

Going Deeper With God Every Day

A Devotional To Start The New Year
with Study Guides

H. Carl Shank

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About the Author

In addition to his M.Div. and Th.M. (systematics) work, H. Carl Shank has been a youth, associate, solo, staff and lead pastor in over forty years of church ministry, pastoring beginning and established congregations in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and New York state. His passion for leadership development has resulted in mentoring numerous pastors, teaching in a number of local Bible institutes as well as serving as an adjunct faculty member of The King's College, and training InterVarsity leaders on the East Coast. Carl has been regularly sought out for his acknowledged gifts of discernment and wisdom in dealing with church issues. He had been serving as the Executive Pastor of Pequea Church south of Lancaster, PA, as well as a church health consultant through NCDAmerica. He is recently retired.

Besides numerous seminars and church related articles, his written contributions include "Qoheleth's World and Life View As Seen in His Recurring Phrases," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 37 (1974), 57-73, *Upfront and Indepth: Deeper Devotional Studies on Psalm 119*, *Making Christianity Work: Letters and Lessons on Leadership, Theology and the Church*, *Living Life God's Way: Reflections from the Psalms, Study Guide and Leader's Guide*, and study guides on *Romans*, *Jonah*, *Esther*, and *The Seven Churches of Revelation*. (See Appendix for more information.) Most are available from Lulu Press, Amazon and other booksellers. Carl is married to his wonderful wife, Nancy, and has three grown, married children, Stephen, Jeremy and Heidi. He lives in the Marietta, PA area and can be reached for consulting, seminars or leadership and mentoring development at

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PREFACE

Motivation for this daily devotional for the opening of a new year has come from many sources. I currently write for a subscriber listing of people in various churches and ministries and various stages of life and leadership. Many of them have commented to me over the past few years how much these daily writings have inspired, convicted and helped them along their Christian path.

There are a multitude of fine daily devotional or inspirational writings available. Many have been composed and written by very famous writers inside and outside of the Christian faith. Some of them have historical significance, such as C. H. Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening*, and Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, and the tried and true *Our Daily Bread*. A number of them offer thoughts and insights on selected books of the Bible, such as Liz Curtis Higgs, *31 Proverbs To Light Your Path* or Timothy Keller's *God's Wisdom for Navigating Life: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Book of Proverbs*. There are many others themed for seasons of the year, for Advent, Easter, Black History, Good Friday, Father's Day, or for specific age groups, including children, tweens, teens, boys, girls, women, and men.

What is distinctive about this devotional is that it includes an additional Study Guide attached to most of the daily writings, giving more opportunity to dive into the subject or topic of the devotional. These study guides come from a variety of sources, mostly gleaned from my forty-four years of pastoral and theological study, as well as interactions with church people in a number of churches and ministries I have served in my career.

I am offering this devotional in print and as an ebook, with a follow up for additional devotionals throughout the rest of the year at a dedicated internet address. It is my profound hope and prayer that God would use these writings to help you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Carl Shank
2017

AND BEYOND

More Daily Devotions

This introductory devotional book to this next year is just the beginning of your journey with God. But unlike most other devotional or inspirational books out there, I am directing you to a link I created for daily devotional materials.

You will therefore find daily devotionals for February through December of this new year at:

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/50f56314-7f5f-412f-869b-b463405d4ec4>

Enjoy your journey with God!

JANUARY 1

The Evidence of Time **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

“Pray during and between all your other jobs as much as you can. You cannot retire too much from the mindless chatter of the world. Learn to steal this time in little snatches, and you will find these moments the most precious part of your day” said Francois de Fenelon, a sixteenth century Christian leader. (François de Fénelon, *100 Days in the Secret Place*, Destiny Image Publishers, Shippensburg, PA) The evidence of time. How we use or misuse time determines what we value and what is important or not important to us. As we look forward to a new year, how can we use our time better for God?

Make God your Lord of time. Obviously, God rules all time and determines the end from the beginning and the middle also. But making God Lord of the time He gives me means I live my life centered on Him and His will. If every minute of every day is God's, then I will be consciously aware that I live under His all-seeing and all-knowing eye. Nothing is left to chance or luck or coincidence. Every planned and every unplanned activity is under God's control. Living life for his honor and glory becomes my minute by minute destiny, not a vain or distant hope. Every minute becomes precious and important. Is God the Lord of your time?

Don't waste the time granted to you. This may seem unnecessary to people whose lives are consumed by busyness. But we all have time to do what we want to do, choose to do, or are forced to do. We can waste time by

complaining about it, by frittering it away, by being lazy and unproductive, or by living by the tyranny of the urgent. All of this is a waste of valuable, God-given time. Just getting by day after day is a waste of God-given time. Make a new year's resolution to not waste any more time—and keep it.

Do life at the “right time.” The Apostle Paul talks about the “kairos” moments in living our lives for God — “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:7-10) “Due season” means the “right time.” Sowing to the Spirit reaps eternal life. Doing good to everyone, especially to brothers and sisters in the faith, reaps eternal benefits. Make your moments count for God.

Lord, let me do life at the right time. Help me not to waste time, not to discard time, not to be ruled by time, but to live it for You. Make every moment of this coming new year count. Help me know and do your will in your time.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 1

Leadership Timing Nehemiah 2:1

“The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Susa the citadel ... In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.” (Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1) Leadership timing. Everything sometimes depends on the right timing. Nehemiah waited a full four months until he spoke with the King. What was he doing? Did he need to get up the courage to speak to the King? Did he put off making his request because he was afraid? Was he uncertain as to what he needed to do for God? The answer to all of these kinds of questions is no. Nehemiah had a passion for God and his home city of Jerusalem planted in his very being by God. He had a vision for the rebuilding of the walls that could not be shrugged off to someone else. So, why wait?

God’s timing is often not our timing. We often think that God delays his guidance and answers on our behalf. But that is never true. God’s delays are not God’s denials. It is that He is often preparing the hearts and minds and circumstances of others to receive what we have to give. And it is often to remind us He is sovereignly in charge and will accomplish his purposes in his own time and by his own power. He must get the glory in the end, middle and beginning of a project. We cannot rush God; we cannot “hurry Him up.”

Part of great leadership is learning to wait upon God. Waiting upon God builds passion and trust. Waiting upon God drives God’s vision deeper into our hearts and minds and beings. Waiting upon God brings

us into God's time, the *kairos* or right time, for his purposes to be carried out. We are often in a hurry—too much of a hurry—to accomplish God's will and purposes. We need to develop patience, hope and courage in Him. This requires time.

Finally, there is a right time to put into motion God's plans, especially in an anti-God world and society. Nehemiah was a “nobody” in the Persian court. Being a cupbearer was probably as close to a throw-away job and person as one can get. He tasted the King's wine and drank to see if it was poisonous—a very dangerous undertaking! As the King watched his faithfulness over the months, God moved the King to ask Nehemiah what was wrong, what he needed.

JANUARY 2

Breaking Our Staffs **Exodus 4**

Breaking our staffs. At this point in his life, Moses had been a shepherd. His staff, that is, his work, was to shepherd sheep. With that staff he herded and guarded and protected the flock he watched. His role as shepherd would invite disdain from the Egyptians, and they would know him by his staff. You know, however, the story of how God transformed his staff to become the instrument of judgment upon the Egyptians and deliverance for his people. What about the “staff” in your hand?

God often uses what is despised and counted as nothing among people to do great and mighty things. God took that which was despised and turned it into a God-given sign and weapon of deliverance for an entire nation. Think of what God can do with the lowly instruments of work or play that you use. While we marvel at technological advancements, they are nothing compared to what God can do with a cell phone, or a computer, or an accountant’s adding machine, or a hammer and saw. We should always know this, but sometimes we bemoan our lack of knowledge or strength or gifting for God’s work. Yet, He uses our staffs all the time. They just need to be submitted to the hand of God for Him to use however and whenever and wherever He places us. They just need to be “broken” to be useful to God.

God often surprises us with what He calls us to do with our staffs. One of my friends is a pastor who recently had me perform a church

health analysis of his church in western PA. The needed health factor was “passionate spirituality,” one of the eight universal health factors I use with natural church development. He wrote me, thanking me for the analysis and work with the church, but noted that this area was probably a weak area for him to take the lead in his congregation. Yet, I have seen God do this over and over again in the dozens of congregations with which I have worked. He pinpoints what we consider our weakest point of skill or gifting or strength and uses that as our “broken staffs” to do His mighty work of health and transformation.

In that process God shows that it is not us who gets the glory, but Him alone. It is not our wisdom, our strengths, our skills, our giftedness, but Him alone. Moses depended on his staff, but he had to surrender it to God for a new purpose. Perhaps God wants you to surrender, to break your staff, in this new year for a new purpose. Let God do that in and for you.

Thank You, Lord, for the staff in my hand, my work, my skills, my strengths and gifts. But I freely give them to You to “break” and use however, whenever and wherever You want to accomplish your purposes in this world. May You be honored and glorified in and through me in this new year, however that looks.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 2

No Little People

What Francis Schaeffer wrote some time ago applies equally well today. “Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. ‘God so used a stick of wood’ can be a banner cry for each of us. Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical energy and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is me must become the me of God. Then, I can become useful in God’s hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God. There are no little people and no big people in the true spiritual sense, but only consecrated and unconsecrated people. The problem for each of us is applying this truth to ourselves: Is Francis Schaeffer the Francis Schaeffer of God?

No Little Places

But if a Christian is consecrated, does this mean he will be in a big place instead of a little place? The answer, the next step, is very important: As there are no little people in God’s sight, so there are no little places. To be wholly committed to God in the place where God wants him—this is the creature glorified. In my writing and lecturing I put much emphasis on God’s being the infinite reference point which integrates the intellectual problems of life. He is to be this, but he must be the reference point not only in our thinking but in our living. This means being what he wants me to be, where he wants me to be.

Nowhere more than in America are Christians caught in the twentieth-century syndrome of size. Size will show success. If I am consecrated, there will necessarily be large quantities of people, dollars, etc. This is not so. Not

only does God not say that size and spiritual power go together, but he even reverses this (especially in the teaching of Jesus) and tells us to be deliberately careful not to choose a place too big for us. We all tend to emphasize big works and big places, but all such emphasis is of the flesh. To think in such terms is simply to hearken back to the old, unconverted, egoist, self-centered Me. This attitude, taken from the world, is more dangerous to the Christian than fleshly amusement or practice. It is the flesh. . . .

Jesus commands Christians to seek consciously the lowest room. All of us—pastors, teachers, professional religious workers and non-professional included—are tempted to say, “I will take the larger place because it will give me more influence for Jesus Christ.” Both individual Christians and Christian organizations fall prey to the temptation of rationalizing this way as we build bigger and bigger empires. But according to the Scripture this is backwards: We should consciously take the lowest place unless the Lord himself extrudes us into a greater one.

The word extrude is important here. To be extruded is to be forced out under pressure into a desired shape. Picture a huge press jamming soft metal at high pressure through a die so that the metal comes out in a certain shape. This is the way of the Christian: He should choose the lesser place until God extrudes him into a position of more responsibility and authority. . . .

Each Christian is to be a rod of God in the place of God for him. We must remember throughout our lives that in God’s sight there are no little people and no little places. Only one thing is important: to be consecrated persons in God’s place for us, at each moment. Those who think of themselves as little people in little places, if committed to Christ and living under his Lordship in the whole of life, may, by God’s grace, change the flow of our generation. And as we get on a bit in our lives, knowing how weak we are, if we look back and see we have been somewhat used of God, then we should be the rod ‘surprised by joy.’”

(From “No Little People, No Little Places,” *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, Vol. 3, Crossway Books, 1982 Edition, pp. 60-66.)

JANUARY 3

Church Plantings **Exodus 33:15, 16**

A new church planting. The Church is not a building, not programming, not events, but God's people coming together exercising the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. This can be in a building we call a church, or in a house, or in the workplace. It could be at the local coffee shop or wherever believers gather. What does such a new church planting require?

“Presence” not programs. God's Presence is the key to any church, wherever it meets. One of the marks of a healthy church of whatever size or location or language or gift mix is that God shows up as his people worship. It's called “inspiring worship.” And inspiring worship can happen with a handful or a stadium full of believers. Everything hangs on whether God shows up in the Bible study, in the songs we sing, in the forms we use. If you and another believer gather for prayer and perhaps some Scripture reading at your workplace, you have a church when God shows up in those acts of devotion. You don't even have to go to a certain place at a certain time on a certain day.

Awareness and intentionality. Are you aware of the needs and concerns and spiritual state of your fellow workers, or school buddies, or playground friends? Are you intentionally praying for them, seeking to share a word from Jesus to them at appropriate times, thanking God for whatever happens in the 9-to-5 window? Isn't this what we are supposed to do

in “church” anyway? We live in a part of the country with a number of believers who work together, go to school together, play together. Welcome to church! I have attended what are called “prayer breakfasts,” where a speaker speaks, worship songs are sung, people are prayed with and for. Yet, a prayer breakfast could also be in a restaurant as believers eat together and pray for the waitress or waiter. A prayer breakfast could be a ten minute devotional time as workplace believers gather before plunging into their daily duties.

Lord, today revise my thinking about “church.” Help me see You at work, at play, at school, at the gas station, at the market. As you place me with fellow believers, be our Presence that makes an eternal difference in the lives of those around us. Let us today be the Church!

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 3

Os Hillman is Executive Director of Marketplace Leaders, a ministry aimed at believers in the work-a-day world. He says this about church planting: “God is helping workplace believers today understand the importance of bringing the presence of Jesus into their work lives so that He may be shared with those who have yet to receive salvation. God is calling us to move past “principle-based” living to “presence-based” living. It is only when we bring God’s presence into our work lives that we see real transformation in us and others. It is the mission field of the 21st century—the “9-5” window. It is where more unsaved people live than the 10/40 window. God is calling us to establish “church plants” into this new frontier that the church has failed to focus upon. The “Church” is a Church when two believers come together in the name of Jesus. It is not a building. It is a people. So today, bring the Church to the workplace by focusing your mission activity on the greatest mission field of the 21st century—the 9-5 window.” (Os Hillman, TGIF, Vol 2, Jan 3, 2017, <https://todaygodisfirst.com>)

Perhaps you are thinking of starting a church or a ministry. Having been involved in two church plants and a denominational resource person for a number of Brethren in Christ church plants and growth ministries, several key factors need to be kept in mind. Jim Montgomery of Dawn Ministries in Colorado Springs, CO, suggests thirteen crucial steps: (1) A big vision or dream; (2) Concretely understand the situation and need. Examine the data; (3) Set challenging, realistic and measurable goals; (4) Achieve goal ownership; (5) Give a name to your program or plant; (6) Develop a functional organizational structure; (7) Depend on prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit; (8) Keep your people motivated and informed; (9) Train your people; (10) Have a sound financial policy and plan; (11) Send out missionaries; (12) regularly evaluate your progress and where you

are; and (13) Make new plans. (Dawn Ministries, 7899 Lexington Drive, Suite 200-B, Colorado Springs, CO 80920)

While each of these steps needs quite a bit of development and work, they are the essentials of any new church or ministry planting. I would suggest you consult your pastor or denominational official for their steps and requirements for you to establish any new church or ministry planting.

JANUARY 4

Everything New! **2 Corinthians 5:17;** **Psalm 96:1; Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Everything new! Every true believer in Christ is a “new creation.” God has put a “new song” in our being. We live under a “new covenant,” where God says “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:33, 34) What does it mean to be “new” in the Lord?

There is an inside-out change of being. Being a Christian is not first a change in the outward character, but a renovation in the inner person. This internal renovation creates an outward change of lifestyle and character. While outward changes can be faked or duplicated for a while, they never last, and God, who sees the heart, knows who we really are. This is why Jesus so emphatically said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never

knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:21-23) And doing the will of God comes from inside-out, from the heart, from the center of our being. So, the very first question of this new year should be, Have you had an inside-out change of being?

It means also that we see everything in a new way. Flowers are not just pretty; they are the handiwork of a beautiful God. The sky is not just blue by electromagnetic forces and atmospheric conditions; God made it that way. People are not just objects to be used up; they are image bearers of God Himself, created uniquely in his image and destined for what He wants to accomplish through each of them. To the extent we have “God-eyes” is to the extent we have been made new. This is why God’s mercies are “new every morning” (Psalm 92:1, 2). The job of the Christ-follower is to grow in seeing everything in a “new” way.

Lord, I praise You for my new creation! I thank You for changing me from the inside-out. I adore the works of your hands, the creation all around me.

Help me this day use “new eyes” to see what You want me to see. For the sake of my Savior, Jesus Christ.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 4

Sermon from Romans 6:1-14

The very first thing that the act of baptism signifies is *death*. It announces that a person has “died to sin.” Notice how *insistent* the Apostle Paul here is about this *fact*. The phrase “died to sin” found in vv. 2, 10, 11. and the parallel phrases in vv. 4, 6, 7. Verse 9 says “death no longer has mastery over him,” that is, no longer rules over the person identified with Jesus Christ pictured in the waters of baptism.

But what does “died to sin” mean? It means that true baptism pictures a person who has definitively and decisively had a once-for-all break with the power, the desire and the life of sin. “Died” (aorist tense) signifies a once for all, concluded breach with the condemning power of sin in a person’s life. That is what the Bible says here. This is called “definitive sanctification” by John Murray, a Scottish Presbyterian theologian.

The Bible is not teaching some sort of sinless perfection where a person who has been baptized never sins again. It doesn’t mean a Christian never struggles with temptation or falls into sinful actions or thoughts. What it *does* mean is that a baptized Christian is a person whose life is no longer driven or controlled or conditioned by sinful ways.

Yes, those who have been baptized have died to sin. But they are also *alive* in Jesus Christ. Notice once again the phrases Paul uses to talk about this “new life.” There has been a divine transaction from death to life in the person who has accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord of his or her life. That is the picture symbolized in the waters of baptism—going down into the water signifying death and coming back up signifying resurrection life.

2 Cor. 5:17, 18 puts it this way — “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God

who reconciled us to himself through Christ...” Jesus tells us, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” in John 10:10. That once we walk through Him who is the way, the truth and the life, we become adopted sons and daughters of God and have a new standard, evidence a new drive, possess a new motivation, and live by a new desire.

A new life signified by baptism means commitment. A new life of commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord of my life. Not only does baptism say something was done *in* me and *for* me but it also declares that I affirm my new *owner*, Jesus Christ. “I’m not owned by anyone or anything!” This is foolish! Every man, woman, boy or girl is owned by either God as his or her Master or Satan. Notice 6:17 here in Romans. Baptism is an affirmation of new ownership that changes the way my life operates. See the little word *into* in Rom. 6:3 — “baptized *into* Christ Jesus” indicating discipleship. We become followers of Christ.

Baptism says I am going to live a new life, that I am no longer going to act like a slave to sin, that I will live with Jesus and that I am now alive to God. Therefore, I take a stand for God, for Christ, for righteousness, for a new lifestyle and I am declaring “sin will not longer reign in my mortal body so that I have to obey its evil desires.” (v. 12)

The eminent philosopher, John Dewey, found his son mopping the floor of a flooded bathroom, trying to contain the water in the room. The professor began thinking of the deeper ramifications of the problem to which his son said, “Dad, this is not the time to philosophize. It’s time to mop!”

Baptism is our statement to a watching world that we are ready to stop thinking about or just talking about Christianity. We are ready to start mopping! The early Anabaptists, forerunners to the Brethren in Christ, held that water baptism is a declaration, a testimonial to a new life of commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ. And in their system took baptism so seriously that candidates had to wait until they were 21 to enter the waters of baptism—so that they could count the cost!

So what difference does baptism make practically? Four differences are indicated here in Romans 6. First, a difference in *masters*. Jesus becomes the defining force of my life. Not me, not Satan, not someone else. He becomes

my all in all, as the Bible puts it. Second, my character changes. Instead of impurity, lawlessness, lack of shame over sin; instead of a disregard to God's Word and way; instead of a wanton disregard to what the Lord says and wants, I now become a "slave to righteousness" verse 18 says. Holiness of lifestyle becomes my character. I now *choose not* to sin and instead choose to live by God's standards.

Third, I live from a different source of strength and power. Rather than strength from myself, living an illusion I am free, I now have a real freedom, a new peace, and a new power source for good through the Holy Spirit of Jesus living inside me. Fourth, there is a difference in outcome. Instead of eternal condemnation I have eternal life. Instead of fearing the judgment of God coming, I welcome the coming of Jesus and find that truth exhilarating and life giving. Instead of fearing death I welcome it as going home.

Perhaps you have already been baptized. Have you submitted yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as Master of your every waking moment? Why is this message of "death to sin" so vague, so unique, so hard for us to grasp? It is often because most people who have claimed the name of Jesus have accepted sin as somehow "normal" and "unavoidable." Because most people have refused (a matter of the will) to submit everything to Jesus Christ in their lives. Sin is not merely a mistake, not merely a personality quirk, not merely a social lapse. It is, according to the Bible, heinous and utter lawlessness and rebellion against Almighty God. Some of you hang onto sins and expect God to somehow overlook them and still bless your lives! That's not the way it works.

Did your baptism signify and seal death to sin? If your life has not really been what your baptism signified, I plead with you to come clean with God, turn from those sins, from that rebellion and give your heart, your lifestyle to Jesus Christ as your new Master, your Savior and Lord, The Bible says, "If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Second, rid yourselves of false guilt. Stop pining away in sin. Stop bemoaning your inability to change your life. God says, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Live by

the fact of your God-given forgiveness and change. Think about it. Really appreciate it. Face sin and declare it dead because of Christ.

JANUARY 5

Why Are You Here?

Psalm 139:15; Philippians 3:10; Jeremiah 29:11

Why are you here? Many people, including many unbelievers in Christ, would affirm that they are here, on this earth, for a special purpose. That they were made for more than just a paycheck. That there is more to life than just making it through life. But many would deny that a relationship with God through Jesus Christ is crucial to finding that unique purpose. They feel this “religious” reason has no place in their life journey. What does a relationship with Jesus Christ really give a person?

It fulfills the deepest longings we have as created beings. Evolutionary teaching through the ages has sought to erase this creation aspect from our minds and intentions. Yet, the urge to be something more, something beyond just “being here” does not go away. It does not go away because that desire has been implanted in us by God Himself. To deny this truth does not make it an untruth. Augustine well said that there is a God-created vacuum inside all of us that can only be filled by knowing and worshipping the God who made us. And I would point out that this is a “common ground” aspect of witnessing we can successfully use with unbelievers. We all sense and know these God-given urges.

A relationship with Jesus Christ lays the foundation for everything else we aim for. It is not just being “religious.” It allows us to pursue our dreams with the security and rootedness that all people seek. It gives us stability and purpose in the hardest or darkest of times. It gives us a base

from which to operate. And it gives us a guarantee for an unknown future because it is rooted in the Christ who came to this earth to redeem us and will come again to complete his work in and for us. We as followers of Christ need to trumpet these truths and realities to our unbelieving friends and neighbors. And then pray for them and see God at work in their lives.

Lord, today I praise and thank You for a relationship with Jesus Christ, your Son and my Lord and Savior. He does indeed fill that God-given vacuum in my heart and life and gives me purpose for my life. Help me share Him with others this day. Speak to all those whom I know as unbelievers. Bring them to such a saving relationship. For your honor and glory and their good.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 5

Sermon Outline **Reclaiming God's Plans** Jeremiah 29:1–14

Introduction

“It’s not the outside obstacles that are the most critical ones. The greatest barriers to growth are barriers to the process of thinking and visualizing.” (Carl George) You can only go “where you have imagined to go!”

Building God’s Church and your life here and beyond hangs upon your conception of God — who He is, how He works, and your dependence upon His plans for you.

God is always more interested in us than we are in Him!

God has plans for us!

“For I know the *plans* I have for you, declares the LORD.” (Jer. 29:11a)
God’s plans are God’s thoughts or intentions.

1. They are God’s plans, known by Him!
 - “I” emphatic here
 - Isaiah 55:8,9; Psalm 77:19
2. They are detailed and exhaustive.
3. They are continual.

“For I know the plans I am planning for you . . .” (Hebrew)

4. They are settled.

God’s Plans are good!

Plans to “prosper you and not to harm you.” Actually the Old Testament word is *shalom*.

This term means more than absence of trouble.

It refers to completeness, soundness and wholeness.

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan his work in vain;
God is His own Interpreter
And He will make it plain.”

– William Cowper, 1772

God’s Plans are optimistic!

“. . . plans to give you a hope and a future.”

Hope is the opposite of despair and languishing.

In eternity everything will come into focus (1 Peter 4:12, 13)

God's Plans can be experienced,

if we have a "God-centered obsession" in our lives!

Verses 12–14a.

When we seek God "with all our hearts" there will be a "God-focused obsession" in our lives that propel us to love God and know His plans as He reveals them to us.

- Note Psalm 42
- Note Psalm 63

Application

1. Does God and his plans "drive" your life today?
2. Does God "possess" you and your plans?
3. Fall in love with God through Christ today!

JANUARY 6

Your Job and God's Calling **Genesis 2:15**

Your job and God's calling. What would happen if every believer would see their work, their job, as a "high and holy" calling from God? And that they would treat each client, each customer, each student, each contact as holy, God-ordained appointments? What would be the changes in the workplaces of the world, and in the lives of people we care about?

Quality and excellence would replace just "getting it done." My deceased father was not at all a religious man. He never professed faith in Christ, hardly ever went to church, and believed the Christian establishments were full of hypocrites and hypocrisy. But he had somehow been raised to believe that his work as a carpenter was special, and he saw to it that each nail nailed, each piece of wood sawed, each building and project built was the very best it could be. People commented about how well he did his work. On one house project in the Hershey, PA area, building luxury homes, he spent an entire summer building a cherry staircase. The joints were so well put together that it looked like one piece of continuous wood. Why did he do this? He believed his work reflected himself. He was taught to treat wood with respect, keep his tools in the best shape for the work he was doing, and finish jobs well. Do we as followers of Christ the carpenter treat our work this way?

Our work becomes our witness for Jesus. The most natural, unobtrusive way to witness is by our work. This is where people see our attitudes

displayed, our ethics lived out, our concerns aired and what is important to us shown to others. Treating our work, our day to day jobs, as “high and heavenly” callings, would show Christ to those without Him day after day. The creation mandate of Genesis would be the redemption mandate of the world. And it would not need a pastor, a priest, a missionary to share that with others. After all, a pastor’s job is to prepare people for the work of ministry at their work, according to Ephesians 4. We *can* win this world for Christ one job at a time. Do you believe this? What about your job?

Lord, thank You for the mandate to do our work for your honor and glory and fulfill the purpose of our creation. Help me show Christ’s love and concern and joy and purpose through my work this day, and everyday. And when I get a chance to put your Word to my work, grant me the right words at the right time and in the right places. Save those I work with this day and use the work I do to prepare the way.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 6

“Royal Work”

Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9;

Psalm 90:17; Proverbs 12:11, 14

Colossians 3:23

From its inception in 1882 by a machinist in New York, the first Monday in September was designated to celebrate the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country. Parades, time-off from the regular routine, and celebrations have marked this day. Most Americans look at Labor Day as the official end of summer, the last opportunity for family vacation before the fall schedule. In U.S. sports, Labor Day marks the beginning of the NFL and college football seasons. NCAA teams usually play their first games the weekend of Labor Day, with the NFL traditionally playing their first game the Thursday following Labor Day. The Southern 500 NASCAR auto race was held that day from 1950 to 1983 in Darlington, South Carolina. At Indianapolis Raceway Park, the National Hot Rod Association hold their finals to the U.S. Nationals drag race.

So, let's ask the question: Are you satisfied at work? Contrary to a recent CNBC mini-poll, Gallup's 2013 State of the American Workplace Report which surveyed more than 150,000 full and part time workers, gave the following figures:

- 30% of the American work force are engaged and inspired at work
- 18% are actively disengaged. As Gallup's CEO Jim Clifton puts it, they “roam the halls of the workplace spreading discontent” and cost up to \$550 billion in lost productivity.

- The rest, 52%, have a perpetual case of the Mondays—they are present, but not particularly excited about their job.

What have companies done to make the jobs we have more exciting—and for the company, more productive? Some companies have added work *perks*. The problem with perks is that statistically they come out as less important than job satisfaction. Randy Allen of Cornell's Curtis Johnson Graduate School of Management says perks “don't make up for a boss who is a jerk or tasks that are not stimulating and roles that don't allow workers to grow.”

What about more money? While more money may help hourly employees, it is still not enough in the long term to keep workers happy. Millennials stay at a job filled with perks a little more than a year while the average length of stay for all workers is a little over four years.

Well, what about workplace culture? If I have a workplace that encourages workers to voice opinion and work together better, and try to eliminate the complainers, then will that finally make people happy? It helps, no doubt, but all of these avenues are external to the worker. They don't address the internal problem of contentment or work satisfaction.

God is concerned about your work satisfaction! That may surprise you. You might think all God is concerned about is your religious or spiritual health. No, God made us to work and has given us at least six ways to find work or job satisfaction.

How can I find satisfaction in my work—whether it's in an office setting, or a hands-on construction or labor intensive setting, or school work? Six ways. The first is for everyone to have a faith-relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You are churchgoers, perhaps. You regularly pray and want to do what God wants you to do. You have made a decision to follow the Lord.

See your work as a *royal privilege!* What does that mean? “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

You are not just workers, not just laborers for God, not just ordinary people who do boring, ordinary stuff. No, God says believers are a “chosen

people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God” and thus shining lights to declare God’s praises to everyone around us. Do you see what you have been saved for? Not just to get along, Not just to take up space and time. Not just to earn a paycheck. Not just to go to work. But to act as royal commissioners of the Most High God at the workplace.

Jesus says we are salt and light, a city set on a hill, a light to shine in the darkest places of our world. Paul says that we work “for the Lord,” not just for the man. We work under the auspices, with the blessing and strength and ability and health that God gives us. We fragrance the workplace with our presence and prayers. It’s not just a job, not just school work, but royal work. Do you see your work as a royal privilege?

The second way to find work satisfaction is to practice diligence in your work. Hard, productive, satisfying work comes from working “with all of our heart” as Colossians 3 reminds us. Paul warns the Thessalonian Christians in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 to stay away from those who are lazy and idle. He concludes with the rule, “If a person will not work, he shall not eat.” The Book of Proverbs many times links diligence to earthly reward, so in Proverbs 13:4, for instance, “The sluggard craves and gets nothing; but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.”

Hard and diligent work in the wisdom of Proverbs acts as God’s preventative to falling into sinful patterns—laziness, being a quitter and never finishing anything, or over-dependency on others or the destruction of mental and emotional energy. We’re not talking about unhealthy stress here, or being overly exhausted and unhealthy, but rather a “good days work for a good days pay” as the old adage goes.

Third, satisfaction in work is found in using the right measuring stick. If you think that your life is your work, then you have gotten the cart before the horse. You have mistaken the point of life itself. Who you *are* determines what you do, not what you do measures who you are. We men have terrible sharing habits, don’t we? We tend to identify ourselves by what we *do* rather than who we are!

Jesus reminds us in response to a questioner who wanted him to arbitrate an inheritance in Luke 12 that “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Someone once asked a friend of Rockefeller

how much he left when he died. The friend replied, “All of it.” When was the last time you saw a hearse pull a U-Haul? The happiest richest people in the world are those who give what they have away.

Success in life does not mean or equal success at work. If you think that people will remember you for your work or your wealth or your achievements, then you haven’t gone to enough funerals. They remember your character, your selfless habits, your freely given time with them. Use the right measuring stick for work satisfaction.

Point number four in work satisfaction is this: Work to become a Christ-like *giver* rather than a self-centered taker. This flows from our last point. Paul in instructing the Ephesians in Eph 4:28 puts it this way— “instead he must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” (Ephesians 4:28)

Avoid what is called the “Cain-Complex.” Remember Cain and Abel in the Bible. Early on in the Book of Genesis Cain becomes jealous at his brother Abel and murders him and then tries to cover it up with these words that have gone down into infamy— “Am I my brother’s keeper?” God has made us to be our brother’s keeper. We are the happiest when we serve others. Just listen to the teens and adults coming back from missions trips—just thrilled over the privilege they had to help others—without pay, without pats on the back, without perks. Why so? Because we as a human race are made in community and made for one another. Job satisfaction comes when you help a fellow worker on a project, or another kid at school with a subject he or she can’t quite get. Why is that so much of a personal lift? Because God made us that way. And when we freely give to others, especially at work, we receive back the satisfaction God has built into us.

The fifth point in job satisfaction is to work smarter! You may think that it is just common sense to hear Solomon in Proverbs say, “Make hay while the sun shines—that’s smart; go fishing during harvest—that’s stupid.” (Prov. 10:5) But it is the underlying wisdom principle of seizing the opportunities where and when God gives them to you that brings work satisfaction.

The term “diligent” in Proverbs not only means hard-working. It also refers to work that is wise, sharp and on the cutting edge of the profession

you are in. In his book on *Prosperity and Poverty*, Beisner says “sweat cannot replace thought.”

An interesting point was made in the TV reality show, *Get Out Alive* by Bear Grylls in which at the end of day campfire he exhorts these people going through survival tests to be *smart*—to learn from their experiences and each other. To not do stupid things like dive into a river fully clothed when the clothes on your back are all you have to keep warm in the wild. So, work smarter for job satisfaction.

Then, finally, work so as to enjoy the sweetness of rest. There is a pattern of labor set up by God Himself at creation for a period of rest following a period of work. “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy . . .” (Genesis 2:2,3)

This rest is body, soul, spirit rest. Rejuvenation for resuming work. I love what David Neff says in the book *The Midas Trap*—that this biblically defined one-day-of-rest-in-seven acts as a “weekly rift in time across which is laid a bridge of grace.” Another writer in that same book says that “God calls us to lives with easy rhythm where we have more time for our children and celebration, but also some time for community, and, with God’s help, some time to be a part of his loving intentions in a world exploding with human need.” (Tom Sine, *Midas Trap*, pp 105-106)

Yes, I know. Some people look at sabbath-rest as some legalistic requirement sanctioned by God in the 10 commandments. And they miss the point of rest. Do you rest? Do you have a time period of non-work when you can relax, refresh and rejuvenate? Job satisfaction comes as we keep this pattern of work and rest properly.

Church Colson nails it with this statement: “The key is to restore a high and morally rooted view of work that once again inculcates in American character those historic virtues of the work ethic: industry, thrift, respect for property, pride in craft, and concern for community.”

JANUARY 7

Your Calling **Ephesians 1:18, 19**

Your calling from God. We all have a “high and heavenly” call from God if we are followers of Jesus Christ. God has invested His special work in us. We have the Holy Spirit, a deposit or guarantee of God’s presence and blessing in our lives. What are we called to do for God?

We are called to live for God, at all times, in all places and in every situation and circumstance. We are to function as Christ-followers and “God-watchers” in and to our world. This is a 24/7 calling from God. There is never, ever, a time when we go it alone, when we take a break, when we decide what *we* want to do apart from God. Now, that doesn’t mean we do what God has called us to perfectly or without sin. What it does mean is that we have surrendered and committed our lives, our thoughts, our possessions, our attitudes and desires to God. We live for and with Him. Is this a description of yourself today?

We are called to be distinctively different from the world around us. This may mean that we are looked upon as oddballs, as “different,” because that is who we are in Christ — “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the

flesh, which wage war against your soul.” (1 Peter 2:9-11) “Sojourners and exiles” — is that a description of yourself today? I ask this very important question today because it is too easy and comfortable to “blend in,” to be like those around us, to want to be liked and honored by others. But what really matters is what God thinks of us. This is what calling urges us to be and do.

Lord, today, deliver me from trying to cater to the world around me to gain their favor. Help me know as a child of yours, that I am to live as a “sojourner and exile” in this world until You call me home to be with You. Help me do so, without straying from your calling on my life. May others see Jesus in and through me this day, and turn to You.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 7

The Call of God

The Bible talks about the “call” of God — “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Romans 8:30). Not only is there a definite order to the process of salvation,¹ but there are definite markers to salvation. One of those markers is “calling.” 1 Peter 2:9 tells us God “calls” people “out of darkness into his wonderful light.” People are called of God to be “saints” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2), to “belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6). Peace (Colossians 3:15), freedom (Galatians 5:13), hope (Ephesians 1:18), holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7) and eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12) are resultant evidences of this calling from God.

This calling then is much more than a letter, or a human invitation, or phone call, or a Facebook note or a Tweet. It is, in fact, a sovereign, intimate summons from God the Father that moves people in such a way that they respond to the gospel in repentance and faith.

It is obvious from these verses that this “call” from God results in life change and transformation. This call has been termed by theologians “effective” or “effectual” calling. Something spiritually amazing really happens. It is also obvious this is all God’s doing. It is not engineered by, planned by, motivated by or coerced by human thought, action, intuition or effort. That does not mean that human experience and action are not involved. People so “called” respond in repentance and faith. They move from spiritual darkness to spiritual light. They experience change. But they don’t generate such change.

Not everyone is called in this distinct, divine and effective sense. This call is particular (Galatians 1:15, 16; Ephesians 4:4; Hebrews 9:15; Jude 1; 1

Peter 2:9). The “irresistible” part of this truth flows from Jesus’ own words that “all that the Father gives me will come to me . . . No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him . . .” (John 6:37ff). God’s Word and work in a person’s life cannot falter or fail. An illustration is often given of Jesus “calling” (or summoning) Lazarus from death to life. Just as Jesus spoke life to his body, so Jesus through the Spirit speaks life to our spiritual bodies, with the immediate and effective result that we “come forth” from death to life (cf. John 11:43).

But aren’t people given what is called an “external” call? Yes, this gospel call is crucial and important to the salvation process. It happens when the gospel message is presented and people are urged, encouraged, and often pleaded with to turn to God from their sinful lives and ways. “How, then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” (Romans 10:14) The systematic theologian, Wayne Grudem, puts it this way:

“The gospel call is general and external and often rejected, while the effective call is particular, internal and *always effective* [emphasis his]. However, this is not to diminish the importance of the gospel call—it is the means God has appointed through which effective calling will come. Without the gospel call, no one could respond and be saved!” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 694.)

A substrata of God’s calling is the “call” to perform a very special work for God— “called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God” (1:1). There is a roadside sign near us advertising nursing positions and needs at a local hospital with two nurses and the phrase, “It’s not a job. It’s a calling.” We can and should look at our vocations or job as a “calling” from God. God has given us the talents, the gifts and the ability to do certain work for his honor and glory. It may take a series of jobs or opportunities to “realize” this calling from God. But once it is felt and understood deeply within us, we can say with the sign, “It’s not a job. It’s a calling.” Os Guinness describes it this way: “calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to

his summons and service.” (*The Call*, p. 4)

For more insight, a couple of books can help:

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Eerdmans, 2015 Edition.

Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life*, Thomas Nelson, 2003.

JANUARY 8

The Gift of Time **Psalm 31:14, 15**

“My times are in your hand.” This is the confession of the Psalmist and all those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. I was led to this devotional today by two other devotionals I read on a regular basis. Both commented on the blessing and delay of time and how God uses time in our lives for his glory and our good. One devotional was written in a country where Christians are repeatedly and regularly persecuted. This was the backdrop of the Psalmist’s comments in Psalm 31. How can we see and use time as a gift from God?

God is Lord of all time. This foundational fact allows us to see purpose and truth in whatever is happening. It allows us to know that there are no wasted minutes or hours or seasons in God’s reckoning of things and people. Time is not cyclical, but moving toward a goal that God has ordained and set. Even in the *deja vu* of life, there is forward movement. Our experiences of “sameness” do not thwart or determine what God is doing in and through us. Nothing is quite ever the same since time is moving forward in God’s plan.

Interruptions to us are simply God’s way of slowing us down, of changing our misguided venues, of using us in situations that demand more time and effort than what we want to give. We need to remember this truth and fact in the “sameness” of our experiences.

God wants us to use time wisely and intentionally. For each of us, God

has determined the end from the beginning, and even the middle. We can either use time for what He wants to do in and with us, or we can squander and sinfully waste the time set for each of us. Worry, for instance, is a waste of time. Laziness and doodling misuse the time God has given to us each day. The dictionary defines a “doodle” as a foolish or silly person, and the book of Proverbs constantly contrasts the foolish person and the wise person and how they use or misuse time. So, today be wise and intentional in your use of the gift of time. Accomplish what God wants to do in and through you this day, during this segment of time.

Lord, thank you for the gift of time. Thank you that there is a reason and purpose for the time you give me. Help me use time for your honor and glory and the good of others. Deliver me from worry, fretting, laziness or fear. May I see You in the day's interruptions and submit to your timetable. Remind me over and over that my times are in your hands!

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE
JANUARY 8
(See Study Guide for January 1)

JANUARY 9

Praying for the President **1 Timothy 2:1-3**

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.” (1 Timothy 2:1-3) Praying for the President. Many of us have gone through many elections, and a number of presidential elections. Probably none have been as contentious, divisive, and shattering as this last one.

Having Donald Trump as President to some seems blasphemous, terrible, almost a crime against humanity. One woman TV host’s response to his winning was to place her head over a toilet to puke. Even among conservative Christians, who normally take these things in stride, divisive and even hateful comments have been made against Mr. Trump. As a Christ-follower, however, we are instructed to pray for Mr. Trump, to respect Mr. Trump, to serve under Mr. Trump (See Study Guide on Romans 13 on p. 49). How then do we pray for President-elect Trump?

Pray for his transition from business tycoon to President. It certainly looks and feels like a very rough transition, on all sides. Whatever we may think of this new President, he needs and deserves our prayers. Not prayers for him to fail, to be embarrassed, to flounder. Not prayers of glee and “told-you-so” prayers either. Notice the Apostle’s instructions here—that we “may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

That doesn't at all sound like warfare or hate talk. It is prayer for Mr. Trump to lead in such a way that stability, peace and godliness are the results.

Pray for humbling before God for *all* of us, including Mr. Trump. There has been a lot of ego-talk in the last months. The only way to get to what God wants for us as a nation is for all of us to take several steps back and humble ourselves before the real King of Kings, Jesus Christ. Instead of swagger or defensiveness and anger, we must seek God's guidance of this new President. If we believe he is too proud, too immoral, too self-centered then he is simply a good candidate for the grace and power of God in his life. He is not much different than Paul and Augustine and millions of others who have gone before in history.

Pray against the destructiveness of the Enemy of our souls. And that is not Mr. Trump! Satan delights in causing confusion, fostering lies, acting like a roaring lion seeking to devour anyone who gets in his way, especially Christ-followers. Hate crimes are up, probably indicative of a nation on edge. To lead "quiet and peaceful lives" is going to require multitudes of Christians to pray for the President and his administration. Stand against Satan in prayer! Stand against hate and division and name-calling. Pray instead for peace, for godliness, for dignity for not only us but for Donald Trump as well. It is only then we become biblically informed and intentional Christ-followers.

So, today, dear Lord I do pray humbly and intentionally for President Trump. I pray that You would be his Lord and Savior. I pray that You would guide and show him the way, even in spite of himself. I pray that You would end the hateful divisiveness of this nation, even of your people. Grant us stability, peace and godliness and dignity in such a time as this. For the sake of Jesus, the real King of Kings.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 9

The Christian and Government Romans 13 Study

God has instituted civil government with delegated authority. (13:1, 3, 4, 6) Civil authority is a “servant” of God and a “minister” for the good.

1. What is due Caesar (Jesus’ words in Matt. 22:21; Luke 20:25; Mark 12:17) is due to Caesar only by the providence, purpose and counsel of God.
 - Authority derives from God, not from the governed!
2. Such authority is never absolute, but “delegated.”

All rightful governments are from God and answerable to God.

 - Such justice is not dependent on personal convictions but on God’s law = “for your good” (13:4) meaning what is in accord with the commandments of God (SEE Matthew 19:16ff for use of the term)

Our role is willing, voluntary, Christ-centered obedience to civil authorities. (13:2–7)

- Pay your taxes! (13:6, 7)
- Render proper respect or honor. (13:7, 8)

Christ’s law of love fulfills the demands of the Mosaic law code. (13:8–13)

The continuing debt to love —

“What Paul means when he insists that obedience to this commandment ‘fulfils’ or ‘sums up’ all the other commandments is not the idea that all we need to do to please God is to ‘love’—with the implication that

as long as we have a 'loving' feeling, we can do anything else we please. Nor does Paul mean that loving others is simply the most important commandment in the law, or the spirit in which all the others are to be obeyed. Rather, he is saying that Christians now fulfil all the demands of the Mosaic law (at least those that relate to our obligations to other people) by loving." (*New Bible Commentary*)

Often repeated in the words of Jesus and the NT (John 13:34, 35; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8; 4:11-12; 1 Jn. 4:11)

Knowing the times, we need to live holy and distinctive lives under Christ. (13:11–14)

1. The process of salvation
 - Not just a decision for Jesus at a point in time but ongoing until that Final Day
 - Dictates a continuing lifestyle of Romans 12:1, 2
2. The immediacy of the End
 - Romans 13:11, 12
 - Wake up! (SEE 1 Thes. 5:1–11)

JANUARY 10

Doing Right In Your Own Eyes Deuteronomy 11 and 12

“For you are to cross over the Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you. And when you possess it and live in it, you shall be careful to do all the statutes and the rules that I am setting before you today... For you shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you.” (Deuteronomy 11:31, 32 and 12:8, 9)

What would happen if indeed we had an America where everyone did right in his or her own eyes? Most thinking people would agree that we would have chaos, not true freedom. Ancient Israel was entering their Promised Land. But they were warned by God Himself not to just do what they wanted, but rather to live lives founded on the statutes and commandments of Almighty God. Granted that we no longer live in a theocracy, but we dangerously veer toward license in our conception of liberty. When everybody is right and nobody is wrong, we eventually choose self-destruction as a people. Why should we live under God’s rules?

God’s rules are universally fair and right. The Ten Commandments start out with God’s “nots”—you shall not kill, not steal, not commit adultery and so forth (READ Exodus 20). In this way God not merely tells us what not to do, but gives us wide latitude and freedom to do the polar opposites—to save life, to accumulate possessions, to help others, to honor

marriage and many more. Living under God's rules gives true freedom of expression and care for others. I would posit that our system of freedoms in America was originally crafted with these rules in mind. Our "Promised Land" was thus built on God's laws, not our own. Have we forgotten and forsaken them?

God's rules save us from ourselves. I grew up in the 1960s where the going phrase was, "I'm okay; you're okay." The problem, however, is that apart from God and his grace and rules, none of us is "okay." Our sinful bents and desires overpower and replace what is good and upright and just. None of us can formulate universally fair and godly rules, or even keep them apart from God and his mercy and grace. I say all of this today to remind us that freedom's bottom line is at stake, I believe, in an America where people want to do what is right in their own eyes. God did not permit that in ancient Israel, warning what the outcome would be. Are we better than them?

Lord, O God, keep me close to your heart and your rules. Deliver me from seeking my own selfish and sinful ways. Help me know what true freedom is in following your rules. And help our country reset itself to your ways.

For Jesus' sake.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 10

Marks of End Times People 2 Timothy 3 and 4

“*Know this!*” (2 Timothy 3:1 Introduction)

- Mark this! (NIV)
- Realize this! (NASB)
- Understand this! (RSV)
- Don’t be naive! (The Message)

Pay Attention! Pause, reflect, study. Have a “discriminating apprehension of external impressions.” Possess a knowledge grounded in personal experience. Not — “avoid this!” Not know this for someone else, or someplace else, or for some other time frame. Know what follows is going to be *your* existence, your life context in the last days.

For younger leaders like Timothy, this was especially important since he was a bit resistant and withdrawn. Timothy was temperamentally shy, sensitive, “disposed to lean rather than lead,” but Paul was headed toward martyrdom, and this was his last will and testament to the Church. Timothy was it! Paul wants us to know what life will be like and what to do in response in these “Last Days.”

1. Know the times! (2 Timothy 3:1–9; 4:3, 4)

The Emperor Nero, bent on suppressing all secret societies, and misunderstanding the nature of the Christian Church, seemed determined to destroy it. Heretics appeared to be on the increase. There had recently been an almost total Asian apostasy from Paul’s teaching (indicated in 2 Tim 1:15). Who would do battle for the truth when Paul laid down his life?” (John Stott, *Commentary*)

“Terrible.” The term harkens back to the scene in Matt. 8:28 where Jesus confronted two demon-possessed men. They were “so exceedingly violent (Greek) that no one could pass by that road.” Christianity . . . trembled, humanly speaking, on the verge of annihilation.” (Moule)

But, you may say, that was then! What do those days have to do with today? Paul registers a blanket statement description when he uses the words “in the last days” meaning from the death/resurrection of Jesus to the Second Coming! *Our* days! The Barna Report for Fall 2006 indicated 66% say want to serve God, yet only 15% claim to know God! (Current surveys are worse!) Most say there are many ways to heaven, not Jesus alone. Among younger generations, spirituality on the dark side was increasing — 79% read their horoscope daily; 73% tried psychic/witchcraft activities; 49% engaged in witchcraft; 45% tried psychic activities; 30% encountered demon or angel; 10% commo with dead; 7% claim to have psychic powers.

But why tell us what many of us, including Timothy, already know? Because Paul wants to emphasize that opposition to God’s truth and God’s ways is not a passing situation or fad, but rather a permanent characteristic of the Last Days.

These are times of great stress. Not uniformly evil, or continuously evil, but times pockmarked with physical and mental and spiritual anguish for the Christian believer. There was no time for “idle repose.” (Calvin) Note the hardness of the times was not due to war or famine or plague, but rather the wicked ways and habits of people.

The main problem of these times is that people are lovers of self rather than lovers of God (3:2) This phrase introduces the list of 19 expressions of wickedness or wrong behavior in vv. 2-8 by this godless self-centeredness. There is an interesting picture here of a hedgehog who rolls itself up into a ball so that its prickly side facing outward to others and its soft, warm side kept for itself.

Why do relationships break down in these days? — lovers of self!

Why do families break down in these days? — obedience, gratitude, respect, affection and reasonableness between kids and parents gone!

Religion and morality divorced (v. 5)

The intellectually and morally weak, gullible people of society (vv. 6,7)

(speaking of SOAPS on TV!!) were being led astray.

“always learning but never acknowledging the truth” — colleges today!
Technology today!

It is an age when people will flock to hear popular religious speakers who tell them what they want to hear instead of God’s truth (4:3,4)

2. Know the truth! (2 Timothy 3:14–17)

- a. “All Scripture is God-breathed” (3:16)
- b. All Scripture is profitable (3:16)
- c. Stand firm (“continue” — 3:14) and follow authentic teachers and examples
- d. Be “thoroughly equipped” (3:17)

3. Finish well ! (2 Timothy 4:1–8)

- a. Never lose the sense of urgency or the presence of God! (4:1,2)
- b. Get the gospel message out, no matter when or how (correct, rebuke encourage) (4:2)
- c. Don’t give up! (4:5)
“The harder the times, the bolder the proclamation!” No crown without the cross! Christians are to be self-aware, aware of the times and the people around them and what they need to hear from God, self-controlled (keep your head), expecting and enduring hardship for the sake of God and the truth, fulfilling the call that God has placed on your life (v. 4).
- d. Win the crown! (4:8)

Application

1. Understand the times without indulging in them.
2. Get beyond “grounding” to application of the Bible to all of life and thought.
3. Expect persecution!
4. Live every moment under the watchful eye of an all-seeing God. Remember Joseph – “How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God!?” (Genesis 39:9)

JANUARY 11

Treasures of Darkness **Isaiah 45:3**

“Treasures of darkness” are what God promised Cyrus as he was appointed to punish Israel for their sins. “For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:4-6) It was a dark time for the people of God. Yet, God promised through these events and tragedies a Savior, a Messiah, to be born and brought to this earth for all mankind. What can we learn from God as we go through our “prisons of circumstances?”

We can learn that God and God alone is the Lord. Many people, including many well-meaning Christian people, think they can engineer their circumstances to their ends. After all, technology and technological advances have made so much possible, and the promise of more to come should be able to take care of us, it is reasoned. Yet, we need to learn over and over again that God and God alone is the only One who gives blessing. He and He alone rules and will give his glory to no other. To learn this lesson over and over again is often why we go through prisons of circumstances and periods of darkness. God does not just want mental compliance here, but heartfelt submission and love. Are you learning this

fundamental lesson?

We need to live fully in the moment. Os Hillman well says, “We must live each day to the fullest. We can’t live in the past or in the future. We must live in the moment that God gives us right now. Our time of deliverance will come according to God’s schedule. Meanwhile, we need to be faithful in doing what God has given us to do and be content in the place where He has placed us.” (Os Hillman, TGIF, Vol 2, Jan 12, 2017) It is hard to plow through life. But that is exactly what God wants of us in our prisons of circumstances. He is there, with us, beside us, guiding and guarding us, but we must go through these circumstances for his glory and our eventual good.

As a young boy my family went through a terrible time of financial and emotional hardship. We lived on welfare for five long years, and they were tough and demanding on all of us. My father had gotten so ill that he could not work. Neighbors took mercy on us and at times provided milk and eggs. I searched the neighborhood streets for bottles to return to the store for money for bread. I had to learn to live fully in the moment. Looking back, it was a hard but good lesson.

Cherish the daily lessons in these times. Look for God’s surprising lessons in these dark days and times. Not that there is easy deliverance, but strength to go on day by day and season by season. These lessons can be used for the good and support of others down the road (Read 2 Corinthians 1). My desperate experiences as a boy helped me understand the desperate needs of inner city kids and adults when I worked for a time as a math teacher in a federally funded “model cities” program in the mid 1970s. A gang leader became a friend as I showed him the love of Jesus while understanding his prison of circumstances. God never wastes any of our seasons of life, and He uses lessons learned through difficult times for future good and expectant hope. So, cherish those lessons, though they are hard.

Lord, help us learn your lessons in the prisons of circumstances we move through. Help us know that You are right there with us in these hard and dark times. Cause us to see through them to future use and good for others.

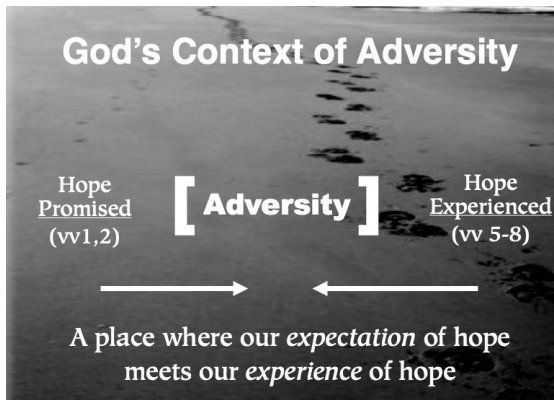
Help me live fully in the moment for your honor and glory.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 11

Going Through Difficult Times Romans 5:1–8 Outline

The Context of Adversity



Adversity is bracketed by hope in the context.

Our problem is one of *perspective*, first of all. We see adversity as an interruption, a bad dream, a cruel joke to life. Few of us see trials and troubles as God's messengers, God's ways to bless and develop us and God's love upon us. We *are* what we *see*, to a great extent.

Our problem is one of living below rather than within the promises of God. What we *believe* is what we *act* upon! So . . .

What about Psalm 23 — “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want!”

What about Isaiah 41:13 — “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”

What about Romans 8:35-37? “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

J.I. Packer has said we as Christians need to “possess our possessions!”

God’s truth about adversity.

Adversity is grounded in faith, founded upon fact, not feelings:

“justified” = God declares us righteous through Jesus Christ

“peace with God” = the status of a right relationship with God

“access by faith” = God’s constant availability through Christ

“hope of the glory of God” = final victory; life forever with God.

***We desperately need to replace human subjectivity
with God’s objectivity!***

More truths . . .

“Bad things happen to good people!” and “When it rains, it pours!”

We *will* have adversity — and plenty of it!

“In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33)

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God”
(Acts 14:22)

Jesus Himself had to suffer (Heb. 2:10; 5:8)

“No pain, no gain!”

“not only so, but on the contrary we also” (v. 3) = exultant rejoicing!

“perseverance” is the ability to handle pressure; steadfastness; endurance.

It is “the characteristic of a person who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety in Christ, even by the greatest of sufferings.”

Romans 12:12 — “be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer”

James 1:12 — “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life

that God has promised to those who love him.”

Hebrews 12:7,8 — “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.”

“character” = “What is left after the fire” (David Stoddard in *The Heart of Mentoring*) Adversity cultivates proven character; gives us concrete evidence, visible proof we are sons and daughters of God in Christ Jesus. The term is used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew) for a “furnace for smelting.” It answers the question, “How do you really know you are a child of God? — By adversity, Paul says! To show that the Christian faith no dream or hallucination or just a mountain-top experience. “God’s rod is a pencil to draw Christ’s image more lively upon us.” (Thomas Watson)

“hope” = more of God alone. Pressures and trials of daily life make God much more real and powerful to us. We start to learn what hope is all about—that it is about final and full trust in God’s ability and power and presence to keep us in life and in death, in sickness and in health, in good times as well as difficult times, in lack of funds as well as in prosperity. God alone becomes our one thing we aim for, seek for, long for, thirst for, and die for!

This kind of hope then “banishes shame” — drives it away; makes us bold for God in this world; gives us confidence in Him for all times and all circumstances. As our hope grows, God “pours out His Spirit of love and power” upon us. Image here of the abundant diffusion of the Spirit in the center of a person’s existence. God becomes real and really powerful to us as we move through adversity to perseverance to character development to experiencing real hope. Called “immediate assurance” by older writers.

“All things work together for good . . .” and “There’s a silver lining under every cloud.” But qualified by the rest of the verse = “... for those who love

him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28)

Application

1. Instead of “Where is God?!” ask, “What does God want to teach me through this?”
2. Instead of “grinning and bearing it,” find ways to actually rejoice in the love of God through it.
3. Find someone to share your pain . . . and God’s comfort from it.

JANUARY 12

Daily “To Do” Lists Micah 6:8

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8) Do you make daily “to do” lists? Probably no list is as profound and as complete as God’s “to do” list for daily living. I love this verse because it is not just a “feel good” verse of Scripture, but a “knowing and doing” verse. It is a call to action, a “to do” list that God gives us each and every day of our lives. Let’s review the list today.

“Do justice.” This is not just a desire to be just in our character, but to practice just behavior in all of our dealings with others. Such behavior is founded on the law of God, not our own sense of fairness or experience. The problem in Micah’s day was that their rulers and judges “cannibalized” the law of God, in their case, the Mosaic law code, and practiced evil and deceitful behavior. Their unregenerate hearts “hated good and loved evil” (Micah 3). It is not enough to know the right, but to *do* the right, to practice ethics according to what God says and wants. Are you *doing* justice day by day?

“Love kindness.” Again, this is not just being kind to people, but with heart and desire and mind living out the demands of the covenant God has made with his people. This is a call to loyalty with God and his Word. This is standing for and with the truth of God. So this is a mandate filled with strength as well as grace and love. We often want to be merciful, but God

calls us to practice true mercy and righteous love, and sometimes “loving kindness” requires rebuke and sternness rather than wimpy sentimentality. Are you keeping your covenant with God day by day?

“Walk humbly.” The *New Bible Commentary* describes walking humbly this way: “and to walk humbly (or ‘to walk [p. 830] thoughtfully’ in the light of the covenant’s requirements) with your God.” “Walking thoughtfully” puts a new twist on humility, doesn’t it? Walking with humility is not being withdrawn, weak, or filled with hesitancy. It is thoughtful living in a world of carelessness and thoughtlessness, in a world described by the Apostle Paul as “lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.” (2 Timothy 3:2-5) That pretty much describes our world, doesn’t it? Christ-followers are to walk thoughtfully in it, keeping covenant with God, and practicing justice according to God’s Word. This should be our daily “to do” list.

So, Lord, enough of the Bible study for today. Help me really and truly “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly” with You in this world this day and everyday. Help me face sin and evil and hate and selfishness with your grace, your love, your Word and your truth. And, after having done all I can, stand for and with You. For Christ’s sake.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 12

Micah 6: 8 Additional Notes

Background

Micah was an 8th century OT prophet who lived about 20 miles south of Jerusalem in the territory of Judaea. The fact that he lived halfway between Jerusalem and Gaza near the Philistine cities tells us that he knew the route invaders would take to capture Jerusalem. Micah prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and he prophesied along with Isaiah, Amos and Hosea.

Inspired by the plea of Amos for justice and the word of Hosea for moral righteousness, Micah sought to awaken Israel to the coming fact of imminent destruction by the invading Assyrians. He condemned rich landlords for their unjust behavior and castigated religious leaders for their condoning and even encouraging immoral and depraved behavior (2:11; 3:10), which they had imbibed from the influence of pagan Canaanite religions.

That brings us to Micah chapter 6 and God's warning to the nation. In verses 1-5 God stands as Judge and brings a lawsuit against the people, a judicial charge. The people respond in vv. 6-7 and that takes us to the famous verse 8.

Follow what God says, not what man supposes.

Notice what is so common are the *religious substitutes* the people come up with:

Burnt offerings = total dedication

Calves a year old = best of the best

Thousands = lavish sacrifices

Firstborn = most valuable possession.

What was wrong?! God did not want their externals; He wanted and still does their hearts! — Their devotion; their obedience; their repentance and submission to Him. “It has been declared clearly to you, O man...” (vs. 8) Note Psalm 51: 16, 17 and Samuel’s word to Saul in 1 Sam. 15: 14ff.

Keep the central things central.

Justice

Rightness rooted in God’s character

“Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgment belongs to God.” (Deuteronomy 1:17)

Gen. 18:25 (Lord standing before Abraham; God about to pronounce judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah) “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and wicked alike! Far be it from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

Ps. 96:13 -- “He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. 103:19-- “The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.”

Mercy

The overwhelming kindness and favor of God especially to His people, or the Just and Holy God not giving us what we as sinners deserve. This mercy is abundant, kept for many, as great as the heavens, the earth is full of it, and it is everlasting.

Note that mercy goes along with, not opposed to, justice or judgment. God is both all-just and all-loving. God is both Holy and gracious at the same time because He is God! (cf. Ex. 34:6,7).

Psalm 145:8 — “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger

and rich in love.”

Lam. 3:22 -- “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed; for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Humility

“An attitude [and lifestyle] in which we recognize our own insignificance and unworthiness before God and attribute to Him the supreme honor, praise, prerogatives, rights, privileges, worship, devotion, authority, submission and obedience that He alone deserves.”
(W. and J. Mack)

Why humility? Because at the root and foundation of every sin, every movement from God, is pride! Pride is what makes us think we can do it ourselves. Pride is what rises up within us when someone disagrees with us, or when someone crosses us. Pride is one of the seven deadly sins listed in the Bible. Pride is what makes men and nations fight. Pride is what keeps brothers and sisters apart in the church. Pride is wanting our way, on our terms, with our thoughts and our mandates. God says NO... Humility is *my* way!

This is humility toward God, “A free and sincere confession of one’s insignificance and sinfulness, and a complete dependence on God for all things.” And humility toward others, “Not being selfishly ambitious and greedy of honor among or over others.”

READ Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 1:31; 5:6; 13:4-7; 2 Cor. 3:5; Philippians 2:3ff; Psalm 147:6.

Do them, rather than just talk about them!

“Establish/do justice”

“Love mercy”

“Walk humbly”

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is just like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law

and Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27)

“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:35, 36, 40)

Prayer of George Washington

“Almighty God, We make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy holy protection . . . And that Thou wilt most graciously be pleased to dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that charity, humility and pacific temper of mind which were the characteristics of the Divine Author of our blessed religion, and without a humble imitation of whose example in these things we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant our supplication, we beseech Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

(George Washington)

JANUARY 13

One Way, One Law **Exodus 12:43–49**

“There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.” (Exodus 12:49). One way, one law. Have you ever wondered why God was so particular and precise with the people of Israel in the Old Testament? The ritual of the Passover was special to God’s people. There were specific instructions as to what kind of lamb to be used, how it was to be killed and eaten, and who should partake of the roasted lamb. The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, in the New Testament age, our age, also has specific requirements and regulations. There are blessings, indeed, but warnings as well. Circumcision was required of all males who would eat the Passover in the Old Testament. Personal faith in Jesus Christ is required for Communion in the New. Why so particular?

God’s ways are not inclusive in the modern sense. Inclusivity is a big deal in a day and age when all kinds of people are to be included in an institution or a sport or an event. There are no barriers of age, race, religion, gender or sexual preference. God did not change his law, his particulars, for the non-Israelite wanting the blessings of Israel. They had to meet God’s standards. They had to abide by God’s way, God’s law. This does not mean the non-Israelite was not invited or welcomed to join the people of God. They just had to conform to the standards set by God Himself. Jesus himself talked about sheep and non-sheep. Most modern people hate to hear such restrictiveness. But God is not so bothered.

God's ways are open to all who conform to those ways. Again, not a welcome thought to the modern man or woman. We want to do what we want to do, think what we want to think, and be who we want to be. We despise restrictiveness. And therefore many reject God's way, God's law. This should not surprise God's people, but neither should it prevent us from inviting others to join us in following the Lord. But we don't bend or break God's rules, God's particulars to do so. Therefore, for example, in celebrating the Lord's Supper, only those who sincerely profess saving faith in Christ are invited to partake. One way, one law.

There are always and only two ways—God's way and those who reject God's ways. There is no middle ground, no neutral way, no common way for all irrespective of their faith and devotion to God. This is why we witness and share Jesus with the unbeliever. Because there are unbelievers who need to be transformed from the inside out to love and honor God's ways. It has always been so, and will remain so until the end of the age. We as Christ-followers need to be re-committed to these truths and re-energize ourselves to share God's ways with our world.

Lord, such a basic truth that your way is the only right and true way. Help me lovingly, yet persistently, share that one way with family and neighbors and friends outside of Christ today. Deliver me from the modern way of inclusivity and help me follow You and your way, your law.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 13

Communion Standards Reformed Presbyterian Church North America

Inclusivity in the celebration of The Lord's Supper, or Communion, has been long debated in the history of the church. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland engaged in such controversy in the 18th century and beyond. While we may shun such distinctions made below as legalism, they were important for the history and practice of that church body. The desire was to strictly adhere to the Word of God.

“In the visible church of Christ, membership involves different privileges for which one must be duly qualified. To hear the Word regularly preached does not automatically qualify a person for baptism, nor does being baptized automatically qualify a person to attend the Lord's Table. Each privilege of the church has its own distinctive prerequisites.

Samuel Rutherford explains: ‘Some be members of the visible church properly and strictly, such as are admitted to all the seals of the covenant and holy things of God. Others are less properly, or in an inferior degree, members of the visible church, such as are baptized and are ordinary hearers of the Word, but not admitted to the Lord's Supper, of old the *Catechumeno*i were such. As there are degrees of citizens, some having all the privileges of the city and some only right to some privileges, but not to all three. Some have right to all and are most properly in the visible church (Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries*, p. 268).’

What Rutherford has just finished saying gives us an important summary of the privileges of church membership. He explains that all members, as mere members, do not have equal access to the signs and seals of the covenant. Some have a right to all privileges while others have a right to

exercise all privileges. We are here saying the same thing as Rutherford, but in more slightly modernized terms. Though we may “possess” the right to all the privileges of the visible church, by virtue of our profession of faith, visible interest in the covenant of grace, and freedom from visible scandal, we are only entitled to “exercise” those rights after we have met the visible qualifications written down in the Word of God.”

(Reformation Principles Re-Exhibited: An Historical Witness & Brotherly Entreaty, Summary and Analysis of Changes within Terms of Communion of the Reformed Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and America from 1761 to the Present, and a Particular Analysis and Testimony Against the Present Day RPCNA, by Greg Barrow & Larry Birger, Jr. (August 5, 2002))

JANUARY 14

Jesus As An Employee **2 Corinthians 4:7**

What would happen if Jesus was the new guy at your workplace? Os Hillman in today's devotional that he writes shares a few of his thoughts – “He would develop new ideas for doing things better (Eph 3:20). He would hang out with sinners in order to develop a relationship with them in order to speak to them about the Father (Mt 9:12). He would strategically pray for each worker about their concerns and their needs. He would pray for those who even disliked Him (Mt 5:44). He would rally the office to support a needy family during Christmas (Jer 22:16). He would offer to pray for those who were sick in the office and see them get healed (Mt 14:14). He would honor the boss and respect him/her (Titus 2:9).” (Os Hillman, TGIF, Vol 2, Jan 15, 2017)

I can think of a few more things Jesus would and would not be doing. He would not bring a big Bible to work, seeking to force its truths on people, and using work time for his personal witnessing agenda. I have actually seen this done by Christian workers. First of all, Jesus would know his Bible so well that he would not need a display or cheat sheet. Then, Jesus would do his assigned tasks so well that people, from the boss down, would love his diligence and work ethic and would see him honor God the Father in it. He would not gossip in break time, not tear down his fellow employees, and not seek his own advancement above their welfare and rights.

He would be a delight to work with and to be around. He would not

have to put on a display of righteousness because he would *be* righteous all the time. He would be positive, upbeat and kind and compassionate toward those going through difficult times. He would challenge the wrong, but in such a way to win others to the right. He would offer to help others in their work and advancement in the company without jealousy or hypocrisy. So, if we know all this, why don't we practice such habits? That's the challenge for our work days.

Lord, thank You for the model and example of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Help me know Him so well and what He wants so well that those around me, especially at work, can see Him through me. May You be honored and glorified and praised in my daily life, especially my work life.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 14

Work Witness or “I Love Mondays!” Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15

God cares about your work—your Mondays! To set the stage for this message, I want us to go back to the creation account itself, found in Genesis 1 and 2 in the Bible, and discover how the working God has placed his special creativity and image in humankind to love their work.

Richard Goosen and Paul Stevens, two leadership gurus, put it this way: “As workers, human beings are called to extend the sanctuary (the Garden) into the world, to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28) by not only populating creation with more human beings but filling it with the glory of God by humanizing the earth through creative work. We do this through inventing better cell phones, farming the land, designing improved computer programs, developing educational programs and creating better images.” (*Entrepreneurial Leadership*, p. 84)

I want you to notice a couple things about God, you and your job from this passage. The creation account places the creation of man and woman, humankind, at the height of God’s creative work—on day six. Unlike the rest of creation God goes back to Himself – “Let *us!*” The model for humanity is going to be God Himself, not that we are divine or gods, but that we have what is called the “image of God” planted in each of us. That image is what makes us creatures with a conscience, wanting to do what is right, giving us a desire to worship, moving us to serve and love the God who made us. That image has been defaced and marred by the fall of humankind into sin, but it still resonates deep within us and our work.

Notice that God *blesses* us. The command to work was given *before* the fall and is meant to be a blessing not a curse. God places His stamp of

approval on us and our work.

And we are put in charge of God's earth through our work. We are made "vice-regents" under God, to act as stewards of God's created order. Psalm 8 puts this amazing truth this way: "Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, Why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way? Yet we've so narrowly missed being gods, bright with Eden's dawn light. You put us in charge of your handcrafted world, repeated to us your Genesis-charge, Made us lords of sheep and cattle, even animals out in the wild, Birds flying and fish swimming, whales singing in the ocean deeps. GOD, brilliant Lord, your name echoes around the world."

God not only wants us to work, but he also *appoints* our work. He did this with the first human being in the Garden of Eden, and He does it today through the bestowal of talents and gifts that each of us carry with us. Notice what He says to Adam— "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" or preserve it. This Hebrew term for work means multiple things—It could refer to agricultural work, as it is here, or to clothing work, or to working in the urban city, or service in the military, or working for another person, or even service to God in ministry. The point is that God makes NO distinction between what we have categorized as "secular" versus "sacred" work. All legitimate work is holy to God. All work is God-appointed, God ordained, God glorifying, or it is supposed to be so.

What this means is huge! The minister's work is not any better, any more godly, any more to be revered than the factory worker, the flag person on the road crew, the office worker, the secretary, or the President of the U.S. If the worker is caring for God's created world, he or she is extending the Garden appointment into this day and age. This religious vs secular distinction simply does not exist in the plan of God. Paul in the letter to the Roman Christians will encourage us to present our entire bodily life, including work, to God as a living sacrifice and spiritual worship. (Rom 12:1,2) No dualism. No division. I personally struggled with the decision to become a math teacher or minister. The counsel given to me then was that I could make a greater impact for the kingdom of God by being a minister of the gospel. I don't believe that any more. And don't you believe it either!

Finally God has made work “good.” He declared his work in creation good including his creation of human beings. He calls us and equips us and appoints us to GOOD work. Sweaty toil and conversely the idolatry of work are the result of the fall, says Goosen and Stevens. Selfish ambition for wealth or power, yes, still infects and affects humanity because of the fall into sin. But it was not meant to be so. Every legitimate job has a God-appointed and a God-defined purpose.

Perhaps the best illustration I can give about work being good and from God comes from my father. My dad was a finish carpenter. He passed away when I was in college. He was not a very religious man. He was not a church goer. But he was a great carpenter. He worked for a time on multi-million dollar homes in the Hershey PA area. He told us kids of a time he spent almost a year on a hand crafted cherry staircase for one of the homes. It was a circular model of craftsmanship. I asked him why it took so long. He told me that he did not want to waste any wood, but he also wanted to make sure the wood grains matched in the lumber he put together. The seams between the wood boards he put together were so precise they literally disappeared. Every night he would come home and hand sharpen his tools, some of which I still have to this day. He once said to me, If a job is worth doing, then it is to be done right. This non-religious man religiously did a good work for God.

Taking this to your job:

1. Find the “good” in your work
2. Remember you are doing God-honoring, holy work
3. Experience God’s blessing for a job well done!

JANUARY 15

Killing Off the Old Man **Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 2:20**

Killing off the “old man.” No, I’m not speaking of a crime against an aged gentleman, but rather a Scriptural phrase about putting to death the sinful self inside all of us. All of us want our own way, and even as Christ-followers we want our own way too many times. We fret and worry and stress over not getting our way. We get angry with others who block us from getting our way. This truly is the “old man” of sin in us, rising up and overcoming for a time the “new man” in us created by Christ Jesus. How do we kill off the “old man?”

Stop trying to do so by ourselves. All people who truly know Jesus believe that we are saved by grace, and grace alone. God Himself has had to take hold of our hearts and minds and emotions and transform them to His will and way. Yes, we believed, but that belief could not have changed us except through the power of God. We deeply know this. But when it comes to daily living, we forget this fundamental fact. Grace and grace alone can save us, not just at the beginning of the salvation journey but all the way to heaven. God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense ((G-R-A-C-E) is the only way to conquer fear and stress and doubt and anger and a plethora of sinful desires, thoughts and actions. Ask for fresh grace today to conquer and put to death the “old man” remaining in you.

Recognize that we have a long way to go. Instant gratification is our way, not God’s way of dealing with us. He takes us bit by bit and piece by

piece into His perfect will. He does this because we have hidden rooms of self-will and pride that need to be opened and conquered. Think of what upsets you today. Why does it upset you? Could it be that one of those doors got opened and self got out–again?? The fight of faith and hope is a daily one, and one that will last until the last day. The old Puritans said that some sins are like dandelion weeds. Until they are individually pulled out by the root, they continue to grow and blossom. No amount of top down treatments will do the final job of killing the weed. So it is with some sins that “so easily beset us.” Let God do a root job on you today. And recognize it is a process, not a once-done deal.

Lord, kill the “old man” within me. Rid me of the self-will and pride and the “I-will-do-it-with-some-help-from-God” kind of thinking and acting today.

Lord, root out the weeds that clog up the shoots of grace and love in me.

*Deliver me from myself that I may live for You. For the sake and honor of
Jesus, my Savior and Lord.*

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE
JANUARY 15
(See Study Guide for January 4)

JANUARY 16

Presumptuous Sins **2 Samuel 6:6–8**

Presumptuous sins. We usually think of sin as doing something wrong against what God wants. We think in mostly active, commission-like sinning. We might have heard about sins of omission, that is, not doing what God wants us to do, or ignoring what God requires. David's sin was the sin of presumption, presuming upon God and acting out of our own limited skill and knowledge. After all, David was a man after God's own heart, a godly king, and one in whom God had entrusted the nation of Israel. Surely, God would understand and grant David a "pass" in this instance. Not so. How do we deal with sins of presumption?

Get to know what God wants. This only comes through careful and diligent study of the Word of God. Thus, for instance, we might think of the sin of adultery as only a physical act. Jesus himself said that to lust after another woman without even touching her is an adulterous act – "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27, 28) Presumptuous sin would be assuming that God would "understand" and grant us a pass over a lustful glance. After all, what harm has been done? God does not relax his standards for our failures.

Make your repentance universal. What I mean by that is to ask God for forgiveness even for sins of presumption and omission, for sins of not

knowing, and therefore, not doing what God requires. Yes, Jesus died for all those sins. But that does not mean they are automatically off the chart and that God will “understand” and forgive us anyway. We need to confess and repent of ALL sin, and this is an active, everyday, dynamic practice. It is not that we are trying to gain favor with God or being legalistic either. It is just being sensitive to God and his requirements, even for those of us who know Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. In fact, that knowledge should drive us to want to confess and repent freely and not presume upon God and his grace.

Stay away from legalism in this regard. It is too easy to become a Pharisee about this area of life and walk before God. That is what the Pharisees of Jesus day did. They became so bent on keeping the Law of God that they invented even more laws supposing that God would be pleased with their diligence and care. He was not. They forgot that true faith is a matter of both the head and heart as well as hands. A humble walk before God in Christ is what Jesus wants of us, not a slavish, duty bound life or checklist. A good check on our daily actions is to remember what one older writer said about God and us–“Thou, God, seeest me!” – and that should keep our hearts, heads and hands in check.

Today, dear Lord, through Jesus my Lord and Savior I ask for forgiveness for all sins that I have committed, including presumptuous sins. Deliver me from thinking and acting as if they don't matter to You. Keep my focus on pleasing You above all else, no matter what anyone else may say. Keep my head and heart and hands in check, doing your will day by day, especially this day.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 16

Self-Examination

Spiritual assessment. How is that going with us? Scripture tells us to “watch ourselves,” to “guard our heart,” to carefully assess our own spirituality and growth in grace. How do we spiritually assess ourselves?

First, we need outside help and accountability. Since our hearts are “deceitful above all things” (Jer.17:9) we cannot and must not trust ourselves to rightly discern spiritual health. Most of us are also simply not honest enough, not aware enough, not investigative enough. That does not mean we don’t try to spiritually discern where we are with the Lord, but we get deceived, distracted and disoriented too much in the process. Every leader needs an accountability partner, someone who will be flatly honest with him or her, someone who knows us and sees us for who we really are, not what we imagine ourselves to be. Regular spiritual accountability must be set up, kept up and followed through.

Then, John Wesley would advise and exhort us to ask the “hard” questions of ourselves everyday, every week and every few months and every year. Have I lied yesterday, last week, last month and so forth, for instance? And, the sin of lying is fairly extensive. From the Larger Catechism of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* we read:

“Q. 143. Which is the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Q. 144. What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?

A. The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our

neighbour, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbours; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging tale-bearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.

Q. 145. What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbours, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful and equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, tale bearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstruing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vain-glorious boasting; thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any, endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful

contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.”
(*The Confession of Faith with The Larger and Shorter Catechisms with the Scripture Proofs at Large Together with The Sum of Saving Knowledge*, The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967 Edition)

And it can be any sin, any fault, any crack in the armor. Again, watch out for self-deception here, thinking ourselves to either be “above” this or that sin or fault, or not prone to it. Do we ask ourselves the hard questions of self-examination?

JANUARY 17

Navigating Fog **Mark 4:10, 11; Isaiah 6:9–12**

“And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.” (Mark 4:10-12) Navigating fog. It is foggy where I live this morning. It was so foggy last evening that everything slowed down to a crawl, and people could hardly see to drive, even through bright car lights. Fog is a vivid reminder of what many people see when they think about God. They cannot see, but continue to drive anyway, hoping beyond hope that they will not have an accident and that they will reach their destination. I would suppose that fog is a normal, natural state of people without a heart relationship with Jesus Christ. How do we navigate through fog?

Have a deeply rooted, heart relationship with Jesus. Jesus had just taught the disciples a parable about “sowing seeds” and the types of ground on which they land. The “seed” is the Word of God and the soils are the hearts of different people. Only one kind of soil will retain and grow the seed so that it produces God-given fruit. Matthew Henry put it this way— “The word does not leave abiding impressions upon the minds of men, because their hearts are not duly disposed to receive it. Impressions that are not deep, will not last. Many do not mind heart-work, without

which religion is nothing. Others are hindered from profiting by the word of God, by abundance of the world. And those who have but little of the world, may yet be ruined by indulging the body. God expects and requires fruit from those who enjoy the gospel, a temper of mind and Christian graces daily exercised, Christian duties duly performed.” (Matthew Henry Commentary on Mark 4)

Understand the problem of foggy thinking and living. Have you ever wondered why people cannot see the harm or trouble in which they place themselves? Have you ever asked why people cannot see the goodness and graciousness of God in their lives? They live in fog. They operate their lives in fog. They think they can see clearly because, after all, they have the headlights of their lives on and suppose they can penetrate the fog without God. The honest ones will say they are hoping beyond hope that everything will finally work out and they will reach a heavenly destination. They need another, much more powerful light to dispel the fog, the light of Christ in their darkened minds and hearts. We are the ones to help them see this light, and walk alongside them in their life journey. Are you the fog lights for your neighbors to see the way ahead?

Lord, thank You for clearing up the fog in my own heart and mind and life. Help me be the fog lights for those trapped by the fog around me. Shine the light of the gospel into their minds and hearts. Make the seed of the Word of God stick firmly in them and produce good fruit. Help me navigate clearly through the fog around me. For the sake of Jesus Christ.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 17

The Fog of Moralism From the Blog of Albert Mohler April 10, 2014

Albert Mohler, President of Southern Seminary, gave an interesting speech about the problem of moralism becoming a substitute for the true gospel of Jesus Christ. This is from his lecture at Brigham Young University on February 25, 2014 and available in his blog site.

“One of the most amazing statements by the Apostle Paul is his indictment of the Galatian Christians for abandoning the Gospel. “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel,” Paul declared. As he stated so emphatically, the Galatians had failed in the crucial test of discerning the authentic Gospel from its counterfeits.

His words could not be more clear: “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you have received, he is to be accursed!” [Gal. 1:6-7]

This warning from the Apostle Paul, expressed in the language of the Apostle’s shock and grief, is addressed not only to the church in Galatia, but to every congregation in every age. In our own day — and in our own churches — we desperately need to hear and to heed this warning. In our own time, we face false gospels no less subversive and seductive than those encountered and embraced by the Galatians.

In our own context, one of the most seductive false gospels is moralism. This false gospel can take many forms and can emerge from any number

of political and cultural impulses. Nevertheless, the basic structure of moralism comes down to this — the belief that the Gospel can be reduced to improvements in behavior.

Sadly, this false gospel is particularly attractive to those who believe themselves to be evangelicals motivated by a biblical impulse. Far too many believers and their churches succumb to the logic of moralism and reduce the Gospel to a message of moral improvement. In other words, we communicate to lost persons the message that what God desires for them and demands of them is to get their lives straight.

In one sense, we are born to be moralists. Created in God's image, we have been given the moral capacity of conscience. From our earliest days our conscience cries out to us the knowledge of our guilt, shortcomings, and misbehaviors. In other words, our conscience communicates our sinfulness. Add to this the fact that the process of parenting and child rearing tends to inculcate moralism from our earliest years. Very quickly we learn that our parents are concerned with our behavior. Well behaved children are rewarded with parental approval, while misbehavior brings parental sanction. This message is reinforced by other authorities in young lives and pervades the culture at large.

Writing about his own childhood in rural Georgia, the novelist Ferrol Sams described the deeply-ingrained tradition of being “raised right.” As he explained, the child who is “raised right” pleases his parents and other adults by adhering to moral conventions and social etiquette. A young person who is “raised right” emerges as an adult who obeys the laws, respects his neighbors, gives at least lip service to religious expectations, and stays away from scandal. The point is clear — this is what parents expect, the culture affirms, and many churches celebrate. But our communities are filled with people who have been “raised right” but are headed for hell.

The seduction of moralism is the essence of its power. We are so easily seduced into believing that we actually can gain all the approval we need by our behavior. Of course, in order to participate in this seduction, we must negotiate a moral code that defines acceptable behavior with innumerable loopholes. Most moralists would not claim to be without sin, but merely beyond scandal. That is considered sufficient.

Moralists can be categorized as both liberal and conservative. In each case, a specific set of moral concerns frames the moral expectation. As a generalization, it is often true that liberals focus on a set of moral expectations related to social ethics while conservatives tend to focus on personal ethics. The essence of moralism is apparent in both — the belief that we can achieve righteousness by means of proper behavior.

The theological temptation of moralism is one many Christians and churches find it difficult to resist. The danger is that the church will communicate by both direct and indirect means that what God expects of fallen humanity is moral improvement. In so doing, the church subverts the Gospel and communicates a false gospel to a fallen world.

Christ's Church has no option but to teach the Word of God, and the Bible faithfully reveals the law of God and a comprehensive moral code. Christians understand that God has revealed Himself throughout creation in such a way that He has gifted all humanity with the restraining power of the law. Furthermore, He has spoken to us in His word with the gift of specific commands and comprehensive moral instruction. The faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ must contend for the righteousness of these commands and the grace given to us in the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. We also have a responsibility to bear witness of this knowledge of good and evil to our neighbors. The restraining power of the law is essential to human community and to civilization.”

(Mohler serves as the president of Southern Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky) An address delivered as a Forum Lecture in the Marriott Center Arena at Brigham Young University on Tuesday, February 25, 2014. <http://www.worldviewchurch.org/wvc-digest/featured-articles/21566-mo...ot-the-gospel-but-many-christians-think-it-is?tmpl=component&print=1>)

JANUARY 18

Listening to Consultants 1 Samuel 9 and 10

Listening to consultants. We might say that Samuel, the prophet, acted as a consultant to Saul and his servant. God had told Samuel what He intended for young Saul and Israel. Samuel obeyed God, invited Saul to eat with him and stay with him overnight. Then, the next day Samuel anointed Saul as the new king of Israel. At least initially, this was a great choice. Saul understood his humble background and amazing choice and was rather embarrassed by all of Samuel's words. What can we learn about listening to consultants sent by God to us?

Our initial search for what we need or want may be redirected by God for a greater good. Many college students change their major two or three times before they launch their careers. And many adults end up changing their initial career plans. For the Christ-follower, this is actually normal and natural. God may have plans for us that redirect our steps and future. God has a master plan for each of us, and as we allow Him to take and mold us His way, He often sends others into our lives for the details of the redirection. Looking for a lost donkey for his father for Saul ended up with his being anointed the next king of Israel. Expect redirection as you seek to follow God and his way for you.

Godly consultants are crucial people for the journey ahead. "Doing it my way" may be a popular song, but it betrays an independence and self-trust that can lead you to a lesser goal than what God wants for you.

In my consulting with churches, there have been many instances where it became obvious that God placed me at the right church in the right time and with the right people for a necessary change or redirection for them. My preparation for all these visits was a simple prayer, “God, use me the way You want for these people.” And God answered that simple prayer over and over again. Follow the advice of Christ-centered consultants and friends. They are simply instruments used by God for the good that you will give many people down the road.

Listen to those under you and around you in this way of redirection. Saul listened to his father’s servant in not turning back and just going home. That humble listening placed Saul in the place and with the person he needed for his life’s calling and direction. He never did find the donkey, but he found the greater good and the God-appointed future for himself and his people. In years of church ministry work, I have listened intently to church secretaries and custodians and often found through them God’s way ahead. The people God has placed around you are there for a reason, and often for a God-given reason and message. Listen to them!

Lord, thank You for the consultants and friends and fellow-workers You place around me and with me in my life’s journey. Help me learn to listen carefully to them for your will for my next steps. May I see the greater good all the time. For your honor and glory.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 18

The Value of A Mentor

“Mentoring is the development of a person through a deliberate transfer of wisdom and character from one person to another with an emphasis on credibility, experience, time, and relationship in the transfer process.” (Bob Shank, “Enhancing Your Ministry Through Mentoring,” *The Pastor’s Update*, Feb. 1993)

“It is also thy duty, O bishop, to have before thine eyes the examples of those who have gone before, and to apply them skillfully to the cases of those who want words of severity or of consolation.” (Apostolic Constitutions, quoted by T.M. Moore, Pastor to Pastor, April 20, 2014, on Psalm 16:3) Mentoring is absolutely necessary in leadership and especially Christian leadership. Not only do people resist “lone-rangers,” they can be dangerous to themselves as well as to others. This is especially true in ministry. Not only do we *need* one another, we must also learn from one another, especially those who have gone before us. I have always pointed out that every leader needs at least three people in his or her life—someone who is their mentor, someone they are mentoring and someone to walk alongside as an accountability partner. A mentor can be a living person, or an historic person from a book, inside or outside the church and Christian ministry role, but someone from whom you can learn wisdom and get directional and informational help. Different seasons of life require different mentors. Here’s some additional clues.

Pick someone as a mentor who can help *you*. This person doesn’t have to be well-known or popular. It can be a person from whom we need to learn a particular skill or trade or advice in a certain area of life and ministry. This person will be able to impart wisdom and direction for a certain area of your

life. This is a very personal choice, and one which requires much prayer on your part for the choice. The Holy Spirit will also then be in the mix.

State a goal or desire for the mentoring. That goal or desire will define how long and how involved the mentoring will be. I would recommend a minimum of a year and no maximum. Meeting once a month seems to be adequate, but every other week can work as well, depending on your needs and desires. Remember that you are learning and growing through the impartation of wisdom or skill.

Have an accountability partner that is different than a mentor. While a mentor *may* be able to be an accountability partner, I would recommend a different person whom you trust with your life, and a mentor may be too specific a choice for that to happen. This is always *your* call and matches *your* needs under God for a “season such as this.”

Some mentoring resources:

Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life, Paul Stanley & Robert Clinton. From their years of research and practical experience, the authors will show you seven types of mentors, how to find the ideal one for you, the dynamics of mentoring, what a balanced range of mentoring relationships look like, and how to avoid failure.

The Fine Art of Mentoring, Ted W. Engstrom. In a culture that has virtually lost the art of teaching by discipling, or mentoring, Dr. Engstrom strongly establishes the importance of teaching and learning as a relationship. He will show you how to lead another person through the process of Christian maturity and then help that person to reproduce that experience with someone else.

Mentoring, Bobb Biehl & Glen Urqhart. From decades of experience the authors demonstrate how to find and how to become mentors. Enlightening and inspiring. (1 cassette and booklet)

Women Mentoring Women, Vickie Kraft. Built on a strong scriptural foundation this book explores ways to start, maintain and expand a biblical women’s ministry. It’s filled with practical ideas and applies to any size church.

The Heart of Godly Leadership, Hudson T. Armerding. The past president

of Wheaton College has written an insightful and challenging book for the modern day church leader. In three chapters on “Exemplifying,” the author calls us to purity, integrity and credibility in helping to lead others. Throughout the book he causes us to see our relationship with others in the shining light of our redeemed relationship with a Holy God.

The Quest for Character, Charles R. Swindoll. This popular Bible teacher gives selected nuggets of wisdom and advice in this devotional giftbook. Divided into two parts, “Guard Your Heart” cautions us to protect ourselves from subtle forces that destroy us from the inside out. Part Two, “Give Your Heart,” urges us to seize the day and give big chunks of your life away as we work with others.

JANUARY 19

The Four Stages of Service **Exodus 33:12; Jeremiah 29:13, 14**

Os Hillman in his devotional cites four ways to serve, actually four stages of looking at our work and our life. We can do “my work, my way,” or “His work, my way,” or “my work, His way,” or finally, “His work, His way.” (Os Hillman, TGIF, Vol 2, Jan 20, 2017) Before we jump to the fourth stage, however, many of us, perhaps all of us, need to go through the first three stages. These stages apply even to ministry in the Name of the Lord. Let us listen carefully to see at what stage we are working for God today.

“My work, my way,” according to Hillman, is the way of the flesh, the normal, natural, human sinful way of work. There have been people, even in Christian ministry, who serve this way. They have worked hard to get where they are. They have trained diligently to get the position they have. They have “paid the price,” they believe, to have the job they have, or even the ministry they serve. It becomes “my work, my way.” This doesn’t mean, however, they don’t believe in serving God. It just means they feel almost a “divine right” to do what they do, their way. After all, God has given it into their hands. It’s up to them now to succeed or fail. This is not what God wants, however.

“His work, my way.” This is the way of those who claim to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, in saving them from their sins, and they are grateful for their work or ministry. They attribute it to God and his doing in their lives. They may realize that they are ultimately working for

God, but they lack the way they perform from their ultimate destiny. They want to do God's work, but "their way," since they know of no other way to proceed. Hillman puts it this way: "When you and I become born-again by the Spirit of God, we begin to focus our attention on living for Christ. We realize it is His work we are doing but it takes time before we learn what it means to do His work, His way."

"My work, His way." This is the lot of many followers of Christ today. They have separated their work-a-day world from God's calling on their lives. They want to perform their jobs or ministries God's way, but it is, after all, their work. They have trained for this work. They have perhaps sacrificed for this work. They want to please God in this work. Barna once said this attitude toward work is shared by 94 percent of those who follow Christ. They do not have what I would call a "world-and-life" Christ-centered viewpoint. They lack a holistic God-centered worldview. They have subtly divorced their work from serving God in and by their work.

"His work, His way." This follower of Christ has put it all together. He or she has surrendered their work to not only what God wants for them, but to do that God-given assignment His way. They seek to know everyday how God wants them to proceed, and if to proceed in what they are doing. They become highly sensitive to God's leading, God's directives, God's anointing. They are ready to move on from what they are doing now to follow God's calling on their lives. Thus, scientists seek to please God in how they do science, in what conclusions they propose, and with what presuppositions they work. Teachers are not just imparting knowledge about this or that subject, but seeking to point students to God as ruler of all and how to use this knowledge to please the Lord. Even in an unbelieving world order, they seek to do "His work, His way" and lead others to that ultimate goal. Where are you in these four ways of work or service? Ask God to help you get to the fourth level.

Lord, today bring me to the place of doing your work, your way. Show and teach me how to proceed, what to do, where to go, and how to get there. I pray that You would not merely be my Guide, but my Lord in this process.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 19

Fulfilling Your Purpose Acts 13:36

“For David...served the purpose of God in his own generation” (Acts 13:36 NASB) Success is fulfilling the complete purpose for which God made you. It has nothing to do with wealth, accomplishments, stature in life, or standard of living. It has to do with living a life of obedience to the Father. And when we live a life of obedience to the Father, we will fulfill the purposes that God had in mind when he made you and me.” Fulfilling your purpose. In the 1981 movie, *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell, a 1924 English Olympic champion runner and a noted missionary to China. is quoted – “When I run I feel His (God’s) pleasure. I was made to run and I was made to be a missionary too.” He fulfilled the purpose for which God made him. It was said that Eric Liddell sold his gold Olympic prize to help feed the hungry of China, He was killed on the mission field. But he, like David, “served the purpose of God in his own generation.” How do we fulfill the purpose of God in our generation?

Seek to understand why you are here. You and I are here not by chance, not by accident, not by good fortune, not by happenstance. We are here by the plan and purposes of God. He created us and, if we are Christians, redeemed us in Jesus Christ. It is amazing and humbling to think that God’s thoughts of us and to us are “more than the sand” (Ps. 139:18). Each one of us is special to God, and sent to this earth with a God-defined purpose. Some would say this is a “calling” from God. Seek to know your calling from God.

Live in obedience. Not slavish legalism, but warm-hearted and loving obedience to our Creator and Redeemer. None of us is perfect. Like David

and Eric Liddell, we will sin and fall many times. The key is what we do after we sin and fall. This is where repentance and faith renewal comes in. These are dynamic qualities, not just once upon a time events. The restrictions of such obedience are not confining. On the other hand, they free us up to fulfill the purpose of God for us each day.

Think of your life like a funnel—wide open at one end but narrow and well-defined at the other. As God puts us through situation after situation, training us and developing us, and disciplining us, the funnel of life narrows. We begin to find our stride. We settle into a life honed and defined by God for us. The end of life here should find us at the narrow end of the funnel. People should say of us— “ For (your name) served the purpose of God in his (or her) generation.” Is that what you want of your life today?

JANUARY 20

Becoming Wise **James 3:13–18**

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:17, 18) Becoming wise. Perhaps nothing greater to possess in this life is wisdom. At least, that’s what young Solomon believed and prayed for in 2 Chronicles 1. God answered Solomon’s prayer and he became known in the world at that time for his astounding wisdom and advice. Much of Proverbs flows from the wisdom writings of Solomon. How do I get to be a wise person?

Fear God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7) No, not be afraid of God, but have a healthy respect and humble demeanor before your Creator and Redeemer. Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your wisdom quotient will dramatically increase. This is the baseline of wisdom.

Ask for wisdom. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5) Wisdom is free and unfettered from God, and it is there for the asking. Ask in faith, however, not doubting, not vacillating between what you want and what God reveals. Wisdom is found in a close walk with Jesus Christ, the source of wisdom. James will later say in his letter that we do not have because we do not ask. I wonder how often we as Christ-followers stumble

around in darkness and questioning because we have not asked God for wisdom in this or that situation. Prayer should be a first step, not a last retreat for us.

Show wisdom by your conduct. “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” (James 3:13) Wisdom is not necessarily being the smartest person in the room, nor the bravest, nor the most outspoken. It is all about demonstrating godly character without fanfare and with steady trust in the God who grants wisdom to us. It is, as James says, “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” Nancy and I have the privilege of being around wise friends. They demonstrate and ooze these character traits. We find their friendship comforting, engaging, encouraging and intelligent. They are wise followers of our Lord and Savior. Find such friends for yourself, and you will grow in wisdom and understanding.

O wise God, grow me in your wisdom and understanding. Fill me with wisdom from above in the situations I face this day. Help me show that wisdom by good character and good choices, even in difficult and disturbing situations. Make me wise way beyond my time on this earth. For your honor and glory.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 20

Leadership Wisdom 1 Kings 3:16–28

“And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.” (1 Kings 3:28) Making hard decisions. This story about the real mother of a surviving child in Solomon’s day may seem out of place in a modern day world with DNA testing and other means to identify the real mother. It is given to us, I believe, to demonstrate several wisdom lessons in making hard decisions, whatever they might be. Notice in the story the identities of the two women are evened out. They are both prostitutes. They both have had a child. There is no initial indication that one is more “moral” or more “righteous” than the other. Both practice sleeping with their child. But one is lying while the other is telling the truth. Whatever our views of the women are, Solomon does not give any indication one is “better” than the other. How do we make hard decisions?

True wisdom comes from God. This is the most obvious lesson in the story. Biblical wisdom is the ability to make everyday life decisions according to God’s will and way. Solomon has been seen, even in his day, as one of the wisest men on earth. You might recall this was his main request before God when he became King of Israel. He asked for wisdom. And God granted him that wisdom and so much more. And though later in his life he squandered that God-given wisdom, the Book of Proverbs gives us plenty of instances of such wisdom in many different situations. Decision making begins with God. We learn God’s ways and God’s will as we read and study His Word and His creation. Every answer to every situation can be found in the Scriptures. We just don’t know them well enough nor

deeply enough to see. In making hard decisions, begin with God and His Word.

The more difficult the decision, the more radical the searching of the heart. Note that Solomon perceived that the true mother would never have wanted her baby killed. Taking a sword and cutting the baby in half would have been horrible and radical. But Solomon knew the heart of people. He knew that the more radical he was, the more desperate the real mother would be to save the child's life. Providing an option that got at the heart of the situation revealed the truth. I have found that many hard decisions are only hard because people are so adept at covering the truth for their own sake. They only reveal truth when pressed where it counts. In making hard decisions choose options that reveal the heart of the matter.

Finally, look for justice. Justice is not being "fair" with people. Justice is pleasing God and God's standards. Solomon here had a grasp on true justice, and this is the outcome people saw. Solomon's goal was to please and demonstrate the justice of God in life's decisions. In a society obsessed with tolerance, justice may not even play in many decisions. But from God's point of view, this is what counts. In making your hard decisions, what is God's way of justice?

JANUARY 21

No Halfway Faith **James 1:6-8; Joshua 5**

“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:6-8) No halfway faith. In Joshua 5 we read about the nation of Israel getting ready to enter the Promised Land of Canaan and conquer Jericho. But first, all the males who had grown up in the desert had to be circumcised. And the daily manna from God stopped. They were to now eat of the fruit of their new land. God says to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” (Joshua 5:9) A new day. A new beginning. A new nation. A new war. And new requirements. What is God saying to us in this new year?

It is all or nothing with God. You cannot have the vestiges of the system of this world together with faith in Christ to move forward. Christians are those who have been “circumcised in Christ” (Colossians 2:11, 12). God has “rolled away” (Hebrew word meaning of “circumcision”) the reproach and trappings of your old life with its old ways and given you a new life. This new life requires all-or-nothing faith to move forward. Dependence on old ways of thinking and doing have to be replaced with new ways of living and thinking. This is the only way to conquer the Jericho’s of our day. This is the only way to enter our Promised Land.

We must move on. There are many who long for the “good old days,”

which were not that “good” at all. It is just that we remember them that way. We conveniently forget the hard times and hard lessons and actually get into nostalgic thinking. Organizational theorists tell us that this is the first stage of uncertainty and death. This is true in church life as well as institutional life. Israel could no longer depend on the daily manna from heaven. They now had to sow and plant and reap the fruit of their new land. They had to move on. “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13, 14) Press on. Move on. Fight on.

I thank You, O Lord, for my new life in Christ. I praise You for the gift of a new year, with new opportunities and new battles for You. Deliver me from dependence on old ways and halfway faith. Help me seize a new day in your power and grace and love.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 21

Yesterday Ended Last Night Mark 2:18-22

What did Jesus face in his ministry? Religious people that have a problem with true religion! The past becomes the predictor of the future. The old becomes “good enough.” Tradition becomes traditionalism. One commentator notes that the words of Jesus must be applied to every church at every age and every stage. “The principle is a broader one, one applicable to the constricting influence of Christian traditions as it is to the context of 1st century Judaism.” (R.T. France, *Commentary on Mark*, p. 142)

You might think the Christian Church is doing fine, however. Not so, say the recent surveys and statistics. Barna Associates from their consistent surveys over the years say, “No” — Most people (99%) believe they can and will go to heaven, but a majority (61%) say this is possible without accepting Christ. Most people (96%) and most Christians (91%) have no biblical, comprehensive worldview. More people claim to be “Christians” (84%), but are morally corrupt! 60% support cohabitation; 42% support adultery; 30% support homosexuality (that number has risen since 2003); 45% support abortion on demand; 36% use profanity; and, 61% support gambling.

What about our Christian traditions? Non-Christians have a high self-love. They are reformulating Christianity to fit “us,” and have a “designer” faith with rootless values. At the end of 2007, 16-to-29 year olds have expressed a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than previous generations. Only 3% express favorable views of evangelicals. It is an increasingly hostile and negative age. This means that today’s young non-Christians are eight times less likely to experience positive associations

toward evangelicals than were non-Christians of the Boomer generation (25%). Common negative perceptions included:

- present day Christianity is judgmental (87%)
- hypocritical (85%)
- old-fashioned (78%)
- too involved in politics

What makes this biting for the Christian church today is that these perceptions were rooted in specific stories and personal interactions with Christians and with churches. Most senior pastors across America have contended that “ministry is more difficult than ever before because people are increasingly hostile and negative toward Christianity.”

There is a national church leader that has a sign in his office which reads: “Yesterday ended last night!” He likes the sign because when he wants to bask in accomplishments of the past, or have a pity-party over the failures, or wants to stay with the comfortable, he looks at the sign and says to himself: “Okay, that was yesterday. That’s over. Go home, go to bed and get ready for another day.” He adds: “Life is not a snapshot. It would be wonderful if at the best day or point of your life you could take a picture of it and assume nothing will ever change. But it will change, and if you don’t change with it, what got you there yesterday won’t keep you there in the future. Yesterday ended last night!”

So, what has to change according to Jesus for individuals and churches in America as we approach 2018? We must, according to Jesus, change the way we “see” the faith and prepare for a “new” way. We must first of all, move from ritual to relationship. Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day:

- Your religious routines won’t save you!
- Your religious routines won’t make you ready for the Messiah!
- Your religious routines are actually blinding you to the present reality — I am here! Open your eyes and see! Really see!

Oh, yes, we say, they missed Jesus alright! He was standing and ministering in their midst and they missed him! Now, let me ask all of us the hard question: How about yourself? Are your religious routines obscuring your faith sight of the Savior?! Are we going to church and doing

churchy things but missing the present view of the King of Kings? Are we doing church yet missing Jesus?! Are we trusting our religious routines, like the Pharisees of old, rather than in Him?!

Secondly, we must change from man centered rules to Christ centered freedom. Have our rules and regulations and practices kept us from the sheer freedom that Christ has bought for us by his death and resurrection? Romans 8:1, 2 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.” And in v. 15, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship/adoption. And by him we cry, “Abba, father!” And v. 24 notes, “For in this hope we were saved.” From “fasting” to “feasting.” How many “rules” have we added to the faith?

Jesus says we must prepare for a new way! We cannot just upgrade or make cosmetic changes. Jesus uses language and imagery here to indicate radical change is needed. “New” means qualitatively different — a “new” piece of cloth, “new” wine. Not “what we’ve always done!” The “Same old/same old” not good enough. Not just an upgrade or enhancement is needed. First, says Jesus, there is a new way to worship. It is to be with great joy, which we are reminded of in the Christmas story of the shepherds who in Luke 2 could not keep quiet about the baby Jesus. Worship with new songs — The presence of Jesus means celebration. “Party time” in the sense of unadulterated, sheer joy, freshness and fervor. That’s what the exhortation to sing a “new song” is all about in the Psalms, now come to fruition in the coming of Jesus Christ:

Psalm 33:3 — “Sing to him a new song. Play skillfully and shout for joy.”

Psalm 40:3 — “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.” Worship as witness!!

Psalm 96:1 — “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.”

Psalm 98:1 — ‘Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.’

Psalm 144:9 — “I will sing a new song to you, O God...”

Psalm 149:1 — “Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints.” Yes, worship will someday be completed and consummated in heaven but it should look the same right here, right now!

King Jesus has come! We eat, sleep, work, play and live in His presence every day! We must see the world the way GOD sees it:

“I have come to call sinners . . .” (v. 17)

“I have come to give forgiveness” (v. 5)

A “whatever-it-takes” love and attitude

Jesus wants a new you! A move from ritual to relationship, from rules to freedom, from “doing” to “done”. Instead of practicing your faith to earn God’s favor, you practice your faith to *show* God’s favor, his grace and presence in your life. How will the coming of Jesus change your life in this new year?

How will the coming of Jesus change your worship in this new year? The issue is not and has never been “contemporary” vs. “traditional” or “emergent” vs. “blended” or whatever. The real issue is, “Is my and is our worship fresh, vibrant, filled with great joy and freedom? Is our worship reflective of heaven? Does my worship use all the skills God has given me and this church?”

How should ministry look in this new year? We need plans to help make us more “missional” and more “community-involved.” How will the coming of Jesus change your view of our world in this new year? The world God so loved and still does. The world right here and right now. The real question for this new year for us all, individually and corporately as churches, is “Does whatever I do really matter for God and for eternity?! Yesterday ended last night!

JANUARY 22

Be Fruitful

Joshua 5:12; Deuteronomy 28; Genesis 1:28, 29

Be fruitful. This was the first command to Adam and Eve in the Garden. They were to “be fruitful.” God had given them the land to work and produce fruit. This was Paradise—to labor intensely for God and his glory and enjoy the fruit of the land. This is also why, deep within, we feel great satisfaction when we do our work well, when we succeed, when we work hard and enjoy the fruits of our labors. God made us this way. Let’s meditate a bit on “being fruitful.”

Be fruitful means to work responsibly and work hard. Just like the Israelites, we are to do our work to enjoy the fruit of the land. The supernatural provision of manna had now stopped for them. They were out of the desert, out of the wilderness and in their Promised Land. They had to work it. They had to labor to eat and flourish. Most of the time, we have to work, and work diligently, for the fruit of our land. Growing up on a farm, I know the meaning of working the land, of laboring intensely, of waiting for God to grant the sun and rain for seed to grow and then for us to harvest the crops. And, this truth rings valid for all kinds of work for all kinds of people. This is the creation mandate under which we live day by day.

Be fruitful means to let go of dependence on supernatural blessings. Let me be clear here, however. This does not mean we work and labor without God and dependence on God. What it does mean is that we expect God’s

blessings through our hard work, not as a substitute for it. The latter is just plain laziness, and a sin against the mandate God has given us. Yes, we can praise God for his intervention at times to shore us up, to miraculously provide when hard work is not enough, to show us that all blessing still comes from his hand. But we should not regularly expect or insist upon it. That is presumption, not faith. God has granted us the marketplace in which to be fruitful. Adam and Eve's Paradise had to be worked to be enjoyed.

Lord, today let me be fruitful in the work You have given me to do. Deliver me from seeking a blessing from You without hard work. Help me learn to be diligent, to dig deep, to fulfill the mandate with which You created me and my work. For your honor and glory.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 22

Defining Success Deuteronomy 8:13; Romans 12:3

“The greater our success, the greater the risk of us thinking too highly of ourselves. Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle observed, “Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity there are a hundred that will stand adversity.” And Oswald Chambers wrote, “Sudden elevation frequently leads to pride and a fall. The most exacting test of all to survive is prosperity.” (Os Hillman, TGIF, Vol 2, June 10, 2015) Defining success. Some people define success as the American dream (whatever that is today), a comfortable salary, esteem in the eyes of others, and perhaps a vacation place at Hilton Head Island. It seems that most people define success as “comfortability” or things in easy reach or grasp. Few think of success as adversity, struggle, living from paycheck to paycheck, fear of the future. How do we define success God’s way?

Success is always a gift. It is a gracious gift from a loving God who grants prosperity, comforts and influence. We may think we have earned success or have a right to success, but apart from God it is a vapor that vanishes in the morning mist or is washed away by a summer storm. We have all seen fortunes lost, abilities severely curtailed by injuries, and influence shattered. It is only by the providential grace of God that we have what we have and can enjoy what we have. Apart from that sustaining grace, success is not to be found or kept.

Success is not defined by things but character development. *How* we spend what God grants us is far more important than on *what* we spend. If we are becoming more enamored with ourselves and our things, then success has vanished. We can become preoccupied by the petty bobbles

of this world and lose honesty, integrity, godly values and care for others. Have you grown more like Jesus in your success development? If not, you are not successful in God's sight.

JANUARY 23

Learning Together **1 Corinthians 14:26**

Learning together. It is called “community hermeneutic” in Brethren circles. We learn a passage together as each believer shares his or her insights and knowledge. Other traditions call it “inductive Bible study.” In many places such learning is only second-best, and the preferred teaching and knowledge dispensing method is being taught by one trained person. He or she handles the “mysteries” of the kingdom of God, it is said. There has been a background debate for years now as to which is the preferred method of learning. I believe both have a place and both are needed in learning the Word of God. How should we learn together?

Learning together does not mean sharing our ignorance. I have been in many small groups over the years. I have facilitated many of those groups. They are great for sharing life and God’s working in our lives. But they are not so great at learning the Word of God. Often, it is shared ignorance applied to the Scriptures. Few have studied the passages discussed to really know the word meanings, background context, the grammatical and historical truths behind the passage in question. So people share what they feel or think without much regard to the real meaning of the passage. This is not how to learn God’s Word together. In fact, many wrong conclusions and deductions can be made.

Learning together requires mutual study with leaders that have more closely studied the passage in question. It is true that with such a group

we can learn the Word of God in a better and fuller way. Individuals may miss something that others see or know. Thus, we should value the wealth of study materials available in Bible study today and use these resources wisely and carefully. I have learned quite a while ago that although I am a trained minister, I have much to learn not merely from books but also from the insights of others around me. This is the value of learning together.

Learning together means a more intentional dependence on the Holy Spirit, our main Teacher of the Word of God. This is not mysticism or subjectivism. It is submission to the insights given by God Himself to a group of people. To deny such insights is to deny the gifts of the Spirit, according to 1 Corinthians 14. God often speaks through people who have prayed through a passage of Scripture and then come together to share what God has revealed to them. This is real and profitable learning together. Whatever venue of learning the Word of God we use, we should always seek to learn together.

Lord, today help me learn from other believers around me. Deliver me from prideful thinking that I can know it all. Deliver me from not being part of a group that learns together. Help me share what You tell me with others as well. May we know You and your Word better day by day.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 23

Effective Small Groups

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience. Feel free to modify anything that does not work for your group.

If the idea of written guidelines is unfamiliar to your group, we encourage you to give it a try. Agreed upon values help a small group to be on target and effective. They have a clear purpose, which is growing healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small group community. They believe in group attendance, giving priority to the group meetings (calling if I am absent or late). They foster a safe environment, helping to create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgements, or simple fixes). They stress confidentiality, keeping anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group. They foster spiritual health, giving group members permission to help each other live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God. They welcome newcomers, allowing people to invite friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers. And they build relationships, getting to know the other members of the group and praying for them regularly.

To achieve these aims or goals, they form a group covenant, agreeing to group rules which include making group meetings a priority, participation by everyone, with a given right to one's opinion and all questions are respected. The group covenant stresses confidentiality, that anything said in the meeting is not to be repeated outside the meeting. They have a philosophy of what is called the "empty chair," staying open to new people

and inviting prospective members to visit the group. They give mutual support, permission to call each other in times of need. Unsolicited advice is not allowed. Finally, the covenant stresses mission: We will do all that is in our power to start a new group. Such a covenant is drafted and signed by every group member a month into the meetings, which can be weekly or bi-weekly.

Healthy small groups multiply organically. That means that after a year or so, they either have grown too large for effective care and communication, or they hive off and start a new group. Groups that do not multiply become stale, uneventful and unproductive for the kingdom of God.

If you have been a part of a healthy group, much of the above advice is normal to you. If not, you have the opportunity along with other interested and committed believers to start such a group.

(Much of this advice comes from Rick Warren, Saddleback Church, CA, and his “Forty Days” series of studies and messages.)

JANUARY 24

God Is Able! **2 Corinthians 9:8**

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8) God is able! I have a close friend who is looking for a job. He has been diligently looking for a while now, is eminently qualified, but a bit older in the job market. There have been a number of possibilities and interviews, but he is still looking. He is in my daily prayers. Another devotional writer today reminded me of God’s faithfulness and readiness to meet our every job need. He was assigned a seemingly impossible sales task, expected to fail, yet God came through for him, and he became an executive in that company. What do we do when faced with seemingly impossible odds in the job market?

Remember that *God is able!* We say it, pray it, tell it to others, but do we personally believe that, indeed, God is able in my situation, my case, to come through and bless me? The Christian life is a matter of faith, not blind faith, not cheap faith, not roll-of-the-dice faith. It is faith in a God who has promised to be always there for us, always watching over us, always able to provide for us. We simply need to trust in His ability and power and love in seemingly impossible odds set against us. Is that your faith today?

God is able in *all things!* Did you catch that word “all” in the quoted verse? “So that having ALL sufficiency in ALL things at ALL times.” Nothing is left to chance or luck or coincidence with God. Not a microcosm is out of

God's sight or care. Remember what Jesus said – "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26) Jesus goes on in that passage to say that we should not become anxious or give in to worry and fretting. God has your back. The Creator God is in control of every situation, every mind, every need and will provide in His timing and His way for His people. Always. Everywhere. In all things.

Lord, today I do pray for my long time friend looking for a job. I pray that his faith will not fail. I pray that You would soon provide him with a good job. I pray that You will care for him and his family in this season. Be his hope and stay. And for all of your people facing seemingly impossible things today, remind them that You are able!

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE JANUARY 24

Psalm 23 – A Study

1. **Introduction.** Psalm 23 has been one of the most precious Psalms of David that the Christian and the Church have ever memorized and sung. While modern commentators have tried to find an appropriate _____ [Note that the fill-in-the-blank answers are below] for this Psalm, it retains its power and comfort for both the individual and the body of Christ.

Thus, Derek Kidner's words ring true: "Depth and strength underlie the simplicity of this psalm. Its peace is not escape; its contentment is not complacency: There is a readiness to face deep darkness and imminent attack, and the climax reveals a love which homes toward no material goal but to the Lord Himself." (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, InterVarsity, 1993)

So we shall investigate this Psalm verse-by-verse because it is so rich.

2. **Verse 1 – My Shepherd**

a. "The Lord" placed at the beginning has an _____ sense – God and _____ else!

b. "my shepherd" = a _____ and _____ relationship. Shepherd verses – Gen. 48:15; 49:24; Num. 27:17; Ps. 28:9; 78:71; 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10; Ezek. 34:15; Micah 5:4; Matt. 2:6; 9:36; John 10; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4; Rev. 7:17.

c. "not be in want" = not live in a _____ of desperation or despair.

3. **Verse 2 – My Adequacy**

a. "green pastures" = _____ his flock

b. "quiet waters" = places of _____ and quiet

4. **Verse 3 – My Restorer**

- a. Two possible pictures here. The first is a picture of bringing back a _____ sheep (Isa. 49:5; Ps. 60:1 and Ps. 19:7), giving spiritual renewal.
 - b. The second sense is _____ since “my soul” often refers to my physical or psychological state (cf. Isa. 58:12).
 - c. “paths of righteousness” indicates _____ and _____ paths, keeping us morally straight.
5. **Verse 4 – My Overcomer**
- a. “valley of the shadow of death” = taking the _____ out of darkness, even death itself.
 - b. “you are with me” = The Shepherd comes _____ us, escorting us through enemies by his _____ (club worn at the belt) and _____ (hooked and long stick to round up the flock), giving _____ and _____ for the flock.
6. **Verse 5 – My Friend**
- a. “prepare a table” = setting out a feast or preparing a defense, giving _____ under pressure (cf. Rom. 8:31-39) and providing infinite _____ in the worst of situations.
 - b. “my cup overflows” = God gives us the _____ over the worst of enemies and spiritual foes. (Picture of a victory celebration where the enemies are present as captives; the defeated rivals are there as reluctant guests.)
7. **Verse 6 – My Eternal Hope**
- a. To be God’s guest is more than an acquaintance, it is to _____ with Him.
 - b. Life is a _____ which is a journey _____.
 - c. “goodness and mercy” = God’s nature as Good and His covenant love gives us steady _____ and lifelong _____, something we can always count on “for length of days,” an expression for eternity.
 - d. “will follow” = These qualities of God will “follow” us, meaning that God is not only with us but fighting _____ us.

“Wherever he may guide me
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way he taketh,
And I will walk with him”
(Anna Waring)

ANSWERS: 1. Setting. 2a. emphatic; no one; b. personal; pledged; c. state.
3a. feeding; b. rest. 4a. straying; b. refreshment; c. right; straight. 5a. sting;
b. alongside; rod; staff; defense; control. 6a. assurance; resources; b. victory.
7a. live; b. pilgrimage; home; c. kindness; support; d. for.

JANUARY 25

Working With Rather Than For Jesus **John 15**

Working with rather than for Jesus. I know many hard-working and diligent Christians. They serve their churches well. They are on a dozen committees and work crews and fill their schedules with working for the Lord. They are committed, diligent, gifted followers of Jesus Christ. So was Philip and the rest of the eleven disciples. Philip and the others worked hard being disciples. But they hardly knew the real Jesus. “Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:8, 9) How do we work *with* Jesus instead of just *for* Jesus?

Know Him. Don't just do what He wants and be busy for Him. Love Him. Have a deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. Know Him as the branches of a vine know their roots. Derive life and sustenance from Him. Grow down as well as up in Him. This is what the Apostle Paul wanted – “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10). Not just facts about Jesus, not just good theology about the Son of God, not just acquaintance with his writings and words, but a true, sincere, and growing knowledge of His Person. My wife, Nancy, would be very displeased if I just knew about her and just helped her around the house. I could even know her habits and her likes and dislikes, and yet not really know her. So, my

goal in marriage is to know Nancy, really and deeply and truly. Intimacy is the key. And so it is with Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him. Do you *know* Jesus?

Value Him. As a consultant I do what is called “core values discovery” with churches and ministries. This is an exercise of getting past the stated goals and trappings of a ministry or church and finding out what they would live and die for, if it came to that. These core values turn out to be more than just a larger worshipping attendance or a better building or more work projects for the community. They are things like holding fast to the Word of God, worship that connects the people to the presence of God, joyful giving and service for God and others like this. Such core values define the heart and nature of a church or a ministry. What are your core values in following Jesus Christ? What would you live and die for in your relationship with Jesus?

Lord, today help me know You better and deeper and with much more intimacy and power and love. Help me not merely work for You, but know You. Grow me as a branch in the vine, healthy, maturing, growing and reaching both up and down. That others around me may see You in and through me.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 25

Intimacy With God Psalm 27

“I’ve heard from God! It’s great! I can do anything for Him.”

The triumph of God with me (Psalm 27:1-6)

“It’s over now . . . The excitement is gone . . .

The pace has changed . . . Still searching.”

Where is God now? (Psalm 27:7-12)

Psalm 27 records the journey of David in the Old Testament before he became king of Israel. It tells the journey of a man who clearly heard from God at times, but then doubted if he really heard from God and then had to choose what to do for the long haul. Just a bit of background here to this Psalm. It is written by David probably during his flight from King Saul and his army as recorded in 1 Samuel. David is fleeing from what he considers certain death from real live enemies. He experiences God’s deliverance a number of times yet continues on the run. This Psalm is what one writer calls a “moody” Psalm because of its definite mood swing from verses 1-6 to verses 7-12. Note the mood swings.

Isn’t this the way life is, including one’s spiritual life? We have these “highs” of delight and ecstasy and feeling the presence of God and that we can do anything for Him, the mountain top experiences, but soon there follows the valleys, the doubts, the fears, the inward wrestling—Did I really hear from God? Has He stopped talking to me? What now?

“I’m asking GOD for one thing, only one thing:

To live with him in his house my whole life long.

I’ll contemplate his beauty; I’ll study at his feet.

That's the only quiet, secure place
in a noisy world, The perfect getaway,
far from the buzz of traffic.”
(Psalm 27, 4, 5 The Message)

For David or any of us to hear God speak and keep on hearing Him, it's a matter of *focus*. What do we focus on? Four things come to mind from this Psalm. It is focusing on the character of God, first of all. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?” verse 1 of Ps. 27 declares. This should not surprise us. God is light, the Bible says. “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.” (Psa. 36:9) “The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.” (Psa. 118:27) Then we read about Jesus being the Light of the world — “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:4,5) This is not just the light of knowledge and truth but light that shatters and dispels darkness. God is the light that conquers the dark corners of our lives and the world. But He is also “salvation” or deliverance from sin, from aloneness, from addictions, from spiritual enemies. To keep on hearing God, focus on Him as your light and your salvation.

Then, focus on His *favor* — “beauty” of the Lord refers to His favor, His kindness, His pleasantness, his graciousness. Focus on His presence—The Bible tells us here to seek Him, to dwell with Him. (House of the Lord = the presence of God) And then focus on God's power and the safety He provides—READ v 5—At times God hides us from danger; at other times He hides us from Satan and his devices; still other times He places us out of the reach of danger (“high on a rock” the Bible paints it).

Do you see the words “one thing?” God and no one or nothing else matter in this focus. David and we need to be extremely intentional in this focus. Focus makes winning tennis players but much more importantly winning Christians, people who know and hear their God. “The awareness of God's presence in your life is the most transformative knowledge there is.” (Bill Hybels) “God intends the disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who

wash dishes and mow lawns.” (Richard Foster) “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:2) “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.” (Matthew 5:8)

How then can I, can you, keep on hearing the whispers of God? First, get right with Him! Is God indeed through Jesus your light and salvation? Can you declare with David—The Lord is *my* light and *my* salvation—whom shall I fear?” Not just “a” light or “a” salvation but mine, all mine?! Second, get rid of devilish distractions. Often when the Old Testament or Psalms talks about “enemies” for us, the translation in our time is “spiritual enemies” orchestrated by Satan himself. And a major enemy to hearing God are distractions that drown out the voice of God in our lives. You need places and circumstances to hear God speak, to seek God’s presence, to listen to His voice over the din of life. Do you have those times??

Third, choose the “best” over the “good.” God wants the very best for our lives. He wants you to experience His blessing and at times that requires taking faith risks when prompted by His Holy Spirit. We can live mediocre lives with mediocre results or we can choose to follow God to new heights, new insights, new vistas, new callings. What faith risks is God prompting you to do?

Finally, when all is said and done, *wait* on God. Listen to the end of Psalm 27—“I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

JANUARY 26

Numbering Our Resources **1 Chronicles 21**

Numbering our resources. What's the problem about assessing our skills, gifts and resources? What's the issue about amassing enough resources for a job or a ministry? It's the same problem David had in the Old Testament. Dependence on resources for the Christ-follower can actually bring the judgment of God! Why so? Because we begin to trust those resources rather than God to see us through. How do we avoid the sin of numbering our resources?

Stop trusting your resources. This seems simple enough, but most of us live life trusting in our skills, our strengths, our finances, our resources. Oh, yes, and God as well. But this is to place God on a list of resources rather than depending on Him alone to see us through. Sure, David trusted God, but he also trusted his armies in this incident in 1 Chronicles. One and a half million man army seemed like a lot of warriors to defeat his foes, but God had other ideas, and David faced God's judgment. God will not give his glory to another or allow us to share trust. Stop trusting your resources. They can disappear in a moment.

Accept God's discipline. This is what David had to do. When we trust what we have rather than place full dependence on God, we face God's discipline. This is faithfulness on God's part, not nastiness or pickiness or worse from God. God wants us to fully trust Him and his promises, not what He has given us to work with. Sometimes "counting our blessings"

is not the good thing to do since we can then get caught up in trusting those blessings rather than the God who gives them. Here is where self-examination comes into our lives. In what or who do we really place our confidence and trust? If we say, the Lord, then we need to prove it by prayerful dependence on Him and Him alone.

Lord, help me this day not to count my resources and trust them rather than You. Forgive me for seeking out resources rather than The Resource for my life and my work. Help me see You clearly this day as my all in all. For the sake of Jesus, my Lord and Savior.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 26

Positioning Ourselves Genesis 16:2

“Branding” is an important concept for business recognition these days. We think of products like Nike (“Just do it!”) or Bob Evans Restaurant (“Down on the Farm”) or many others. Churches have become branded as well, like Willow Creek (“Turning irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ) and locally LCBC (Lancaster County Bible Church, “Lives Changed By Christ,” known by these four letters). Businesses brand, and unfortunately churches brand, to be known and attended and sought after. They “position” themselves in their market-nitch. The reminder today is about individual “positioning” or branding. That we are to let that up to others who see and experience God’s work in our lives, rather than putting ourselves out there for all to see and follow. A couple of notes on “positioning.”

First, we need to learn the first and main principle, that everything we say, do and think must glorify, exalt, revere and promote God and His glory. This is no catch-phrase for the earnest Christian leader or worker. It is the heart beat of what he or she does. To glorify God adds “weightiness” (the Old Testament nuance of the term) to Who and What God is. It gives Him the ultimate value in our lives, words, deeds and thoughts. This has to be a conscious, thought-through thing, not an after thought or a catch as one can concept. It is why we wake up every morning and on our lips and heart as we go to sleep every night.

Then we need to practice “servant-leadership.” We should be known for serving and helping others rather than promotion of our gifts or talents or special leadership prowess. If our world-view is God-centered and

biblically informed this is a no-brainer for us. We are not in leadership or business or church work for ourselves, for our self-esteem, for our self-promotion. We serve the community of the world God created and cares for.

We also need to let others praise us without seeking it. That is the teaching of Proverbs 27:2. The best compliment I have ever had came from a leader in another denominational group who said to me, “You come to us with excellent and helpful recommendations. We know you through your work with us.” Do people know you through your service or work with them? What do they really think of you and your leadership?

Avoid Ismael decisions. The biblical story of Ismael is a classic case of a good man making a bad decision. Instead of waiting on God for the promised seed and future of Israel, Abraham and Sarah take the matter into their own hands. It is right to point out that the present day Arab versus Israeli wars and conflicts go back to this terribly wrong decision. Generations of conflict and mistrust have resulted because of a “horizontal choice instead of a vertical dependence that required patience.” How do we avoid making Ismael like decisions?

Wait on God’s direction and God’s timing. This very essential and biblical way of making tough decisions is often replaced by our own desires and timeline. We get in the way of God’s time by insisting on our own. Our “instant” world has tempted us to act instead of wait, to react instead of responding, to force the issue instead of exercising patient restraint. God’s delays are not God’s denials. God is always with us and with the situations and decisions we face. Really believe this declaration of faith and hope and *wait!*

Make the decision not yours alone. Accountability relationships are crucially important here. Trust the intuition of your spouse and your very close friends and companions. Here is where the counsel of two or more people is invaluable. Listen to them. Seek them out. Trust that God speaks through others to you and your situation.

Become “dead” to what you strongly want. This advice is precious. Few of us can handle intense desires and strong feelings about something. We then make the mistake of asking God to bless our decision instead

of heeding His will. We even rationalize our decision by arguing with ourselves and God that this *has* to be the right choice. Walk away from very strong inclinations until you have received assurances from trusted friends and until you have really heard God's voice on the matter. I have found that God has a way to make His will clear and plain to those who become "dead" to what they want and rest in God's plan for them.

JANUARY 27

Doing Greater Works Than Jesus **John 14:12-14**

None of the disciples had grasped the profound truth that God had made himself known in Jesus. There are two grounds on which Jesus appealed to Philip; on the basis of what he said and on the basis of what he did. At least the disciples should have realized that the miracles of Jesus showed that they could only be the works of God (10-11). The statement of Jesus in verse 12 is surprising. The believer would do greater things than these. Jesus had made clear that the believer would continue what he had been doing. But greater than that can be understood only in the light of the post-resurrection period during which the gospel would be proclaimed.

It is clear that the greater things can be done only because Jesus is going to the Father. “The book of Acts is evidence of the fulfilment of this prediction, and the worldwide spread of Christianity today a further sign of these ‘greater things’. The close link between the promise and the attitude of prayer needed for its fulfilment is seen.” (*New Bible Commentary*, John 14) There are those who claim miraculous powers because of these verses from Jesus. After all, Jesus Himself said that we would do “greater works” than even He did, and that must mean more and greater miracles and astounding events. The only barrier, they say, is that we don’t trust enough in the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Otherwise we would see the “greater things.” What does Jesus mean by us doing “greater works?”

“Greater” in the worldwide spread of the gospel of saving grace. Jesus

Himself said that He specifically was sent by God the Father to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24) His commissioning by God was specific and limited as the Son of Man. This does not mean any of his powers were unavailable for him to use. It just means that He chose to limit his ministry and service to specifics. The worldwide spread of the gospel would come through his disciples, through us. These were the “greater things.” That would indeed include more widespread miracles, but the focus is not on us becoming “miracle workers.” The focus is on the worldwide work of God through us as we follow Jesus.

“Greater” means a broader, more comprehensive view of “miracle working.” We all know of churches and movements that claim special miracle working powers and results. Millions of people flock to supposed sites of resurrected saints or to special schools claiming to teach Spirit-empowered ministry with astounding healing and other miracles on a daily basis. We need to have a broader view of miracles. A miracle is when my unsaved neighbor’s heart is opened to the Good News of Jesus and receives Christ as Savior and Lord. A miracle is when God provides needed funds or help through unexpected sources and means. A miracle is when the preached or taught Word of God saves a marriage or enables a drug user to quit and be restored. To classify such things as “normal” divests them of the power of God that makes them all possible.

“Greater things” come through intentional prayer — “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:13, 14) We are not automatically endowed with special miracle making abilities or supernatural powers. Greater works than Jesus come through absolute dependency on God and His will. This comes through sustained and intentional prayer. And the goal is not for us to shine, but “that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” It is all God-centered, not exalting human ingenuity or human gatherings. To *say* that miracles I do in Jesus Name glorify God is not the point. They must demonstrate the power of God, not myself serving in God’s Name. This is often missing in “miracle workers.”

Lord, today help me do “greater things” in Jesus’ Name and power. Help me see You at work today in the normal, routine miracles of the day that I often miss because I fail to see You at work in others’ lives. Help me be God-centered in these greater works, that others may glorify and praise your Name.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 27

Using My Gifts for God 1 Corinthians 12; Nehemiah 3

“Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him.

Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house.

Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs.

Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters.” (Nehemiah 3: 10, 20, 23, 29, 30)

“Just think . . . You’re here not by chance, but by God’s choosing. His hand formed you and made you the person you are. He compares you to no one else—you are one of a kind. You lack nothing that His grace cannot give you. He has allowed you to be here at this time in history to fulfill His special purpose for this generation.” (Roy Lessin)

We are going to an odd place to talk about the use of spiritual gifts and talents in the church—and that is the little Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is one of those OT gems that stands out to many as a model of leadership and administration prowess. This unknown Jewish man, Nehemiah, cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes, was chosen by

God to go back from captivity in the empire to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall that had been demolished by the invaders. Nehemiah succeeded in a record time of fifty two days where other Jewish priests and leaders had failed for hundreds of years. But what does building an ancient wall have to do with using spiritual gifts? Where's the connection?

A couple of things. First, Nehemiah's gift of leadership has been used by Christian and secular writers as a model of administration and leadership. The way he organized and used people with diverse talents and needs has been a model for many organizations. Chapter 3 of Nehemiah has been referred to as the Old Testament model of New Testament body-life in a church. We'll look at that in a moment. The second thing is that this "wall" is more than just ancient stones and mortar. It stood and still stands symbolically and prophetically for the saving presence of God with his people. The prophet Isaiah writes, "I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem. . .you who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth." (62:6,7)

There are four key questions for the proper use of your gifts for God. Is what I do for God an extension of who I am before God? Am I operating in the church out of my passions and spiritual gifts? Am I involved—no matter how little or much I think I can serve? Am I going in the same direction as everyone else in this body of believers?

The first lesson we learn from these Jewish workers in Nehemiah is that one's character undergirds gifts and talents. As we examine this record, we are impressed with the significance of their names. In the Hebrew language, a person's name was often descriptive of his character. Just as the name of God reveals the character of God so the name of a person here often revealed his character. Thus, Abraham is known worldwide as the "father of the faithful" or "father of many nations"—the meaning of his name. Joshua's name meant "savior" and he was mainly responsible for leading the Israelites after the death of Moses to a new country, a promised land.

Jedaiah (v. 10) = "invoker of God" = prayer warrior

Baruch (v. 20) = "blessed by God" and noted for his zeal

Benjamin (v. 23) = "son of my right hand" = safety and protection

Zadok (v. 29) = justice and integrity

Meshullam (v. 30) = “devoted” = son of Berekiah, one blessed by the Lord

You will notice in the verses we selected the little phrase: “he repaired next to his house, or opposite his house.” The older writer, Alan Redpath, who wrote a very moving book on Nehemiah called *Victorious Christian Service*, applies this little phrase to the truth that ministry or Christian service begins *at home*. He says, “This is where every real work for God must begin—at home. That is a revelation throughout the whole revelation of the Book (of the Bible). The disciples were to commence at Jerusalem . . . The witness of Christian people is no more effective anywhere in public than it is at home. . . A church is no stronger than its homes, for a church is made up of families.” Your use of spiritual gifting from God will be no stronger than your witness at home and your character revealed there. Thus, what is often valued in church work must be replaced and reworked for the list on the right. Character is the foundation of the use of spiritual gifts.

Often Valued

Tenure – How Long?

Education

Presence

Busyness

Compliance

Ability

Contribution Amount

Really Important

Love for the unlovable

Teachability

Flexibility

Contentment

Commitment

Availability

Simplicity

Everyone’s important and no one’s left out in using gifts and talents in the church. Note the variety of involvement. Some worked harder than others. Some repaired a couple of sections of the wall, while others stayed close to home. Yes, there were even some who did not work at all (3:5) but were still listed as part of the project.

There was diversity of interests. Some worked on the basis of family associations. Other worked in a particular district. Others worked according to distinct professions or job descriptions. The point of all the variety here is that unity does not mean or have to be uniformity. The job

gone done. The wall got built. God's work succeeded.

And, finally, note that there was a *unity of intention* in these workers. They worked with one foundation, all had one focus, and all worked with one main intention—to build God's wall around Jerusalem. The same holds true for any church of Jesus Christ, anywhere in the world, in any part of His grand kingdom project. Note how the Apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 3— “It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow. Planting and watering are menial servant jobs at minimum wages. What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving. Using the gift God gave me as a good architect, I designed blueprints; Apollos is putting up the walls. Let each carpenter who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation! Remember, there is only one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ.” (From 1 Corinthians 3:7-11)

The final question on using your gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit is, Am I going in the same direction as everyone else in this body of believers? Like Nehemiah and his wall-building for God, we should be moving in one direction and that is forward, forward in worship, forward in service, forward in connecting. We should be seeking to live together beyond ourselves. We need to have workers with the same heart, mind and goal to get the job done. All of this to accomplish God's destiny for your particular part of his universal body of believers.

JANUARY 28

Values God Wants

Psalm 27:11; Proverbs 15:18-20

“Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.” (Psalm 27:11) “But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.” (Ps 26:11, 12) “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!” (Ps 146:10) Values God wants—stability and consistency. My dad was a finish carpenter, and he used levels all the time. I remember the “string level” he used for brick work, to make sure they were straight and level, the 6-foot level for large framing projects and the 3-foot all around level for everything else. Why the preoccupation for being level? Because we all want stable homes, level floors, walls and ceilings that are plumb and straight. We value stability and consistency, and we need to value them in our spiritual lives as well. What does a “level” life look like?

It stays calm in the face of persecution and threats. Perhaps there is nothing better in the face of calamity, war or extreme danger than to remain calm. Why? Because calmness, stability and consistency, help us think through a right response, a right course of action in tough times. Without that level-headed thinking, we become hasty, make mistakes, jump to conclusions that are untrue and can mess everything up. This is also true in the spiritual realm and in our spiritual lives. Satan is the Great Deceiver, the Great Destroyer and the Author of confusion. The way to

defeat him is to think through our spiritual responses to his lies and deceit and confusion. We need to stay calm. We need stability and consistency. How stable and consistent are you in stressful times? This is the measure of spiritual maturity.

It controls our natural anger and being upset over large and small things. Proverbs puts it this way— “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway.” (Proverbs 15:18, 19) I once had the opportunity at the height of the Right To Life movement in New York State to intervene in a heated exchange between the director of the town’s Planned Parenthood and the executive director of the area’s Right to Life Committee. They were both argumentative, throwing invectives at each other over the local TV stations, and generally hated one another. I was asked to be on the Right to Life Committee and step in because their anger was getting out of hand. Thankfully, calmness finally prevailed and through a lot of mediation they began actually talking and reasoning together. It made for a more peaceful and more intelligent discussion. Disagreement was still there, but the temperature had cooled down. I had the opportunity to be a witness for Jesus to both directors.

It sets the stage for true worship. “My foot stands on level ground; in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.” (Psalm 26:12) Rather than raucous and outlandish worship antics, the stable and consistent spiritually minded Christian worships God out of thoughtful integrity and maturity. This is not to belittle any worship style. It is just pointing out that stability and consistency in our spiritual lives lead us to heartfelt and thoughtful worship of God. These values allow us to intelligently worship God with the various gifts and graces He grants to a congregation (Read 1 Corinthians 14 here). And in such worship we become a shining witness to those without Christ around us. Some say this is “boring.” God says it is wise, thoughtful, intelligent and mature. What is your worship like?

Lord, today lead me along level paths and on level ground. Help me grow in stability and consistency in my life and worship, and in my attitudes toward others, especially enemies or those who persecute me for my faith in Christ. Deliver me from hot-tempered living and instability. Help me live for your honor and glory, that others may praise your holy Name.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 28

The Quality of Faithfulness Galatians 5:16–25

A 360 degree Christian is a person unwilling to just say a little prayer to Jesus at mealtimes or at bedtime and go to church once in a while. A 360 degree Christian is a person who believes that faith and Christ are all or nothing, that God has given us a whole life to live, not just a mental capacity to register a cold belief in a divine being.

All people have a divine compass implanted in their very being, a compass that even when blindfolded they can point home and due north. This is true spiritually as well. Every person in this room and world has a divine compass in their heart of hearts that gravitates to where God wants them to be and do, a divine sense of the need and direction of God in their life journey.

A 360 degree Christian looks upward to the God who sees and cares for him or her intimately, concretely, convictionally and personally, forward to where God would have them go and do, sideways to the people God places in their path and, backward to review where God has taken and taught them. A full 360 degrees.

What does it mean “to look backward.” When we think spiritually of looking backward, we are of course talking about faithfulness, God’s faithfulness to us and our faithfulness to Him. A wonderful example of faithfulness in nature comes from the eagle family. A female eagle has an interesting way of picking a mate. She will pick up a twig and fly high into the air and drop it. Male eagles will fly beneath her and try to catch the twig. She will do this until a male has caught the twig three times. The reason is the female is testing the male for his ability to catch young eagles

as they are directed out of the nest for flight. When it is time for the young eagle to fly on its own the mother eagle pushes her young out of the nest. She carries the young eaglets on her back up high into the air and shakes them off. It is the responsibility of the father to swoop down and catch the young eaglets until they learn to fly on their own. Just as the female eagle is testing the male for his reliability, a believer will be tested by God in his or her faithfulness and dependability. (Paul Fritz)

What is faithfulness? Let's start with a working definition and then go deeper and wider. Faithfulness can be defined or described as "A God-centered, practical trustworthiness, a constancy, a loyalty, or stick-to-it-ness. It is reliance, integrity and stability when dealing with others." Others have described it as perseverance.

Faithfulness is a term that actually comes from the Old Testament, springing from the truth that God is faithful. Thus, the "God-centered" in the definition — "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations." (Deut. 7:9) "I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations." (Psalm 89:1) "The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." (Ps. 145:13) And the classic verse from Lamentations 3:23— "because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness."

Jesus Himself stressed faithfulness above legalistic scruples of the Pharisees of His day— "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices..but you have neglected the more important (weightier) matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former." (Matt. 23:23) In predicting the final judgment day, Jesus parades faithfulness above success, influence, position, power, status and wealth— "Well done, good and faithful servant." (Matt 25:21, 23; 24:45)

The 360 degree believer has to be concerned about faithfulness, about loyalty to His Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let's take a deeper look. Faithfulness is a spiritual matter. (Note Galatians 5:16-25) And especially

verse 22. “Faithfulness” is a fruit or evidence of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life. Why this is so important is that many people think of faithfulness first of all as a grueling, sticking it out, putting up with duty! Not so with the Apostle Paul here in this letter to the churches in Galatia.

He begins this chapter by talking about being set free in Jesus Christ. Free from the legalistic, dominating prescriptions of the law that some Jews in his day pointed to as the key to Christian living. Oh, belief in Jesus is okay they would say, but after all, you must keep the law to go to heaven, really! So Paul amplifies the message that once a person has Jesus in his or her life, they are free to live by the Spirit (v. 16), to be led by the Spirit (v. 18), and to keep in step with the Spirit (v. 25). And the amazing thing is that in the list of evidences of the Spirit in a person’s life, he places faithfulness right in the midst of the list—alongside love, joy, patience, gentleness and others. He is saying that faithfulness is just as “spiritual” as being full of joy or love or peace. One writer called faithfulness “love’s habit.”

No, faithfulness is not an automatic “pass” to heaven. Only Jesus gets us into heaven, but Jesus creates in us a desire to be faithful, to live faithfully, to exercise faithfulness. And, note this is not legalism or license. Legalism is trying to get to heaven by keeping the rules, even adding to the Bible’s rules, thinking if I work harder and more diligently God will surely grant me heaven. License, on the other hand is thinking, what does it matter how I live just as long as I passively mentally believe in God or Jesus.

Faithfulness gives us God-Markers as reference points of life. Many of you recognize and love the old hymn, “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” as one of the most popular and most sung Christian songs or hymns and especially at funerals. Why so? Because the song “Great Is thy Faithfulness” is not the result of some tragic event in writer Thomas Chisholm’s life but a powerful witness to his daily walk with Jesus as he experienced “morning by morning” new mercies from his Everlasting Father. Just before his death in 1960 he wrote this powerful, personal witness: “My income has never been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. But I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant keeping God and that He has given me

many wonderful displays of His providing care which have filled me with astonishing gratefulness.”

God gives us “markers,” or what the Old Testament writer Samuel calls “Ebenezer stones” in our journey with God. At a great victory over their mortal enemies, the Philistines, the prophet and leader Samuel in 1 Samuel 7:12 sets up a “stone of remembrance” to mark the day, the battle and God’s deliverance of the people. We get the hymn words, “Here I raise mine Ebenezer, Hither by thy help I’m come” from this passage. What are some God-Markers in your life thus far? Where has God showed up for you? What are the Ebenezer stones of your life?

Here’s just a few of my God-Markers. The Wesleyan church in a little town in W. PA where I came to know Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and the place where a saintly elderly lady teaching four squirmy 8th graders looked at me and told me I would be a gospel minister some day. My wedding day to my wonderful wife and companion and best friend. Our young family in Schenectady, NY where loving Presbyterians helped me grow in grace. My farewell event at Carlisle Brethren in Christ Church (The Meeting House) where I was accepted and propelled into future Brethren in Christ service and influence. My 2006 accident in which I almost lost my life. God’s markers for me! God’s faithfulness reminding me of why I should live in faithfulness to Him. What about you??

Faithfulness is not a nostalgia trip to the past, however. Faithfulness rightly understood and lived out, moves us forward, not backward. This quality of life produces usefulness for God now and in the future. Listen to Jesus’s words from Matthew 24:44-46— “So you must also be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom the master has put in charge of his servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”

Faithfulness has an overcoming quality about it. In Revelation 2:10 in speaking to the seven churches and to the Church in our day, God says, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer....Be faithful even to the point of death and I will give you the crown of life.”

Faithfulness, living such a life before God, makes our faith-sharing believable. We see this in Titus 2:7,8 where Paul urges Titus to speak to the young men in his congregation in these words. "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us."

So, how does a person develop faithfulness? Four suggestions: Know Jesus Christ! — Personally, really, deeply and truly as your Savior, Friend and Lord. Ask Him into your life and follow Him. Beware of substituting religious things for faithfulness. This was the downfall of the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus day and even our own day. You cannot substitute church, or service, or worship, or giving money for faithfulness. Do what you say and say what you do. Labor as a Christian for the long haul and a good finish. That's what Jesus wants. That's what God says. That's what a Christian's destiny must be.

David Livingstone, the world famous missionary who gave his life in service to Jesus Christ in the wilds of Africa left us with a favorite prayer which ought to be etched on the heart of every Christian: "Send me anywhere, only go with me. Lay any burden on me, only sustain me. Sever any tie that binds but the tie that binds me to Thy service and to thy heart." May God grant that prayer will be yours today!

JANUARY 29

Living the Abundant Life **John 10:7-18**

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10) Living the abundant life. “Abundant living” – what does that look like? What is Jesus telling us here in John 10? Depending on your circumstances and point of view, the “abundant life” means different things to different people, even among Christ-followers. Some suppose it to be a trouble-free life, a comfortable living, a painless existence. Others see here a promise of the Spirit-filled life, a life of doing miraculous things for Jesus and by Jesus. Still others see a life of a conqueror for God, successfully fighting and winning the battles of the kingdom of God. How do we live the abundant life?

In a close relationship with Jesus Himself. Salvation from sin and shame and condemnation come only through the True Shepherd, Jesus Christ. All others are false shepherds, robbers or thieves, who only come to kill and destroy the sheep. Closeness of spiritual intimacy with Jesus, the True Shepherd, is promised here— “When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” (V. 4) and “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (V. 14). Living closely with Jesus is abundant living. Is your spiritual intimacy with Jesus growing day by day? Then you are living the abundant life.

Daily sustenance for the journey of life is also promised — “I am the

door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” (V. 10) Going “in and out” is simply daily living with Jesus. Life with Christ is not a theory, not a set of propositions, not a list of duties and rules, but a hand-in-glove relationship with my Lord and Savior. This doesn’t mean that there are no boundaries and restrictions, but they are for our protection and our good. There are many who live an “add-on” life with Jesus. He is there for Sunday services, or special spiritual retreats or events. But in the day to day, He is hardly seen or heard or even followed. Jesus is not just a convenient “add-on” to life. He is life itself. “He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own” is the way the old hymn goes. This is abundant living. No matter the difficulties and trials and ups and downs of life, Jesus is always there, always watching, always caring, always the doorway to blessing and sustenance.

Help me this day, Lord Jesus, to hear your voice and follow you. Deliver me from trying to find life’s joys and sustenance in anyone or anything else. Help me really know you this day. Teach me to be a grateful sheep of the Chief Shepherd.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 29

The Power of The Holy Spirit

When I say the word “power,” all kinds of thoughts might come to your mind. Perhaps you think of the influence of the Spirit of God in a person’s life and thought. Or, perhaps you think of people waving their hands, stomping their feet, speaking in strange and unintelligible voices, making worship rousing and noisy. Or, perhaps you think of healing services where people attend to be touched by an evangelist or someone for physical healing of some sort.

I want to go back to the basics of “power of the Spirit,” however, from the Bible. And mainly, I want to help us all answer an essential question many have been asking. It goes something like this — I pray, I hope for, I long for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, but nothing seems to happen. Why? Is the power of the Spirit just for excitable, outgoing, charismatic people? Is there something wrong with me that I don’t seem to have this power—whatever it may be? Is there something I should be doing or stop from doing to possess such power?

Dwight Moody has rightly said: “There is no use in running before you are sent; there is no use in attempting to do God’s work without God’s power. A man working without this unction, a man working without this anointing, a man working without the Holy Spirit upon him, is losing time after all.” When Jesus left this earth, He told his disciples that He would not leave them alone. In fact, he said to them that He would send a Comforter, a Counselor, a Helper to their faith journey. That would be the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus says that the Spirit will do when He comes: “When he comes, he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He’ll show them that their refusal to believe

in me is their basic sin.” (The Message, John 16:8,9)

The Holy Spirit has *exposing power*. In older language, He has convicting power. It is the Holy Spirit who invisibly yet deeply and certainly convicts us of sinful thoughts, actions, deeds and desires. He exposes them to our hearts and minds. He exposes the root cause of sin, and that is disbelief in Jesus Christ as the only way, the only truth, the only life with God the Father. A person, any person, at any age or stage of life and experience comes to trust in Christ as his or her Savior and Lord through the exposing, convicting power of the Holy Spirit. He shines a God-sized mirror in our hearts, in our inner beings, and shows the dark corners to us. He shows and convicts us of our sins.

And why? Not to cower us. Not to shame us, but to change us, to convert us, to bring us back to God, back home spiritually to where we belong. The Bible tells us that all we like sheep have gone astray. All of us have wandered from God and His ways. The Spirit’s power draws us, convicts us, brings us back to Him. No one ever becomes a true believer without this exposing and convicting power of the Holy Spirit. So how should you respond to such power? Three words—Accept – Admit – Repent! If you want the power of the Holy Spirit in your life, this is the first base, this is the very first step. To accept God’s judgment of your life. To admit your sins before Him. And to repent—to change your mind and heart, to go from your own direction to God’s direction, with sorrow and true humility.

It’s not just mentally agreeing with the Bible here. Not just a nodding acceptance that Jesus died on the cross in your place for your sins, which is all true. True change comes through the power of the Holy Spirit. And we know we have experienced that power when we really and truly take responsibility for our sins, confess them to God and trust in Him alone for deliverance and freedom.

The second powerful work the Holy Spirit does is to transform us into what Christ wants us to be. It is *transforming power* — “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (Ephesians 3:16, 17a) “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide

and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17b-19)

In this passage the Apostle Paul reveals our weakness in spiritual life and power. We may be good in Bible accuracy, church programming, have the right things to say and do in sharing our faith with others, but power—real, Spirit-given, Spirit-led power lacks. Paul prays not merely for these people then and there, but also here and now.

The transforming power of God the Holy Spirit infuses us with strong faith in Christ. It is not a magical touch of supernatural ecstasy as much as it is conforming us to the character of Christ. Without Christ, there is no work of the Spirit; without the Spirit the truth and grace that is in Christ has no dynamic, no punch, no effectiveness. More power means more faith. This is a radical transformation from the inside out—“in your inner being” see that! Why is it that people say they are Christians, claim to be Christ-followers, but seem to live lives like those of their non-Christian neighbors and friends? It is a lack of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit! Why hasn’t the Church made the impact we would all hope it would have made in this world? Lack of the transforming power of the Spirit of Christ.

If this power is what you may lack, what should you do? Pray for it! Not just a table-grace type of brief prayer either. But insistent, expectant prayer. That’s what Paul does for us and instructs us to do for ourselves and others in this prayer.

A third type of power is *witnessing* or sharing Christ with others type of *power*. “Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.” (1 Thessalonians 1:5) People need the Lord—yes. People need instruction from God’s Word, the Bible—yes. People need counseled and helped along the way—yes. But people around us need Spirit-filled, empowered Christians to share with them the Good News. The Holy Spirit provides witnessing power to those who engage in watchful waiting. Waiting the right time. Waiting for the right words to say. Waiting for the God-moment when the Holy Spirit is exposing a person’s sins to him or her. Watchful waiting—active, prayer

led, prayer inspired waiting for God to nudge you and say—Now's the time. Share now. Witness now. Watch and see me work now.

A final note about the power of the Holy Spirit. He gives us *overcoming power*. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13). Paul is here contrasting the Greek notion of hope founded in uncertainty of the future and fear of present circumstances with the Hebrew notion of truthful hope, hope founded in the character and power of the God of the universe. God's tested and tried character produces real hope. Romans 5 says it this way: “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Where is the power to live day by day? To endure the hardships, the difficulties, the challenges of life? To face disappointment and fear? To deal with sickness and death and disease and all the world's ills? It is found in the hope produced by the power of the Holy Spirit given to us.

How does a Christian, a sincere, watchful, dedicated believer in Jesus or even a person who is just seeking God get from here to there? First, admit “I can't!” God's power through the Holy Spirit comes to those who at the end of the day confess humbly and truthfully—I just cannot get there. In our younger years, Nancy and I had purchased a house, a duplex in Wilmington, DE that gave us myriads of problems, and when we went on to other church works in other states in obedience to God, it just would not sell. Year after year. I think 5 years in all. I was bi-vocational at the time, teaching in a public school. One day, just about at the end of my rope and patience and need, in tears I gave the house over to God and said, Whatever You want to do with it. It's okay. The house sold the next day!

No power? Our problem may be that we think we can have what God wants us to have by just “cooperating” with him. We have bought into the lie that Christianity is about those who work hard, obey the rules, and need just a little help from God along the way. Second, plug in. You cannot get the power of the Holy Spirit by simply wishing it were yours! Like this corded drill I have, the only way it works is to plug it into the power source.

Plug in—ask God really and deeply for such power. He’s the source. Third, clear away the roadblocks. Here Scripture guides us well. Nothing may be happening due to one of three realities—resisting (Acts 7:51ff), quenching (1 Thessalonians 5:19), or grieving (Ephesians 4:30) the Holy Spirit.

Finally, take faith-risks. For many, the only way they will ever experience the profound and amazing power of the Holy Spirit is to step out in faith where God is nudging them, leading them, taking them. How about you? Are you keeping back, knowing what you need to do, but hesitant?

JANUARY 30

Interacting With People With Whom You Disagree Colossians 4:5, 6

“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” (Colossians 4:5,6) Interacting with people with who you disagree. Probably at no time in our national history has there ever been such numerous protests against or for the present political situation in Washington, D.C. People are divided, speaking at, rather than with, each other, and this includes followers of Christ. Anger, recrimination, name-calling, gossip and slander are high on the list. How should we interact with people with whom we disagree?

Use wisdom. Not every word or action deserves or expects a response from you. Biblical wisdom is simply knowing how to daily live in an unbelieving world using God’s principles and mandates. The textbook on wisdom is the Word of God, and the source of wisdom is the “fear of God.” This is not being afraid of God, but rather a close and intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is in knowing God that we find wisdom for daily living. More details are found in his written Word. As we study and apply Scripture to our daily lives, we gain wisdom and insight into the words and lives of others.

Make the best use of your time. There is a lot of wasted energy and time in interacting with others that needs correcting. We become inefficient

and scattered if we respond to every thing every person says. This is the bane of online sites like Facebook, Google, and so forth. People spend way too much time and energy on exchanging a whole lot of nothing on such sites. Just because we “can” does not mean we “should.” Time is a precious commodity, a gift from God, given to us to use for his honor and glory and the good of those around us. Are you making the best use of your time in interacting with others?

Use grace and salt. God’s undeserved favor has been given to us to use toward others. Most people need gracious words and responses from those of us who say we follow the Lord of grace, Jesus Christ. Taking a moment to seek to understand where a person is coming from releases us from making hasty and unfounded conclusions or assumptions about people. Jesus Himself taught us to “love our enemies” and not return hate for hate.

“Salt” preserves and adds taste to our interactions. Some people need encouragement. Some need ignored by us. Others need comfort. Still others need correction or rebuke. Most need us to listen to or observe without comment what they are really saying or doing. Let grace and salt be your watchwords in interacting with others with whom you disagree.

Lord, as I interact with those with whom I disagree, let me follow the lead of your Word of grace and truth. Deliver me from making hasty judgments about others, or reacting rather than carefully responding to them. Fill me with grace and truth in my responses to them. And let me demonstrate the wisdom that comes from your Word in dealing with them. All for your honor and glory, and that Jesus may be seen in and through my responses.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 30

Becoming A Kingdom Christian OR “Get Out of the Boat!”

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about two major influences in my life. The first is the wonderful time recounting God’s faithfulness to the last two churches and their ministry over the past 200 years. The other reality that you and I have been facing is, of course, the Boston Bombings. The massive news coverage, the capture of the suspects, the investigation, the ongoing question of “Why?” This is one of a number of mass shootings in this country over the recent months. Coumbine, Sandy Hook, Boston—they come so fast and frequent it seems.

But it’s not merely the violence that troubles us, isn’t it? It’s the disintegration of societal values which seem to be eroding and shrinking. Evangelical Christians seem to be fighting for their very rights in a society that is more than open to same-sex marriage, alternative lifestyles, restriction of Judaeo-Christian symbols and programs in public places. How do we “face down” these fears and invasions? How does the Christian man or woman, young or old, deal with an increasingly hostile society?

On every coin or bill there are four little words that we barely see or think about – IN GOD WE TRUST! Now we don’t pay too much attention to this saying, and it has been continually challenged in our courts. But it also indicates the other side of FAITH. The other side of faith is spelled R—I—S—K!! This piece of change, even in a secular America, reminds us that our very lives are at the end of the day built on faith in God, on taking risks, on trusting what we cannot now see. Jesus puts it this way to Peter in a fishing boat in the middle of the lake of Galilee while the winds were howling and the waves were crashing, and the disciples were unsure of next

steps with this Master Teacher. He walks on the water, simply scaring his followers out of their wits—"It's a ghost!" He tells them to take courage, reminding them it is He who created the winds and waves and boat, and their past and their future. The ever impetuous Peter yells out, "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water!" Jesus says, "Come"—"Get out of the boat"—Take a risk—Believe!

How do we live out the other side of being faithful? How do we really put into practice the slogan "In God We Trust?" How do we face an unknown future with unknown perils and challenges? By becoming "kingdom" Christians! Not just more active Christians, or more loving Christians, or more dedicated Christians, or more aware Christians, but kingdom-based, kingdom-infused, kingdom-knowledgeable Christians.

The term "kingdom" Christian refers to a person who knows Jesus Christ as his or her Savior and Lord and one who believes and lives out the rule and reign of Jesus Christ over everything. This word "kingdom" is an active term in the Bible that has a wider range of meaning and application than just a "goal" or a "place" where Christian believers are going to be when Jesus comes again or when the Millennium takes place.

One Bible scholar puts it this way: "In announcing the kingdom of God the accent falls on God's initiative and action. The kingdom...belongs to the God who comes and invades history in order to secure man's redemption. The emphasis falls upon God who IS doing something and who will do something that radically affects men in their alienation and rebellion against himself." (Lane on *Mark*) The kingdom is "near" as Jesus put it because God's decisive action has already begun. The "kingdom Christian" is not just a religious catch-phrase, and he or she is not limited by what we see, how we feel, or who we are. It is God's sovereign rule where His will is supreme.

Now, you might say, so what? Why do we need to point this out now? For a couple of reasons. First, it's *why* Jesus came! "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15) "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for

this purpose.” (Luke 4:43)

All three historical gospels (we call them synoptics) record the rationale, the reason from Jesus’ own words, as to why He came to this earth. He came to not merely announce but to indicate that God’s kingdom is now here. Long before the term “Christian” came into vogue, Jesus used the term “kingdom” to indicate and distinguish his followers, his disciples, from others. Now of course the religious leaders of his day not only didn’t understand but they expected that this kingdom thing was a power play against the Roman empire, a show of military force that would restore the glories of David and Solomon to the Middle East, a supernatural power that would cower the Herods and Caesars of their day. And by wanting human-based, Judah-strong, power they missed the *real* power, the real meaning of the kingdom of God come in the Person and Power of Jesus Christ.

Kingdom Christianity is what Jesus *wants*. In his first recorded public sermon, called the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7, Jesus puts it this way— “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33) What things? Practical things like food and clothing and necessities. Things that people—including many Christians—worry and fret about. By placing the kingdom of God first in our priorities and wants and lives God will care for the rest—if only we believed what Jesus said?!! Right?!!!

And how many of you know the Lord’s Prayer? Let’s say it “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your” WAIT! Again, what? Your “kingdom” come! Every time a believer prays this model prayer; every time a church on a Sunday morning says this prayer together; every time a family gathers around their dinner table and says this prayer—we are praying for God’s rule and reign over every bit of creation, over every life, over every aspect of school and work and recreation, over everything imaginable and unimaginable to be realized! Not just some future land mass or earthly authoritative rule.

We are praying, and should be praying, according to Jesus, that his rule would extend to every single part of humanity and what humanity says, does and thinks. Let’s put this in practical terms. A kingdom Christian has

kingdom values, first of all. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mathew 5:3) “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:4) Humble, assured confidence with a freely obedient life is kingdom living.

In Squantum, MASS, In the shadow of downtown Boston, four best friends, all 10 years old, decided to replace anguish with action. In this tiny seaside community of about 400 families, four girls, set up a lemonade and baked goods stand near the Kennedy Library Thursday after the tragedy. Brigid Norris didn't know 8-year-old bombing victim Martin Richard, but she knew she wanted to help. “We hoped to raise \$100, and so far we've raised more than \$3,000.” “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” said Jesus. This attitude and value of humble, confident, free flowing obedience marks out a kingdom Christian. This, too, is kingdom work.

A kingdom Christian has kingdom *perspective*. Jesus gave a set of what are called kingdom parables or stories in Matthew ch 13 to illustrate what this kingdom looks like. “The kingdom of heaven is like . . .” A grain of mustard seed, Yeast in bread dough, Treasure hid in a field, Fishnet thrown into the sea gathering all kinds of fish. These are seemingly insignificant yet broad, expansive, earth-changing, destiny defining things.

T.M. Moore, puts it this way: “God is doing a unique work on earth today. There are seasons in which the Holy Spirit speaks things to the Church. During one decade it might be a focus on evangelism. During another, it might be a greater awareness of the Holy Spirit. During yet another, it might be a focus on social problems in cities.

Today, God is speaking very clearly to the Church about societal transformation. Fifteen years ago, the idea of a community being totally transformed through the Gospel of Jesus Christ was a foreign concept. However, according to George Otis, Jr, director of the Sentinel Group, there are over 500 communities that are in some form of quantifiable transformation process today.” (April3, 2013, Prime Time with God)

In a recent article entitled, “How Do We Measure the Great Commission?” Scott Allen, a staff member of Food for the Hungry International, writes that while most evangelicals think that the Great

Commission will be completed once churches are planted in remaining unreached people groups., By this definition, many nations have been reached—they have churches and are over 2% evangelical—yet they are rife with poverty, corruption and injustice. He gives an example: “Probably 2/3 of Rwanda’s citizens were in church on any given Sunday in 1994, including the Sunday in April before the genocide erupted in which over a half million people perished. Is Rwanda before the genocide a model of the Great Commission accomplished?”

Then he says, “We cannot fulfill the Great Commission without making disciples, training believers to be like Christ. And because Christ is Lord over all creation, the task also includes bringing God’s truth into every sphere of society and every arena of public life. . . . I would see the end goal what Habakkuk 2:14 prophesies—For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

Finally, a kingdom Christian evidences kingdom power. As T.M. Moore states it: “It is a domain of power, real spiritual power (really!), over which nothing in this world has any authority or control. It is power for righteousness, and we may know this power at work within and through us regardless of the circumstances of our lives. It is power for peace, which we may know and extend to others, though all the world be arrayed against us. And it is power for joy, which, as [the Old Testament prophet] Habakkuk reminds us, is an affection rooted in eternal verities that no amount of untoward circumstances can destroy (Hab. 3:17-19). The key to knowing this power is not to be found in the right outward circumstances, but in believing according to the Word of God.”

How do I become a kingdom-Christian? Realize you are one already—in and through Christ’s Holy Spirit living in you if you are a believer. Have the faith of a child! Remember Brigid Norris and her three 10 year old friends. See differently and think differently. Pray differently—expectantly, intentionally, passionately, knowing Jesus is here and now!

JANUARY 31

Going Deeper With God **Job 12:22**

Going deeper with God. Many followers of Christ are satisfied with either surface knowledge of God or bits and pieces. They rarely delve more deeply into the things of God. Their knowledge and experience of God in their lives is merely average. When I go to the store and buy a mop and get an “average” mop, what is the result? It performs according to its average status. It’s not a bad mop, or a terrible mop. You can get by with it, but it will do an average job. You get what you pay for. If you want an excellent mop you know you need to pay the price for it, but it lasts longer, does a better mopping job and you end up more satisfied with it. How does one go deeper with God?

By not being satisfied with “average” or status-quo. Many people just get by in life, but they are not really happy or satisfied. Their victories are small or non-existent. Their hum-drum lives leave them complaining and fretful. They dread the next year, the next month, the next week or even the next day. They have little to look forward to. A Christ-follower in this cycle of life lives on what I call the “vapors” of the gospel. They have tasted of the kingdom of God. They have had flashes of what life with Christ could be. But they settle for average, for the same-old, same-old, for safety and security and end up almost resenting God for it. Yes, they will go to heaven, but as the Apostle Paul says, “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw each one’s work will become

manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire." (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

By expecting and cherishing the dark seasons of life. Os Hillman in his daily devotionals points out that this is a two-stage process. First, we want deliverance from the pain, from the darkness, from the trials. Then we accept what God is trying to teach us and we learn how to grow deeper in Him, trusting Him more, following Him more closely and becoming much more intimately connected with Jesus. This is indeed a process, and we need to go through the dark times to get there. But the fruit of such experiences is stability, security, consistency and commitment to Christ that can never be taken from us. Many stay at the first stage, wanting only deliverance and never get to stage two. But it is in these times and seasons we grow deeper and wider in Christ. It is only through these seasons that we are able to counsel and teach and help others. The old saying rings true—you cannot give what you do not have or have not experienced. So, if you are going through these dark times, take heart and learn all that God wants you to learn. He will never fail you, and you will end up much better than “average.”

Lord, today help me want to go deeper with You. Deliver me from just wanting to get by in the Christian life. Help me be better than just average with You. Teach me your ways especially in the dark seasons of my life that I may serve You more closely and be more of a help to others. For the sake of Jesus, my Lord and Savior, who went before me.

MY NOTES:

STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY 31

Grow! 2 Peter 3:15–18

In a recent study of 1,000 churches and over 250,000 survey results among those churches, Willow Creek Community church in Chicago found some surprising and disturbing results in church America. Thinking that many of their own 25,000 attendees were actively involved and dynamically growing in their faith walk with Jesus Christ, they instead found the following, which they printed up for the world to see in the book, *Move*.

First, they found that church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth. While church related activities help in the early stages of spiritual maturity, they do very little to help people grow in their faith.

Second, they found many church-going people, in churches large and small, and in-between as ours, even the most devoted Christians, falling far short in living out the mandates of Christ. While 80% say they love God more than anything, 33% do not serve at all. 60% had fewer than six spiritual conversations with nonbelievers and 80% invited fewer than six people to church. A full 40% do not tithe.

Third, the longer a person attends church without making a commitment to Christ, the less likely they are to do so. Up to 31% say they are spiritually “stalled” or highly dissatisfied with their church, and only one-fifth or 20% reflect on Scripture on a daily basis.

Richard Foster has well said: “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The desperate need is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.” But it’s not a new problem. It’s not unique to this 21st century. It’s an age-old problem that surfaced even in the early

church. Turn with me in your Bible to see this problem spelled out in Hebrews — “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” (Hebrews 5:11–6:1)

The problem is spiritual babyitis! While we like cute pictures of little babies, and smile at the antics of little children giving incorrect answers to Bible questions and topics (like little Larry’s note to God that said “Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother,” Or Donna’s letter which said, “We read that Edison made light. But in Sunday school they said you did it. So I bet he stoled your idea!”), we would all agree that it is a deformity if adults continued to act like infants in their thinking and understanding of the Bible.

Jesus gave us what is called the Great Commandment, which is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matt 22:37) And we spend a lot of time and effort on the subject of intimacy with God, on our emotional and physical well-being, yet what about our minds?! Jesus said we are to love God with all of our mind! What’s the solution—Here it is from 2 Peter 3:18—GROW!! “And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.”

The Apostle Peter is wrestling against false teachers who have either denied Paul's words to say they are nonsense or twisted Paul's teaching (found primarily in Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians) to support their heresy. They used the Bible to support and justify immorality and ungodliness. Sounds like the 21st century, doesn't it?

These men and women have led "ignorant and unstable" people astray, putting their own spin on the difficult passages of Scripture, things "hard to understand" Peter says in v. 16. Peter calls them "blowhards" ("bold and arrogant" in 2:10) and "scoffers" in 3:3. They "blaspheme in matters they do not understand" (2:12). In today's lingo they would be TV and radio and internet preachers and teachers who deny the Trinity, who doubt the historicity of the Bible, who say that there is no final judgment and that everyone will end up okay with God no matter their lifestyle or thinking about Him. The solution to all of this muddle, Peter, says is to GROW! Let's break that down here.

Spiritual growth must be three things according to this passage. First it must be *intentional*. The word used in verse 18 allows no other interpretation but a direct, present tense, imperative from God Himself—GROW! Not think about growth, not it would be a good idea to grow, not that growth is optional for the believer. It's a command from God's man, Peter himself. What is significant in this passage is that those who are "ignorant and unstable" are people who have chosen to be such. They are ignorant of Paul's teaching because they have been unwilling to learn and they are unstable because they allow themselves to be misled. We must *choose* to spiritually grow or not. Spiritual growth is an intentional choice.

Second, be disciplined to grow spiritually. Notice verse 17— "Therefore, you, dear friends, since you already know this be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position in Christ." Protect yourselves; shun and avoid evil and misleading teaching; keep yourself from these novel, though insidious, errors. Watch yourselves! Spiritual growth is a spiritual discipline.

Third, spiritual growth must be transformational! It's not merely filling our heads with Bible facts and knowledge, notice, it is growth in *both* grace (the undeserved favor of God) and knowledge. We serve a God of

all grace (1 Pet 5:10); we come to the throne of grace in prayer (Heb 4:16); we are justified by God's grace (Tit 3:7; Rom 3:24). We are saved, from beginning to end by grace. The more you know, Peter is saying, the more grace-like you will be. And the more you understand God's grace, the more knowledgeable you will become. Further, this "knowledge" is knowledge of spiritual things beyond the entry stage of Christianity—that's the use of the term here.

What does all of this mean practically speaking? First of all, it means a few minutes a day is not enough to grow spiritually. Second, regular Sunday attendance or church activities do not cause growth. Again they are good things to do and be involved with, but they do not grow you in Christ. What *does* grow you is regular disciplined study of the Bible. "Oh, I don't have time!" All of us have time to do what we want to do and need to do—we just don't want to give God the time! Let's be honest!

Another truth is that kids and youth are trained by modeling spiritual growth. They do what they *see*, not what you tell them in spiritual matters! If you want them to pray more, you must pray more. If you want them to guard their tongue, then you must discipline your language choices. If you want your kids to choose godly and healthy activities, then you must choose them. If you want them to study the Bible and read it more, then you have to do so.

Avail yourself of the means of growth — a regular Bible class, or a solid small group study, or a men's or women's study group. Set aside daily time to read and study the Bible. Get some basic Bible helps, like a Bible dictionary, a good commentary and perhaps a study Bible. The point is — GROW!

AND BEYOND

More Daily Devotions

This introductory devotional book to this next year is just the beginning of your journey with God. But unlike most other devotional or inspirational books out there, I am directing you to a link I created for daily devotional materials.

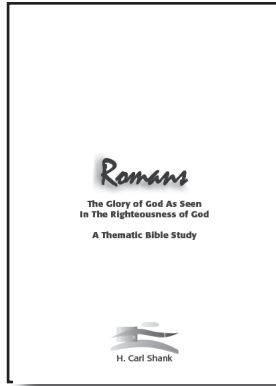
You will therefore find daily devotionals for February through December of this new year at:

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/50f56314-7f5f-412f-869b-b463405d4ec4>

Enjoy your journey with God!

APPENDIX

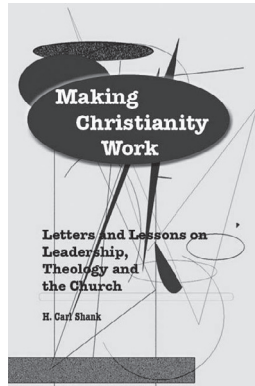
OTHER TITLES
BY THE AUTHOR



Romans: The Glory of God As Seen in the Righteousness of God, A Thematic Bible Study, 2017.

A Bible study book on Romans with Leader's Notes. The study is arranged according to the themes of Paul's Letter to the Romans. "Righteousness From A Sovereign God," "Universal Guilt," "Gospel Benefits," "Sanctification: God's Picture of Righteousness In Our Lives," "Sovereignty: God's Sovereignty Leads to Grateful Praise and Gospel Love," "Understanding God's Sovereign Purposes," "God Is Not Through With Israel," "Living Sacrifices," "The Politically Correct Christian," and "Liberty Not License."

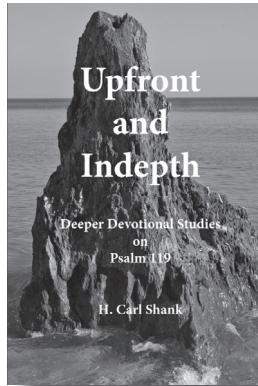
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Making Christianity Work: Letters and Lessons on Leadership, Theology and the Church, 2012.

Insights shared by the author from letters, emails and various mentoring situations involving a number of lay and professional ministry leaders over an almost forty year span. Sections include "Feelings About God and Life," "Knowing God Better," "Faith and Culture," "On Church Health and Growth," "On Church Difficulties," "On Preaching and Teaching," and "On Theology."

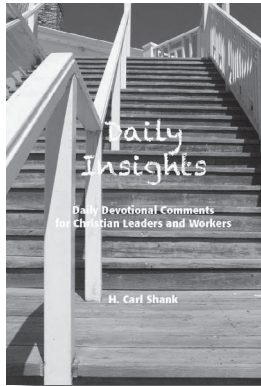
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Upfront and Indepth: Deeper Devotional Studies on Psalm 119, 2010.

This little exposition of Psalm 119 unlocks some of the deeper truths of the longest Psalm recorded in the Bible. Not for the tame, or for a quick read, this devotional study will challenge you to personally go places you have never visited within your own walk with God.

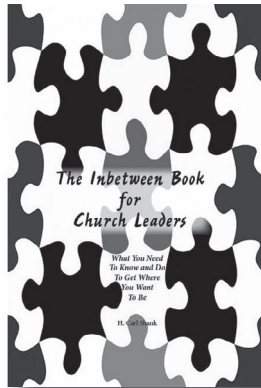
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Daily Insights: Daily Devotional Comments for Christian Leaders and Workers, 2010.

A selection of daily devotionals for Christians wanting to know how to go deeper with God on very practical matters such as character, leadership and spirituality. Gleaned from the author's daily devotionals.

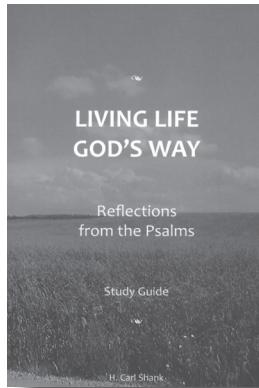
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The In-Between Book for Church Leaders: What You Need to Know and Do To Get To Where You Want To Be, 2013.

For leaders of smaller to mid-sized churches seeking to go from where they are to where they may want to be. Sections include "Fighting the Three Ds," "Attending to the Five Cs," "Is This What God Really Wants?," "The Role of Godly Complaining," "Intentional Patience," "Mentoring Not Modeling," and "Stop Whining!"

Available from lulu.com and amazon.com and other booksellers.



Living Life God's Way: Reflections from the Psalms,
2016.

This is a study guide for selected Psalms from the Bible. It's fill-in-the blanks format is perfect for a small group study, or even a personal study of the Psalms. It references 67 of the most read Psalms and includes a special study of Psalm 1. A selection of "Psalms for Christmas" is included in the study.

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