looking for someone to bless. And "practice makes perfect" certainly applies here. When you consistently practice the love of God, you are perfected in love. You grow up and become like Jesus. What are the specific things you are to practice?

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NASB

We could spend hours studying patience alone. Read and meditate on the topic of patience in these verses, and also on the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, in various translations. Get a revelation of what love is and what love is not.

Here is what the Bible says love is not:

...Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first," doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel....

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 MESSAGE

Turn to these Scriptures on love whenever you struggle in a relationship. As you develop these attitudes and behaviors, here are some of the rewards you will begin to receive.

You will know God and develop an intimate relationship with Him.

You will love your brothers and sisters in Christ and will have good relationships with friends and family in the Lord.

You will be filled with faith, hope, and joy.

You will trust God and believe His Word, having great faith to move mountains.

You will cast out all fear.

You will fulfill all the Law and the prophets, which will result in your being mightily blessed of God in every area of your life.

You will be holy and without blame in Him.

One more thing about the love of God: the Bible says that love never fails, but how it succeeds is often known only by Him. You cannot force others to receive the Lord or be made whole by loving them unconditionally. Some people you will endure and persevere to love, and you may never see a change. But you are not to try to control and manipulate them with love. That is perverting the love of God into witchcraft. Just love them, pray for them, and know that the Holy Spirit is moving heaven and earth to save them, heal them, and set them free.

The love of God gives us faith for the impossible. Whether or not we see the fruit of it in this life, we know His love never fails. One day we will see the eternal fruit of His love expressed through us. In the meantime, we can rejoice that we are being perfected in His love today.

Chapter 7

Looking Forward— How to Share Jesus

Sharing Jesus with people often strikes terror in the hearts of believers, but it is a basic and fundamental part of what we do as Christians. That is why we need to discuss it openly and look to God's Word for instruction and confidence so that we can do what God has called us to do.

From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Matthew 4:17-19

Anyone who is born again is a disciple of Jesus and called to be a fisher of men. He was not speaking only to full-time ministers. He was talking to anybody who followed Him.

He didn't say, "Follow Me, and I'll make you a bank president." He said, "Follow Me, and I'll make you a fisher of men."

You will be successful in your calling if you fulfill your primary purpose, which is to be a fisher of men. As you do this, you will find yourself blessed and fulfilled. As you view life through the proper lens of being a fisher of men, the Holy Spirit can reveal the specifics of your calling. Being a fisher of men gives eternal meaning and brings the power of God to everything you do in life.

The Heart of Jesus

Unbelievers cannot understand God's Word until they see it demonstrated. This is important to Jesus. In Matthew 25:34-40, He said that if we feed the hungry, provide a home for the homeless, clothe the naked, and visit prisoners and the sick, we have done this to Him.

Jesus is in the midst of every relationship and encounter. None is casual or accidental. He brings people into your life, and some you may not like! If they are not saved, then you do a little fishing. Visit someone in prison or baby-sit for a single parent who can't afford daycare. God will give you opportunities to meet people's needs so that you can share Jesus with them.

A pastor in northern Minnesota had a small building with a little parking lot. He bought a plow for his truck to keep the parking lot free of snow. One morning the Lord told him to clear the driveways of the houses near his church. He left a church card on each door that said, "Jesus loves you. Come visit us sometime." Within a year he was clearing a lot more driveways and had several hundred people coming to his church. This is not just a formula for church growth; this is a believer seeing Jesus in everyone he meets.

You're Not Alone!

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Mark 16:15

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.
Matthew 28:19

How can we go into the entire world to preach the Gospel and teach all nations? We only can if every believer does his part in his part of the world. Individually, we can serve others, lead them to Jesus, and teach them about the kingdom of God. But we can also invite them to church and give the five-fold ministers a chance to preach, teach, and minister to them.

In Luke 14:23, Jesus taught about the master who told his servants to “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come....” The church is where spiritual needs are met. The Word goes forth, people are saved, and the Holy Spirit breaks every yoke of bondage. Children receive the Word in children’s church, while their parents receive the Word in the sanctuary. A rebellious teen can go to the youth group, while someone with a drug or alcohol problem can attend a meeting just for him or her.

Some discipleship programs make you feel like you’ve got to do everything yourself, but no one person can disciple another person alone. You are doing great if you minister to those God puts in your path, influence them to look to Jesus, and invite them to your church.

Your Style

When you are a fisher of men, God will use you in certain ways that He may not use others. Look at how different the apostles were. In Acts 2, Peter is an example of confrontational evangelism. There’s no diplomacy involved. You simply say, “You’re a sinner in need of a Savior, and that’s Jesus.” Some flow effectively in this style, and the Holy Spirit convicts many through them.

Some of us use intellectual evangelism like Paul did in Acts 17. There are unbelievers who have to see the logic of the Gospel. They get hooked on Jesus in their hearts through their minds.

In Mark 5, the maniac of the Gadaranes shared his testimony with family and friends. Relational evangelism is natural for some who are uneasy sharing with strangers but have great success with those to whom they are close.

In Acts 9:36, Dorcas was a seamstress who helped widows and orphans. Service evangelism is for those whose idea of a great day is mowing someone’s lawn or cooking a meal for someone who is sick.

The woman at the well in John 4 yelled in the street, “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (v. 29). Invitational evangelism is inviting people to church, a revival meeting, a crusade, a prayer meeting, a Bible study, or anywhere the Gospel is preached and the Word is taught.

You may have another style, or you may find you operate in a combination of styles. Just be who God called you to be. Sharing Jesus flows out of any heart that desires to see eternal life imparted to somebody else. You don’t need to go to Bible school. God will use

you to share Jesus in day-to-day activities. Just allow the Holy Spirit to lead you.

The Holy Spirit Calls the Shots

The Holy Spirit convicts the unbeliever of sin and is the agent of the new birth. Therefore, when you are “fishing,” you must listen to Him. He will not only lead you to deal wisely and effectively with unbelievers, but He will comfort you if you must endure rejection or persecution.

Jesus told us that if people persecuted Him, they would persecute those who followed Him, and that’s what the Devil will hit you with when you begin to share Jesus with others. Nobody likes to be rejected or labeled a religious weirdo. But what you need to remember is that they are not rejecting you; they are rejecting Jesus. So don’t take it personally!

Some believers incite persecution and rejection because of actions they take without being led by the Holy Spirit. For example, some people act as if they know everything because they’re saved, slapping people in the face with their spirituality. This won’t happen if you stay humble and listen to the Holy Spirit.

According to Acts 1:8, the Holy Spirit was given so we could be witnesses for Jesus. Jesus doesn’t baptize us in the Holy Spirit so we can feel superior to others but to help us to be

fishers of men. If you want to experience the power and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then align yourself with the purpose for His power: fishing for men.

Your Motivation

The Bible tells us how to cultivate a desire to share Jesus: by giving our attention to the reality of hell. If eternal torment is real to you, then you will share your faith! You will be so grateful to Jesus that you don’t have to go there, and you will not want anyone else to go there—especially your loved ones.

I asked God to make hell real to me, and He gave me a dream. A multitude of people pressed toward a cliff, and those in front were falling into a dark abyss. Screams and cries came from below. Then I noticed a nice looking man moving toward the cliff. He was a macho guy, but he was uneasy. He held his little girl’s hand. She looked up at him and asked, “Is everything going to be all right?” He said, “Yes,” and they continued moving toward the abyss.

If you lack motivation to share Jesus, I strongly encourage you to read and study what the Bible says about hell. Ask God to make it real to you. Why? If you’re more concerned that your ungodly friends will call you a Jesus

freak than you are that they are going to hell, then you will not be a fisher of men.

You need to think in eternal terms. Everything you do in this life has an eternal impact. You have an eternal impact on every person the Holy Spirit brings to you. You will either influence them toward eternity in heaven or eternity in hell.

Another great motivation to share Jesus is the fruit you see in this life: new believers with the peace of God in their hearts, restored marriages, children receiving the love and direction they need, and financial stability. In 2 Corinthians 5:14-18, Paul wrote that the love of God constrained him to share Jesus and that every believer has the ministry of reconciliation. We are compelled by the love of God to be ministers of reconciliation, reconciling others to God.

Your Message

Your message to the lost person is simple: “You need Jesus.” If they are skeptical that the Bible is the Word of God or carries the truth they need to be set free, challenge them to try it. It can’t do any more damage than the drugs, alcohol, pornography, crime, violence, working night and day, or other things they are doing to fill the emptiness inside them.

Share how Jesus changed your life—past, present, and for eternity. When you humbly admit your struggles and then tell how the Lord helped you and continues to help you, they can relate to you. Your humility and transparency give you credibility.

Every believer has a great and continuous testimony. No testimony is better than any other. The Holy Spirit will use you and your life to say to someone, “You know, I went through that. I have struggled with that.” Then they will want to hear what you have to say. The most effective message is one heart sharing the love and saving power of Jesus with another heart.

Chapter 8

Three Baptisms

Baptism is a foundational concept for the Christian, but it is often misunderstood. We need to know what the Bible says about it so we can fully obey the Lord. The Greek word that is translated “baptized” or “baptism” is *baptizo*. It means, “to dip, immerse, submerge for a religious purpose, to overwhelm, saturate.”¹ There are three baptisms in a believer’s life.

The Baptism of Regeneration

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Romans 6:3-4

When you were born again, you were baptized into Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and became a member of the body of Christ. Your spirit was regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and that is why it is called the baptism of regeneration. It is amazing how many believers don't know that when they were saved, they were baptized or immersed into Christ.

The baptism of regeneration says that our old man of sin died with Jesus Christ on the cross and was buried with Him. This is called "identification." We identify with Jesus in His death. When we are baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit, our old man dies. But that's not all.

For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Romans 6:5

Our baptism into Christ also means we were raised into newness of life, and the Bible says, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We were born again "in the likeness of his resurrection." The Holy Spirit regenerates our spirit.

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:13

Underscore "one Spirit." The Holy Spirit immerses us into "one body," which is the body of Christ. We become a part of the universal and eternal Church. The baptism of regeneration is a miracle, and the agent of that spiritual transformation is the Holy Spirit. It is His work that causes us to be born again and spiritually made new or regenerated.

First Corinthians 12:13 says that it doesn't matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor. Every true child of God is baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the very first baptism for believers is the baptism of regeneration, or salvation, which is spiritual.

Water Baptism

After we experience the baptism of regeneration, we are baptized in water as an outward show of what has happened to us inwardly. Being immersed in water is the natural act that symbolizes the spiritual act of being immersed into the body of Christ. Throughout the New Testament, we are commanded to be baptized immediately after being born again. Most believers have a desire to be baptized, such as when Philip led the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus.

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

Acts 8:35-39

The qualification for water baptism is stated clearly in verse 37: you must believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. In other words, you must have already experienced the New Birth. That is the prerequisite for water baptism.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:9-10

When people believe in their hearts unto righteousness and confession is made unto salvation, the Holy Spirit works the miracle of the new birth. He spiritually baptizes them into the body of Christ. Once they are saved, they can be water baptized. If you were saved spiritually after you were water baptized, then you should be water baptized again. Now it will really mean something to you!

We also see in Acts 8:38 how to baptize. Philip and the eunuch went “down both into the water,” and verse 39 says, “And when they were come up out of the water.” No room for sprinkling in this passage of Scripture. They went down into the water, and they came up out of the water. That means Philip completely immersed the eunuch in water.

There are many denominations that just sprinkle a person when they are water baptized, so forgive me for correcting you if this has been your experience. However, the word “baptize” clearly means that you must

be totally engulfed by water. Why is this so important? Because being totally immersed in water signifies that you have been totally immersed in Christ—not just sprinkled here and there with Him. Your baptism should demonstrate in the natural exactly what has occurred in your spirit.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

After the baptism of regeneration, we can be water baptized; and we can also be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This is the third baptism for the believer. Like water baptism, you must be born again before you can be baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentence. He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. Matthew 3:11

He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God. John 1:33-34

In these verses, John the Baptist is referring to Jesus. He states that Jesus is the Son of God, who will baptize with the Holy Ghost. In Acts, we see the first instance of Jesus baptizing believers in the Holy Ghost.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:2-4

Jesus said in Acts 1:5, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” In Matthew 3:11 and 1:33, John the Baptist said Jesus would “baptize you with the Holy Ghost,” and that Jesus was “he that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.” Then in Acts 2:4, the Bible says “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” Since Jesus is obviously doing what He and John prophesied He would do, we can logically conclude that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is the same as being filled with the Holy Ghost. When Jesus baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit, they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

I want to add this about being baptized with fire. The only time fire appears with the baptism of the Holy Spirit is in Acts 1:3. My guess is that it is because it is the first time Jesus baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit, and the “cloven tongues of fire” were a miraculous sign that the day had come and they had received what Jesus and John had prophesied. Nowhere else in God’s Word do we see fire manifest when the baptism with the Holy Spirit is given.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

John 1:29

And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. John 1:33

By the Spirit of God, John is illuminating the coming ministry of Jesus. He takes away our sin, and He baptizes with the Holy Ghost. The same Lamb who removes the sin of the world also baptizes with the Holy Ghost. Both are part of His ministry. Although the Church has tried to separate them for generations, we can’t take one and not the other without

perverting Scripture. Furthermore, Hebrews 13:8 states, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”

One of the primary ways that religious tradition tries to sweep the baptism of the Holy Ghost under the rug is by saying that it was a one-time phenomenon to demonstrate the birth of the New Testament Church, that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is not applicable to today’s believers. However, if He is still the Lamb of God who cleanses us from sin, then He must still be the One who baptizes in the Holy Ghost. “Yesterday, and today, and forever.”

You can be baptized with water and with the Holy Ghost if you have been born again and experienced the baptism of regeneration. Your pastor will gladly baptize you in water, and Jesus will gladly baptize you with the Holy Ghost, just like He has countless other believers through the centuries. (If you want to know more details about this experience, I discuss this thoroughly in the first book of the *Water, Wind, & Fire* series: *Understanding the New Birth and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*.)

Prayer of Commitment

Father, in Jesus' name, I come to submit myself fully to You. Jesus has paid the price for my sin, and I have risen with Him into a new life. I embrace the importance of Your Word, and I ask You to help me be a doer of what I hear. I thank You for leading me to the church You want me to attend, where I can grow up in You as I yield to Your plan for my growth. I commit to be a faithful steward who promotes Your purposes with my material resources.

Father, more than anything else I want to know You, and I will pursue an intimate relationship with You in prayer. I recognize the power of my words and will put a guard on my tongue. I will walk in Your love, seeking forgiveness when I sin or offend another, and forgiving those who sin against me. I will not let anything come between me, You, Your people, and Your church.

I will take my place in sharing with others what You have done for me. I ask You to help me make being a fisher of men a part of my lifestyle.

Please continue to perfect me in Your love, Father. I thank You for this incredible new life as Your child. Amen.

Endnotes

Chapter 2

The Local Church and Your Role in It

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² James Strong, Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, "Greek Dictionary of the New Testament" (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), #5426.

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Chapter 5

The Importance of God's Word

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Chapter 7

Walking in Love

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mac Hammond is senior pastor of Living Word Christian Center, a large and growing body of Christian believers in Brooklyn Park (a suburb of Minneapolis), Minnesota. He is the host of the *Winner's Way*

broadcast and author of several internationally distributed books. Mac is broadly acclaimed for his ability to apply the principles of the Bible to practical situations and the challenges of daily living.

Mac Hammond graduated from Virginia Military Institute in 1965 with a Bachelor's degree in English. Upon graduation, he entered the Air Force with a regular officer's commission and reported for pilot training at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. He received his wings in November 1966, and subsequently served two tours of duty in Southeast Asia, accumulating 198 combat missions. He was honorably discharged in 1970 with the rank of Captain.

Between 1970 and 1980, Mac was involved in varying capacities in the general aviation industry including ownership of a successful air cargo business serving the Midwestern United States. A business acquisition brought the Hammonds

to Minneapolis where they ultimately founded Living Word Christian Center in 1980 with 12 people in attendance.

After more than 27 years, that group of twelve people has grown into an active church body of more than 9,000 members. Today some of the outreaches that spring from Living Word include Maranatha Christian Academy, a fully-accredited, pre-K through 12th grade Christian school; Maranatha College, an evening college with an uncompromising Christian environment; Living Free Recovery Services, a state licensed outpatient treatment facility for chemical dependency; The Wells at 7th Street, a multi-faceted outreach to inner-city residents; CFAITH, an online cooperative missionary outreach of hundreds of national and international organizations providing faith-based content; and a national and international media outreach that includes hundreds of audio/video teaching series, the *Winner's Way* broadcast, the *PrayerNotes* e-newsletter, and the *Winner's Way* e-magazine.

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