

God's Armor

For

Today's Battles

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INTRODUCTION

God has called us to Himself. He has given us all a purpose and a voice. Sadly, most Christians have never found their God-given voice. The enemy has effectively used multiple strongholds to frustrate their growth, kill their purpose, and silence their voice. To tear down the strongholds and stand amid the enemy's attacks, we need to cloth ourselves daily with God's armor.

As listed in Ephesians 6, God's armor is the faith-sustaining qualities and characteristics essential for building resilience and Godly grit. If we could live without threat or adversity, the armor would not be necessary. The problem is that you cannot avoid all hardship, and much of it, you will not be able to handle it without reliance on the Holy Spirit and relying on God's armor. If you expect to remain healthy and viable in God's kingdom, you need to put on His armor daily. You will need to be equipped with honesty, faith, surrender, and

ongoing honest self-evaluation. You will need to be living a life of continuing confession, redemption, restoration, reconciliation, and ongoing sanctification. If appropriately equipped, you will find your place in God's kingdom through service and generosity.

We all have a God-given purpose. Many people live their entire lives with no idea where they fit. If you know your place, it will give your grit strength and substance. My prayer is that you will find your God-given voice and place in His kingdom. If we seek Him, He has promised abundant and meaningful life.

Chapter 1 – Your Voice

It was a sweltering, dry, and dusty afternoon in late June. We were in beautiful Sunriver, Oregon, with a couple of our children and grandchildren. The heat was getting the best of us as we sat in an Airbnb's unairconditioned living room. We were all tired, and the youngest granddaughter had reached her limit. She did not cry; she did not scream; she just grumbled. The high-pitched grumbling of a six-year-old when you are hot and exhausted is exceptionally annoying. When you are six and cute, you can usually get away with some irritating complaining but not on this day. In frustration, her uncle spoke up, “use your voice.” This situation got me thinking about how most people, devoid of voice, speak in grumblese. We mumble and complain as we live in constant frustration consumed with needless distraction. On the other hand, if we can find our voice, we find freedom from that frustration and distraction.

We all have a voice, but only a few will find it and use it for its intended purpose. Your voice is a gift from God; it is unique and expresses your purpose. Your voice is why you exist. If you find your voice, exercise it appropriately, and use it as intended, you will find that it comes equipped with an ample supply of sustaining grit.

Have you found your voice? Are you exercising your voice? Are you using your voice?

God made us all unique individuals. When I immigrated from Canada in 1992, my uniqueness was determined by a fingerprint. From when I left Canada until I became a US citizen, I had my fingerprints recorded seven times. Your fingerprints are unique. When I travel back to see family in Canada, I stop at a kiosk that snaps a photo of my retina. I am identified as unique by the blood vessels on the back of my eye. I live in Oregon, where my driver's license is part of a database that identifies me as unique based on facial features. When I call my bank in Canada, I am recognized as unique by their voice recognition software without logging in or entering a password.

We are all unique, with unique DNA and a unique voice. We are all unique in the eyes of God, as recorded in Psalm 139:16 (TPT), "*You saw who you created me to be before I became me!*" Your voice has a theme, a form of expression, and a

message. God gave you your voice to bring glory to Him. Unique in presentation and composition, but united in purpose. Your voice is the expression of your life, a proclamation of everything God has given. It is your way of uniquely expressing God's glorious wonders. It is the living of 1 Corinthians 10:31 (TPT) "*Whether you eat or drink, live your life in a way that glorifies and honors God.*" Your voice is to demonstrate the attributes of God as the fruit of the Spirit recorded in Galatians 5:22-23. Your voice is your unique way of displaying and expressing God's love to the glory of God in the service of humanity. As disciples of Jesus, we all have a calling. Our calling is not unique; we are all called to Him. He has given us unique gifts, talents, interests, opportunities, and passions for His glory. Our calling is the same, but our voices are different. When you seek Him, you will find Him and find your voice. You do not have to search for your voice or feel pressured if your voice is different than your neighbor's. The voices of all of God's children are needed as reported in 1 Peter 4:10 (TPT), "*Every believer has received grace gifts, so use them to serve one another as faithful stewards of the many-colored tapestry of God's grace.*" We are knit together as God's quilt of love to the world.

1 Peter 2:9 (TPT), "*But you are God's chosen treasure - priests who are kings, a spiritual "nation" set apart as God's devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience*

his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world.” You are God’s treasure, and your voice is present to proclaim His wonders.

Your voice is the expression of the authentic you. The you that God fashioned and empowered.

The purpose of your voice is to glorify God as the unique, authentic individual that He created. There is a lot of room for a wide variety of voice themes and expressions. What is the accurate you? What are your interests, talents, gifts, and passions? How do you see yourself expressing the fruit of the spirit and the image of God?

The following is a list of possible voice themes. Pause and consider what may be your theme. You will find that several of these themes may describe you, but you will also find that one is more dominant. Be aware of what energizes you. In what section of God’s great choir do you sit?

Artistic theme – Do you have an eye for beauty in its many wondrous forms? Are you energized by creating art? Art takes many forms from painting, photography, film production, sculpture, music, poetry, architecture, design, and cooking. If you have a passion for the beauty you experience and a desire to share it with others, then your voice may have an artistic theme.

Encourager theme – Are you passionate about helping others? Do you see yourself as having the gift of “helps?” Are you keenly aware of the needs of others and where you may be encouraging? Encouragement takes many forms, from volunteering time, being generous with what God has provided to speaking words of encouragement during a time of vulnerability. If you are passionate about praying for others and taking action to build them up, your voice theme may be that of the encourager.

Teacher theme – Do you have a passion for learning and an ability to explain what may seem complicated in simple terms? Do you enjoy researching a matter and looking for solutions? Do you love studying, reading, and evaluating? If you are passionate about becoming an expert in a field and sharing that knowledge with others, your voice theme may be the teacher theme.

Performer theme – Are you skilled at telling a story? Do you have the passion and ability to bring people together to build community? Do you experience joy in planning events and special occasions? If you are sensitive to the mood in a room and are passionate about improving that mood, your voice theme is that of the performer.

Nurturer theme – Do you have the same gifts and passions as the encourager but the patience and resilience to be present

for a long time? The nurturer is the encourager for a smaller number of people for a more extended period.

Boundary establishment theme – Do you have a passion for relational order? Do you have the ability to see both sides of an issue and evaluate unemotionally? Can you bring two disagreeing parties together and find a common purpose? Would you be a fair judge? If you have a passion for relational order, for balancing rewards and responsibilities while establishing consequences, your voice theme may be the theme of a boundary establisher.

Reporter theme – Would you be described as overly curious? Do you enjoy asking questions? If you are curious, ask lots of questions, and are passionate about sharing your findings with others, your voice theme may be a reporter's theme.

Prophetic theme - Do you feel driven to find the truth? Are you passionate about authenticity, even if rejected by others? Does your stand for the truth offend someone? If you are passionate about truth and authenticity and sharing with others for their benefit, your voice theme may be the prophet's theme.

Order establisher theme – Is it necessary to you that your possessions have a proper storage place? Do you put things back where they belong? Are you troubled by unnecessary disorder? If you have a passion for efficient orderliness and

enjoy sharing your discoveries with others, you may have the voice theme of order establisher.

Pause to consider what may be your voice theme. You may find you have several voice themes and that they have changed over the years. What is your dominant theme today? For each theme, there are limitless opportunities and mechanisms for expression. How will you express your voice today to bring glory to God and advance His kingdom?

It is impossible to list all the possible voice delivery mechanisms, so I will name just a few to give you an idea. It is up to you to consider and embrace your instrument. What are your God-given gifts and talents? Are you using them?

You can express your voice artistically. There are limitless modalities of creative artistic endeavor. God is a God of beauty and creativity, and His glory can be communicated to the world through art. The art activities could range from finger painting to marble sculpture. Do you have a passion for a form of art? Do you share your gifts, talents, and passions with others? What does your art tell your world about the God who loves them and you? You can express your voice through music. In 1 Samuel 16:23 (MSG), we read about the impact of music on the soul, *“After that, whenever the bad depression from God tormented Saul, David got out his harp and played. That would calm Saul down, and he*

would feel better as the moodiness lifted.” God’s created world is filled with soul-soothing music. As recorded in Colossians 3:16 (TPT), God desires music to be a part of our relationship with Him, “Let the word of Christ live in you richly, flooding you with all wisdom. Apply the Scriptures as you teach and instruct one another with the Psalms, and with festive praises, and with prophetic songs given to you spontaneously by the Spirit, so sing to God with all your hearts!”

Music can be sung, played, or appreciated. Do you have a passion for music? Are you using your talents for music to bring glory to God? You can express your voice in writing. As difficult as it may be, do you enjoy crafting a sentence, lyric, or line that communicates clearly and effectively? Writing does not have to be a novel or theological masterpiece. Writing a card of encouragement or appreciation can go a long way in demonstrating God’s love. You can express your voice in actions or acts of service. An act of service could be developing a company or improving your place of work. Do you enjoy enhancing your environment or the environments of others? Do you have a talent for creating order out of chaos? God is a God of order, and your actions to develop order can bring glory to His name. These productive actions can be an individual effort, a group effort, or support for others’ efforts. You can express your voice with your voice. Timely

spoken words of encouragement are potent. Spoken words are powerful. We need to be continuously reminded of Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV), *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”* Be conscientious about what you speak. If you want to eat good fruit, you will have to say life-giving words. You do not have to be a gifted orator to speak peace and life or share the love of God.

All the voice mechanisms need nurturing in prayer. If you claim you are a child of God, you should spend time talking to Him. Only as your intimacy with God grows will you grow in awareness and expression of your voice. Intimate time with God is the womb for your developing voice. So, pause, and lean in on God for direction, comfort, and strength. His Holy Spirit will infuse your passion and perseverance.

Your voice is the expression of your unique purpose for demonstrating God’s love to the world. God gave you a unique voice, and you were made to find, exercise, and use your voice. If you develop an intimate relationship with God, you will find the voice He gave you. Exercising and utilizing this voice will generate its own grit. It is energizing and freeing to be the authentic you created to know God and glorify Him.

The purpose of your voice is to glorify God and advance His kingdom. You should not use your voice to gain attention or

affirmation. 1 Peter 5:6 (TPT), *“If you bow low in God’s awesome presence, he will eventually exalt you as you leave the timing in his hands.”* The relentless pursuit of affirmation will eventually leave you burnt out and empty. Living God’s way, you are free to pursue a passion without focusing on recognition or affirmation. You are free to look ahead and not around to determine direction and success based on God’s definition. Live by God’s standard.

Remember that the giftedness to express your God-given voice comes from God. God has given gifts to all, as recorded in Romans 11:29 (TPT), *“And when God chooses someone and graciously imparts gifts to him, they are never rescinded.”* Do not arrogantly believe your gifts come from you because you are somehow special. Yes, you are special in God’s eyes, and He gave you your gifts. You need to seek Him and apply your Godly grit to use the gifts He gave you.

If you use your voice in this way to glorify God, you will be partnering with Him. This is how we were intended to live, walking with God and not pleading God to walk with us. 2 Peter 1:2-4 (TPT), *“May grace and perfect peace cascade over you as you live in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Everything we could ever need for life and complete devotion to God has already been deposited in us by his divine power. For all this was lavished upon us through the rich experience of knowing him who has called us by name and*

invited us to come to him through a glorious manifestation of his goodness. As a result of this, he has given you magnificent promises that are beyond all price, so that through the power of these tremendous promises you can experience partnership with the divine nature, by which you have escaped the corrupt desires that are of the world.”

Pause and consider your voice. Metaphorically speaking, God has given His children a place in a massive choir that has gathered to sing of His glory. You were given a ticket to this choir that identifies your seat. On that ticket, there is a place identifying the section (theme), row (a delivery mechanism), and seat number (your location today). Your task is to follow the information on that ticket, find your seat, and begin exercising your voice.

It is energizing and fulfilling to use your voice as intended. However, to live authentically, you will face many obstacles that will require Godly grit. The struggle is to find, exercise, and express your voice. No one can find or speak your voice for you, and no one can take it away.

You must press into God to find your voice. You will face many distractions from the urgency of life events and responsibilities. You will face discouragements along with ridicule, rejection, uncertainty, and insecurity. Much of the time, you will have to dig deep to rely on the Holy Spirit's

infused grit to *“press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 3:14 (KJV)

Chapter 2 – The Press

If we pause for a moment of contemplation, we must admit that life is complicated. We are often left struggling without the necessary answers to important questions. Even though we have the God of the universe on our side and all His resources at hand, we are still left feeling powerless and confused. The apostle Paul describes the life of stretching to become like Christ in Philippians 3:12-16 (AMP), “*Not that I have already obtained it [this goal of being Christlike] or have already been made perfect, but I actively press on so that I may take hold of that [perfection] for which Christ Jesus took hold of me and made me His own. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the [heavenly] prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature [pursuing spiritual perfection] should*

have this attitude. And if in any respect you have a different attitude, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us stay true to what we have already attained.”

We need to “actively press” because we have an enemy and obstacles that try to thwart our progress.

Part of being carnally minded is losing track of spiritual realities. Carnal problems are tangible, concrete, and definable. We believe that life’s difficulties are physical, and we downplay the truth that there is an enemy. The enemy’s purpose is described in John 10:10 (TPT), “*A thief has only one thing in mind—he wants to steal, slaughter, and destroy. But I have come to give you everything in abundance, more than you expect - life in its fullness until you overflow!*” The enemy knows you well and wants to steal, slaughter, and destroy your voice, joy, spiritual growth, knowledge of God, and peace. You are not able to defeat this enemy on your own.

Our real battles in life are not with our boss, rebellious teenager, nasty neighbor, or someone from an opposing political party. Our struggle is in the spiritual realm that controls our thoughts and emotions. 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (TPT), “*For although we live in the natural realm, we don’t wage a military campaign employing human weapons, using manipulation to achieve our aims. Instead, our spiritual*

weapons are energized with divine power to effectively dismantle the defenses behind which people hide. We can demolish every deceptive fantasy that opposes God and break through every arrogant attitude that is raised up in defiance of the true knowledge of God. We capture, like prisoners of war, every thought and insist that it bow in obedience to the Anointed One. Since we are armed with such dynamic weaponry, we stand ready to punish any trace of rebellion, as soon as you choose complete obedience.”

Do you want to know God? Do you want to live with freedom and vitality in seeking and serving God? Do you want to be able to set aside the burdens that trip you up and slow you down? If you are God's unique person, you will need to renew your mind. Romans 12:2 (TPT), *“Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God’s will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes.”* This renewing of your mind needs to be a daily occurrence, a washing with His word as described in Ephesians 5:26 (TPT), *“to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.”*

To live this life of seeking God, finding your voice, using your voice, battling against principalities and powers, we will all need a healthy dose of Godly grit. God has provided the

necessary armor and weapons to lessen our burdens and run the race set before us with spirit-infused power, passion, and perseverance. We have a God who wants to be known. We have a voice to use. Would you like to know what it is like to live with your “burdens are light?”

Chapter 3 – Fortress of Shalom

Life is hard, confusing, troubling, and at times, feels impossible. We all struggle with insults, painful losses, injustices, and our sinful nature. During these times of difficulty, our goal is not complacency or comfort; our goal is contentment. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you have a defensive fortress manufactured by the cross's wood and nails. This fortress is a place of peace and contentment where you are free to be authentic and honest. Psalm 9:9-10 (NIV), *“The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.”*

Most believers look forward to the mansion Christ is preparing for them in heaven and care little about the fortress He has provided for them here today. We willingly live in perpetual discontent, looking forward to a time of peace in the sweet by-

and-by. Jesus died for you to provide a fortress of peace, available for immediate occupancy. The prayer of the Levites is for us today, Numbers 6:24-26 (NIV), *““The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”* The Hebrew Shalom, this life of peace is for today. Shalom is a state of peace and completeness. It is a mindset of quiet tranquility and contentment. Within our God-provided fortress, there is safety and security. Outside of this fortress, the world may be upside-down and out of control, but there is Shalom within the fortress’ walls.

This fortress is not something we can create with our efforts; it is a gift available to us. John 14:27 (TPT), *“I leave the gift of peace with you—my peace. Not the kind of fragile peace given by the world, but my perfect peace. Don’t yield to fear or be troubled in your hearts—instead, be courageous!”* Are you living in this place of peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, and tranquility?

God is our fortress; He is our protector and our salvation. We have no reason to crumble in fear or cower because of intimidation. Psalm 18:2 (TPT), *“You’re as real to me as bedrock beneath my feet, like a castle on a cliff, my forever firm fortress, my mountain of hiding, my pathway of escape, my tower of rescue where none can reach me. My secret strength and shield around me, you are salvation’s ray of*

brightness shining on the hillside, always the champion of my cause.”

Psalm 62:6 (TPT), *“For he alone is my safe place. His wrap-around presence always protects me as my champion defender. There’s no risk of failure with God! So why would I let worry paralyze me, even when troubles multiply around me?”*

Psalm 46:1-3 (TPT), *“God, you’re such a safe and powerful place to find refuge! You’re a proven help in time of trouble—more than enough and always available whenever I need you. So we will never fear even if every structure of support were to crumble away. We will not fear even when the earth quakes and shakes, moving mountains and casting them into the sea. For the raging roar of stormy winds and crashing waves cannot erode our faith in you.”*

2 Samuel 22:2-4 (NKJV), *“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, My stronghold and my refuge; My Savior, You save me from violence. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies.”*

Psalm 144:2 (TPT), *“He’s my shelter of love and my fortress of faith, who wraps himself around me as a secure shield. I hide myself in this one who subdues enemies before me.”*

We can take comfort in the fact that the God of our comfort knows us thoroughly. He knows the beginning from the end; He knows the outcome and what we need.

Nahum 1:7 (NKJV), *“The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.”*

If you seek Him and find your voice and begin to use it, you will face many challenges that will require a fortress – a fortress of safety, rest, and nourishment.

A life free from discomfort would lack the challenges needed to grow. Yes, we have times when we would like to see things work out smoothly. We long for our environment to change to accommodate our wishes. However, we ultimately desire to know that we are still at peace and not destroyed emotionally amid very troubling circumstances.

God provided the way of escape through the work Christ accomplished on the cross. What does it mean that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light? What does life look like within the walls of His fortress? Life seems more of a duty and heavy responsibility than a blessing at times.

Our discomfort and discontent often do not lead us to the cross; it leads us to actions within our power and control. We strive to overcome uneasiness through denial, distraction, reaction, and minimization. All these methods seem to work

briefly but given time, they leave us more discouraged and emptier.

To control our discontentment and felt pain, we alter painful reality through denial. This life of denial is a weak self-made fortress. We deny we have a problem or minimize the seriousness of the problem. We deny our faults, and by pretending they do not exist, we believe we will be able to hide our flaws. We deny our intent, pretending our goal or motives are pure and positive when they are self-protective. We deny our self-centeredness and selfishness, convinced our actions are to serve others. We use fantasy and superstition to strengthen our denial, removing our felt pain further from experience and reality. We can even use perpetual turmoil to deny, believing that if my life is in constant upheaval, I have an excuse and do not have to deal with the more significant realities and life issues. Through a lack of gratitude, we can even deny the many blessings in our life. If I chose to live in denial to control felt pain, then thanksgiving and gratitude will not be a part of my life. Gratitude dissolves denial, so if I am grateful, I would have to face the realities of life.

If denying is not our first choice of controlling discontentment, we will often choose distraction. Distraction is a mild form of denial and can effectively deal with some uneasiness and pain. If you want to lessen the pain of childhood immunizations, distract the child with a noisy toy. We distract

ourselves in many ways. We distract through entertainment. Social media, movies, television, sports, commuter games are all readily available and effective forms of distraction. Work can serve as a distraction, avoiding dealing with or recognizing discontent in other areas of life. We can be distracted through education or additional learning. Self-help books are plentiful and can even offer some superficial benefit, but they can also be a form of ongoing distraction from life's realities. We can be distracted by hobbies. We can be distracted fighting for a cause or being part of a group of like-minded people. It is not that these things are evil; they may be valuable parts of our lives, but not if their sole purpose is a distraction. It would help if you still spent time addressing reality.

We can achieve avoidance-distraction with ritual, practicing a set of actions or procedures with an expected outcome. If I do things in a specific prescribed way, God is obligated to bless me. If left uncontrolled, rituals can become compulsions, and compulsions can become obsessions, and the purpose of the action is wholly lost.

If distraction becomes ineffective, it is possible to take it to another level and seek to numb ourselves. It is possible for you to numb discontentment for some time with food, drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, or computer games. The brief comfort provided by these activities makes an addiction an addiction.

Be careful; it is easy to go from distraction to addiction without even realizing it. Your self-made fortress is about to collapse on you.

Another mechanism of dealing with discontentment is a reflexive reaction. Anger can be an effective form of self-protection when you feel threatened. Living as a victim and avoiding responsibility through blame and bitterness can feel like a safe place to hide from life's discontentment. Feeling superior because of your unique situation or life pain can be used to justify rebellion and even criminal activity.

We long for contentment. Denial, distraction, addiction, and overt reaction do not bring us more pleasure. These activities may be an effective means of avoidance but leave us with more discontentment in the long run.

What is contentment? What is this life of Shalom that Jesus has offered to us as a gift? If you ask, you will get many different answers. Most people would answer that contentment is the solution to an immediate life problem. From the beginning of time, disgruntled people have turned to their spiritual leaders, monks, shaman, mystics, rabbis, imams, priests, and pastors for the key to living a contented life. We also turn to our psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, and medical doctors to find the path to contentment. If all else fails, we can minimize your

discontentment with a medication. We are even promised bliss by the advertising industry, which promotes their products as a cure for dissatisfaction. Peddlers of counterfeit contentment fill our world. If a wave of contentment suddenly hit our nation, the jobless rate would skyrocket. Discontent is good for the economy but cruel to the citizens.

Contentment masquerades as many things, so we need to consider what contentment is not to understand contentment better.

Contentment is a vital part of healthy, productive living, but it is not a quality you can achieve through self-generated efforts. Contentment is not a minimizing of expectations and learning to live in the moment. This minimization is just a combination of denial and complacency.

Contentment is not financial security. If you have enough finances for your basic needs, the rest or abundance does not add to your contentment level.

Contentment has nothing to do with leisure time. Leisure as the sole focus of attainable peace will disappoint.

Contentment is not a physical state. You cannot obtain peace with an exercise program or diet. Good health is desirable, but it is not contentment.

So, what then is the contentment or peace available to the

children of God?

Hebrews chapter 4 describes this Shalom type of contentment. It is the faith-rest that should be a part of every believer's life. Unfortunately, what we witness most often, or experience in our own lives, is a life where we believe in God, but faith-rest lacks. Where is this promised land of rest? Where is the door to the fortress? We seem to be willing to remain content that our faith will get us to heaven while we struggle with life's burdens. We are no different than the children of Israel; we believe in the promise but walk in the wilderness. Hebrews chapter four encourages us to walk in this faith-rest provided by God, "today." We do not have to be weighed down by the burdens of this life if we live by faith. We do not have to be imprisoned by any of the strongholds. We do not have to be crushed by condemnation or trapped by self-centeredness. Hebrews 4:3 (TPT), *"For those of us who believe, faith activates the promise, and we experience the realm of confident rest!"*

God has promised us His rest; this rest is real contentment. It is the freedom to be the authentic you. It is not a life of complacency. It is the life available from within His fortress. It is the ability to know God's plan for you and live that plan with passion and commitment. It is the ability to understand, exercise, and use your voice. It is living with the belief and faith that God's rest and peace are more significant than any

of the world's burdens or problems. God is our source, our provider, and we should live free in service to Him. Hebrews 4:10 (TPT), *“As we enter into God’s faith-rest life, we cease from our works, just as God celebrates his finished works and rests in them.”*

We cannot gain God’s faith-rest by our works; it is provided, as a gift, that was bought with a price. Real contentment is only available through and because of the cross. The cost was high, and He paid the price. Shalom seems out of reach because it is out of our reach; it is only available through the cross. All other forms of felt contentment are minimization of genuine contentment. The only faithful Shalom is the faith-rest Christ died to purchase for us. The burdens of life have no adequate resolution without the cross, but there is a resolution, restoration, and rest with the cross. Hebrews 4:11 tells us this is not the “let go and let God” kind of complacent rest; we obtain this rest through diligence and effort. We need to allow God to search our hearts; we need to root out unbelief and ask God for faith. We need to seek Him with all our heart and not just seek Him enough to feel a little better about ourselves today. We also need to gain a growing appreciation for what Christ accomplished on the cross. Hebrews 4:11 (TPT), *“So then we must give our all and be eager to experience this faith-rest life so that no one falls short by following the same pattern of doubt and unbelief.”*

The children of Israel could visualize their lives in the promised land but did not have the faith to enter that land. We, too, should be able to imagine what life would look like if we lived in this faith-rest promise. Do we want to be like the children of Israel and miss the promise?

What would our experience of the trials and strongholds of life look like if we were to live by faith and understanding God provided “faith-rest”?

Firstly, we would not see the strongholds as insurmountable hurdles. We would see that our discontent comes from not living our lives in the image of God, as God intended. Our God-given image has not changed, but our relationship with God has changed. Contentment comes with “living the image.” At the cross, Christ provided a way back to God, so we should now be able to live in His image as was initially intended. Colossians 1:20-22 (TPT), *“And by the blood of his cross, everything in heaven and earth is brought back to himself - back to its original intent, restored to innocence again! Even though you were once distant from him, living in the shadows of your evil thoughts and actions, he reconnected you back to himself. He released his supernatural peace to you through the sacrifice of his own body as the sin-payment on your behalf so that you would dwell in his presence. And now there is nothing between you and Father God, for he sees you as holy, flawless, and*

restored,” We need to live with a growing awareness of what Christ accomplished for each of us on the cross.

The image of God in us is fractured, and the enemy tries to trip us up with various strongholds, but because of the work Christ accomplished on the cross, we can now renew our relationship with God and live the image and the life that He intended.

If you live the life God has for you, you will need this fortress and comfort only found in Him. God gave you a voice and a purpose. If you use it, you will be a threat to the enemy, and he will try to destroy you. May God give you peace and rest as you seek and serve Him.

Chapter 4 – The Enemy’s Playbook

If you are the coach of a team headed to the Super Bowl, you would have a considerable advantage if you had the other team’s playbook. A playbook details the game plan, listing what options you have and how you will respond based on the game’s unfolding. The Bible is not only a guidebook on how to live, but it is also a revelation of the enemy’s playbook. You will be at a considerable advantage if you know how the enemy plans to stop you from fulfilling God’s plan for your life.

If you seek God and have found your voice, you will also discover that the enemy has a plan. The enemy’s objective is to prevent you from using your voice. The enemy has a book of tactics to knock you off course and cause you to quit. Often, the enemy is victorious. In this next chapter, I would like to uncover the enemy’s schemes to prepare you for what you

will face.

This book is a project that started about fifty years ago. The contents developed slowly into a form that was ready to be shared with others in the fall of 2020. With ninety-five percent of the book written, I released the first podcast on November 18, 2020. The enemy was not happy. I believe I had found my voice and was now taking direct action to share it. On that day, the enemy released an unexpected attack to discourage me and prevent me from moving in the direction God was leading. That day's events included false accusations, mocking, deception, and shaming, with a significant threat to my finances. I was preparing to write this chapter, not realizing I was about to live it. Now, I have never given much stock to my dreams, usually explaining them on my dietary indiscretions or level of fatigue, but the night before these events was different. That night I dreamt that God presented my wife and me with an extraordinary gift – a gift that we at first would not understand to be a gift. I awoke that morning full of peace as I walked out to my shop to record and release the first podcast. God is so good in giving you what you need when you need it. I now have an experiential understanding of 1 Peter 4:16 (TPT), *“If you suffer for being a Christian, don’t consider it a disgrace but a privilege. Glorify God because you carry the Anointed One’s name.”* When you begin to live God’s plan for your life, you will find the enemy whispers, and

he has many willing listeners, ready to cooperate in his plan to get you to become discouraged and quit.

Amid the turmoil, keep seeking God and do not quit. He is your fortress and source of peace. James 1:12 (TPT), *“If your faith remains strong, even while surrounded by life’s difficulties, you will continue to experience the untold blessings of God! True happiness comes as you pass the test with faith, and receive the victorious crown of life promised to every lover of God!”*

This victorious crown of life promised in James 1 is not waiting for you in heaven; it is available today as you find your voice and begin to use it. You will find your life has purpose and meaning; you will experience contentment and peace that can only come from God. You will experience fulfillment as you establish a legacy of God’s love. The enemy will push back with intensity but keep standing.

You are a threat to the enemy's plans, and he will fight back. He wants to steal your peace, kill your voice, and destroy your legacy. He wants to keep you from being who God wants you to be. How does the enemy attack, who does he use? The Bible contains many examples of the enemy’s tactics against people of faith.

The enemy will attack you through condemnation. In 2 Samuel 6 about David and Michal after David experienced

a significant victory. When David danced in the streets celebrating the victory that God ordained, his wife mocked and ridiculed him. Do not be surprised if you experience condemnation from those close to you. Condemnation from strangers is powerless, but condemnation from those you love can be devastating. Do not let condemnation destroy you.

Another scheme of the enemy is a false accusation. In Genesis 39, we read the account of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Joseph was where God wanted him. He was in a place of leadership that would ensure the survival of the children of Israel. The false accusation from Potiphar's wife was the enemy's scheme to remove Joseph. A false allegation is an injustice that can destroy you in two ways. If believed by others, the accusation can hurt you. It can also destroy you if you become consumed fighting the false charge. In Isaiah 54:17 (NKJV), we read, "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn.*" When falsely accused, condemn the words as untrue and move ahead with your God-given purpose. God does not require you to be the enemy's doormat. Strive to love the people, condemn the words, and not be consumed by the fight. God will defend you. We read the story of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16. In this account, we see that the enemy used seduction and

flattery to prevent Samson from fulfilling his God-given plan. Delilah mocked Samson and then accused him of mocking her. Be careful; the weapons used against you are often how the accuser hides those same actions and intentions. If you are mocked, flattered, or unduly promoted, it is most likely to take something from you and not give you something genuine. God has more for you than the accolades of others.

The events I mentioned occurring on November 18, 2020, happened during a time of personal physical and mental exhaustion. I had been on-call for an inpatient facility 24/7 for 15 weeks. The enemy knows when we are most vulnerable, and one of those times is when we are exhausted. In 1 Kings 19, we read about Elijah running from Jezebel, fearful and intimidated. He was exhausted and wanted to die. 1 Kings 19:4 (NKJV), *“But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”* Take care of yourself – do not burn yourself out. Do not forget that the battle is the Lord’s. Do not become weary in doing good. Galatians 6:9 (TPT), *“And don’t allow yourselves to be weary or disheartened in planting good seeds, for the season of reaping the wonderful harvest you’ve planted is coming!”*

The enemy is aware of your vulnerable areas and will use

those areas to steal, kill, and destroy. The enemy will use any of the stronghold areas that have been areas of vulnerability in your life to isolate you and cause you to retreat. As you move ahead in becoming the person God would have you to be, you can expect to wrestle with your past strongholds. Be aware and on guard – seek the Lord and keep moving forward.

In 1 Samuel 30:18 (NKJV), we read of another scheme of the enemy. The enemy will attack by stealing the fruit of your toil and labor. *“Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way. So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David’s two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive. Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.”* Moving

forward with God may bring with it an attack on your finances, family, and reputation. The enemy will do all he can to rob your joy and peace to discourage you and get you to quit. Do what you can to value and protect your marriage and your family. Pray for them and be available.

We see another example of the enemy's schemes in the account of Moses. Moses was God's man to lead the children of Israel to their promised land. Almost every time Moses moved forward with God's plans, the people turned against him. Exodus 14:11-12 (NKJV), *"Then they said to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.'*" Do not be surprised if the enemy uses this scheme against you when it is least expected. A victory won is often attacked by the enemy through others' envy and jealousy.

Another effective scheme of the enemy is to get you to become offended and bitter. Bitterness will quickly steal your peace and kill your voice. Others will pick up on your offense and become bitter themselves. As you move forward with God's plan for you, you will see injustices more clearly for what they are. Do not pick up these injustices and transform

them into a bitter-producing offense. Look to Jesus, who faced the ultimate injustice as He hung on the cross yet did not become bitter.

If all else fails, the enemy will use fear and intimidation to cause you to quit and submit. We look at the Bible's heroes as people of exceptional courage and fortitude when they are no different from the rest of us. What is outstanding about them is that they continued to move ahead with God's plan amid fear and intimidation. Esther 4:15-16 (NKJV), *"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"* Do not expect to fulfill God's plans for you with feelings of confidence and strength. God's plans for you are much bigger than you could ever accomplish with your power, and because of this, you will experience fear and intimidation. God's plans for you will take you miles beyond your zone of comfort and confidence.

We will need God's help to survive and move ahead with His plans for us. We need to develop a Biblical approach to spiritual growth and understand our role in God's kingdom. We need to build and supply a storehouse of spiritual weapons so that we will not be consumed by distraction, complacency, fear, and the enemy's other schemes.

Remember the words of Jesus in John 16:33 (TPT), *“And everything I’ve taught you is so that the peace which is in me will be in you and will give you great confidence as you rest in me. For in this unbelieving world you will experience trouble and sorrows, but you must be courageous, for I have conquered the world!”*

Chapter 5 – God’s Armor

To become the person God intends you to be, to fill your part in His kingdom will take more than tearing down strongholds and overcoming the enemy's schemes. You are not a threat to the enemy if you spend your life focused only on the strongholds like lady Macbeth continuously washing her hands. To break free of the cycle of tearing down strongholds and be free to use our voice and live as God intended, we will need a storehouse within His fortress where we can grow and mature. This storehouse is where we find the rest that God can provide and the nourishment needed to grow and heal. Never forget, this life you have been given is a gift; it is not all about you; it is about Him and sharing His love with the world around you. In Galatians 6:1-5 (TPT), we read, *“My beloved friends, if you see a believer who is overtaken with a fault, may the one who overflows with the Spirit seek to restore him. Win him over with gentle*

words, which will open his heart to you and will keep you from exalting yourself over him. Love empowers us to fulfill the law of the Anointed One as we carry each other's troubles. If you think you are too important to stoop down to help another, you are living in deception. Let everyone be devoted to fulfill the work God has given them to do with excellence, and their joy will be in doing what's right and being themselves, and not in being affirmed by others. Every believer is ultimately responsible for his or her own conscience." This passage should be our guiding light when we reach out to help others. We should be willing to help, humble in our approach, work with the highest standards of excellence, not seeking others' affirmation, as we are comforted by His Spirit. If we move in this direction, we will be fulfilling the law of Christ, stated in Matthew 22:36-40 (TPT), *"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus answered him, "Love the Lord your God with every passion of your heart, with all the energy of your being, and with every thought that is within you. " This is the great and supreme commandment. And the second is like it in importance: 'You must love your friend in the same way you love yourself. Contained within these commandments to love you will find all the meaning of the Law and the Prophets."* If we claim to be followers of Jesus, then this is why we are here on earth today. If we claim we are His disciples, we will be on a path to help those struggling around us. As we read in Galatians 6:1, the ones who are overflowing

with the Spirit are in the position to reach out to help others. Those overflowing with the Spirit will be living lives that demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. We should all live this life of honesty, humility, acceptance, courage, compassion, forgiveness, and self-discipline. We should all be on the path of spiritual growth if we expect to use our voice to help others and bring glory to God.

The path you are on is not easy; you will need guidance and God-given grit to know how to stand. Life is not a fifty-meter sprint; it is a million-mile marathon; you will need rest and nutrition along the way supplied from a previously filled storehouse. You will need to be clothed in God's armor.

During times of upheaval and turmoil, there is great comfort in having an adequately stocked storehouse. When I was fifteen, I learned the value of an adequately stocked storehouse. I worked with my grandfather in the Canadian arctic during that summer, helping a missionary family build a new house and church. A significant part of their home was an attached storehouse. If you lived in Eskimo Point, Northwest Territories, in 1968, the supply ship only arrived once a year. A family had to consider their needs for a year and then order their supplies well ahead of time. If you run out of a specific item, you might still be able to find it at the local Hudson's Bay Company store at a significantly inflated price. In 1968 a six-pack of Pepsi cost fifty-nine cents unless

you lived in Eskimo Point. It was a big thrill for the young men in the community to board the transport ship where you could purchase a Pepsi for \$2.50. I made that trip with some local young men and shelled out my \$2.50. Best Pepsi I have ever drunk!

What does it take to build a storehouse? If you are making yourself a storehouse, you will want to consider what items you will want to store carefully. Do you have all the necessities? Do you have enough shelves? Are things arranged in an orderly manner? Are your items secure? Do you have enough toilet paper? Do you have enough batteries? You better consider the shelf life of what you are storing. You cannot expect to keep a side of beef in your living room and expect it to last. You will need to hold what is necessary, lasting, and sustaining. It will also take a lot of effort to gather the essential items and arrange them in your newly built storehouse. In other words, to develop and stock a good storehouse, you will need to take inventory of what will be required, and you will need to create sufficient space. You will need to be diligent, and you will need to devote adequate time for ongoing reevaluation. It is much the same when it comes to building a spiritual storehouse. It would be best to prioritize it, take inventory, create space in your life with adequate time and energy, and be diligent.

If we could live without threat or adversity, we would not

require a storehouse or God's armor. There will be adversity, and you will not be able to handle much of it without reliance on God's armor. If you expect to remain strong and viable in God's kingdom, your storehouse will need to be stocked with some vital qualities. You will need a shelf for honesty, one for faith, another for surrender, and yet another for an ongoing honest evaluation. You will need room for confession, redemption, restoration, reconciliation, and ongoing sanctification. If you set up your storehouse correctly, you will also have ample space for service and generosity. You need to fill your spiritual storehouse with all the components of the armor of God.

Ephesians 6:10-18 (TPT), *“Now my beloved ones, I have saved these most important truths for last: Be supernaturally infused with strength through your life-union with the Lord Jesus. Stand victorious with the force of his explosive power flowing in and through you. Put on God's complete set of armor provided for us, so that you will be protected as you fight against the evil strategies of the accuser! Your hand-to-hand combat is not with human beings, but with the highest principalities and authorities operating in rebellion under the heavenly realms. For they are a powerful class of demon-gods and evil spirits that hold this dark world in bondage. Because of this, you must wear all the armor that God provides so you're protected as you confront the slanderer, for*

you are destined for all things and will rise victorious. Put on truth as a belt to strengthen you to stand in triumph. Put on holiness as the protective armor that covers your heart. Stand on your feet alert, then you'll always be ready to share the blessings of peace. In every battle, take faith as your wrap-around shield, for it is able to extinguish the blazing arrows coming at you from the Evil One! Embrace the power of salvation's full deliverance, like a helmet to protect your thoughts from lies. And take the mighty razor-sharp Spirit-sword of the spoken Word of God. Pray passionately in the Spirit, as you constantly intercede with every form of prayer at all times. Pray the blessings of God upon all his believers."

So, pick up and use the armor of God to build and supply your storehouse, so on this evil day, you will be able to stand and not fall by the wayside.

We will take a closer look at the elements of the armor of God in the following chapters. The belt of truth consists of honesty, evaluation, and confession. For the shield of faith, we will look at the significance of faith in our lives. We will explore surrender, redemption, restoration, and reconciliation for the breastplate of righteousness. For the helmet of salvation, we will look at what it means to work out your salvation with fear and trembling by exploring the concept of sanctification. For the gospel of peace, we will look at the role of service and generosity. For the element of praying in the Spirit, we will

look at what gives these weapons their power. We need to put on the whole armor of God – not just part of it.

The following chapters are principles we should all be applying to our lives. These principles are God’s blueprint for personal growth. If we live by these principles, we will grow and be people who can assist those around us who are struggling. We will be using our voice to build God’s kingdom. You will need to address the elements draining your resilience bucket, but these Godly living principles will help fill your resilience bucket. Who we are is much more important than what degree we possess or the architecture of our workplace. Use the following chapters as filters for self-evaluation and tools to strengthen Godly grit. We need to be growing if we hope to be the people God desires us to be. We need to have a supply in our resilience bucket if we expect to survive and thrive and be an example to others.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NKJV), *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Your storehouse is where you will get stronger. It is those areas in life where God is changing you. So, build your

storehouse. Put on all the armor of God. If you do this, you will grow and see a change in your life. The fruit of the Spirit will begin to show.

The following chapters are God's spiritual laws for living. Spiritual laws, like natural laws, need to be respected and appreciated, even if they are not fully understood. I did not need to fully understand the law of gravity when I slipped on the deck and dislocated my shoulder. I now have a new respect for the law of gravity. Adherence to spiritual laws is beneficial to all who follow them, regardless of faith. The basis for the many successful twelve-step programs is respect for these spiritual laws. If you have addiction problems, you can remain sober if you live an honest, humble life with willpower and accountability. You will be able to stay sober but not free from addiction. Freedom from addiction only comes through the Spirit of God. God's Word and His Holy Spirit will guide us in developing an appreciation and understanding of His ways. Stock your storehouse well. Put on all of God's armor.

Chapter 6 - Honesty

When it comes to stocking your storehouse with the armor of God, we need to start with the belt of truth. We do not stand a chance against the enemy's attack if we are not grounded in biblical truth. We need to know the truth about God and the truth about ourselves. We need the truth about what the scriptures say about our relationship with God. Without this truth, there is no foundation for the other weapons. John 8:32 (NKJV), "*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*" To be the people God desires us to be, we need to be people of the highest integrity. We need to be people of truth.

The belt of truth has three components; honesty is the leather strap, ongoing evaluation is the notches, and confession is the buckle. In the following three chapters, we will evaluate the importance of honesty, evaluation, and

confession as three components of truth.

If we put on the belt of truth, we will be honest. If we are honest, we will speak the truth without pretense, and we will be living authentically. We will take full responsibility for our actions and our emotions.

It takes a tremendous amount of courage, to be honest. It is humbling to admit when you are powerless, but there is great power in being honest. Many of the strongholds we need to tear down are much bigger and stronger than us. To tear down these strongholds, we need God's help and guidance. We need to admit our inability honestly and in faith to reach out to Him. Our culture, on the other hand, promotes self-sufficiency and personal strength. If you do not have enough internal fortitude or wisdom to solve your problems, you are viewed as an inferior human. While living in northern Canada, I enjoyed kayaking on the glassy smooth, quiet lake in front of our cabin. The sun would rise at 3 am in the summer, and I would regularly go for an early morning paddle before driving in for work. I learned to do an Eskimo roll with relative ease during this time. After leaving the Canadian medical practice, we moved to Placerville, California. Our house was a short two-mile drive to the South Fork of the American River, a world-renowned river for rafting and kayaking. I was able to raft the river a few times before attempting the trip on my river

kayak. Now, I must tell you, an Eskimo roll on a calm lake is nothing like trying and accomplishing an Eskimo roll on a raging river. I have no idea how many times I swam that day – if I did remember, I would probably lie about it to make my experience sound more accomplished. The trip ended with me exhausted, clinging to the edge of a rock, losing parts of my kayak, and then being rescued by a sympathetic rafting group. The best part of that day was finally admitting that I was powerless over the river and desperately needed rescuing. If we are honest, we all need rescuing. If you live in a world where you do not recognize your need to be rescued or saved, you live in a delusional world of eventual destruction.

When you pause and evaluate your problems and shortcomings, do not hide in a forest of well-meaning intentions. Talk is cheap and not to be trusted. Good intentions are nothing more than deceptive self-talk. If you are willing to embrace the uncertain struggle for what it is, it will humble you, and it is humbling that you become free to be the person God would have you to be.

Being honest enough to admit where you are powerless is very freeing. This kind of honesty does not mean we give up and go home; there is a lot we can and should do, but it is crucial to keep in mind that we are fighting an enemy who intends our destruction. Do not treat this battle lightly!

The Bible has a lot to say about honest living and the vital importance of honesty. If you want to experience God's favor, you need to live honestly. Proverbs 12:22 (TPT), "*Live in the truth and keep your promises, and the Lord will keep delighting in you, but he detests a liar.*"

Living honestly will cost you at times but has great value in God's economy. Proverbs 19:1 (TPT), "*It's better to be honest, even if it leads to poverty, than to live as a dishonest fool.*"

Living honestly means living transparently. If you are transparent before God, He will be able to guide and change you into the person you were designed to be. 2 Corinthians 8:21 (TPT), "*for we intend to do what is right and we are totally open both to the Lord's inspection and to man's.*"

If you want your God-given dreams to succeed and your voice to be spoken, you must live honestly. Proverbs 11:3 (TPT), "*Integrity will lead you to success and happiness, but treachery will destroy your dreams.*"

Dishonesty destroys relationships and will distance you from others. If you desire quality relationships, you must be honest and authentic. Proverbs 16:28 (TPT), "*A twisted person spreads rumors; a whispering gossip ruins good friendships.*"

Do not strive for more; instead, seek to manage with integrity

and honesty what you currently have, and then you will be blessed with more. Luke 16:10 (TPT), *“The one who manages the little he has been given with faithfulness and integrity will be promoted and trusted with greater responsibilities. But those who cheat with the little they have been given will not be considered trustworthy to receive more.”*

Are you honest? Are you authentic? How can you evaluate if you are genuine or not? How can this critical trait grow and develop in your life?

Honesty must be a priority and a necessary part of your storehouse. Do not compromise your honesty. 2 Timothy 2:15 (TPT), *“Always be eager to present yourself before God as a perfect and mature minister, without shame, as one who correctly explains the Word of Truth.”*

We need to be aware of how easily we deceive ourselves. Without humility, it is impossible to live an authentic, honest life. Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV), *“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”*

1 John 1:8 (TPT), *“If we boast that we have no sin, we’re only fooling ourselves and are strangers to the truth.”*

We require God’s help to guide us to the truth and help us live more honestly. Psalm 25:5 (TPT), *“Escort me along the way;*

take me by the hand and teach me. For you are the God of my increasing salvation; I have wrapped my heart into yours!”

Psalm 86:11(TPT), *“Teach me more about you, how you work and how you move, so that I can walk onward in your truth until everything within me brings honor to your name.”*

To develop honesty requires regular washing by His Word. God’s Word is powerful and active and can reveal areas of dishonesty in our lives. Ephesians 5:26 (TPT), *“to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.”*

To be authentic and live in the truth, we require guidance and insight only available through the Holy Spirit. John 16:13 (TPT), *“But when the truth-giving Spirit comes, he will unveil the reality of every truth within you. He won’t speak his own message, but only what he hears from the Father, and he will reveal prophetically to you what is to come.”*

We must remain in a relationship with other committed believers. Your honesty will grow in an environment where you are held accountable to others seeking to grow in their relationship with the Lord. Hebrews 10:25 (TPT), *“This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing, because we need each other! In fact, we should come together even more frequently, eager to encourage and urge each other onward as we anticipate*

that day dawning.”

Growth in honesty and authenticity is not painless. It will hurt, and you will want to give up at times. It will be a struggle, but the battle will be worth it. If you are not struggling, you are probably not growing.

How stocked is the honesty section of your storehouse? Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Are you humble enough to see where you are powerless? Are you humble enough to admit that you struggle with significant issues in life? Do you desire to be the person God intended you to be? If you are not wrestling, you are not living a Christ-centered life, and you will not be able to help others who are struggling.

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul addresses this issue of ongoing struggle. In Romans 7:15-25 (TPT), he writes, *“I’m a mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. And if my behavior is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but will-power is not enough to accomplish it. My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do*

the things I want to avoid. So if my behavior contradicts my desires to do good, I must conclude that it's not my true identity doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin hindering me from being who I really am. Through my experience of this principle, I discover that even when I want to do good, evil is ready to sabotage me. Truly, deep within my true identity, I love to do what pleases God. But I discern another power operating in my humanity, waging a war against the moral principles of my conscience and bringing me into captivity as a prisoner to the "law" of sin—this unwelcome intruder in my humanity. What an agonizing situation I am in! So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death? I give all my thanks to God, for his mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So if left to myself, the flesh is aligned with the law of sin, but now my renewed mind is fixed on and submitted to God's righteous principles."

Would you like God to show up and show Himself strong on your behalf? If you live a life of pretense and self-protective deception, you tell God through your thoughts and actions that you do not need His help. You are only deceiving yourself. Are you committed to living and speaking honestly? Do you have room in your storehouse for this quality? If this quality is not a priority, you will be wasting your time attempting to utilize the rest of God's armor. You must start with honesty. You

owe it to God, you owe it to others, and you owe it to yourself.

Chapter 7 – Evaluation

Inventory taking, we do it all the time without even realizing what we are doing. When we glance at the gas gauge in our car, we take inventory. Just try covering up that gauge and going for a long drive. Not being able to see how much gas you have will significantly increase your level of anxiety. When we check our refrigerator and pantry, we take an inventory before going to the store to get groceries for the weekend.

At any given time, we are on multiple paths. We should be taking frequent inventory in numerous areas. Do not be deceived by your good intentions; they are only self-generated lies to keep you off track; be brutally honest in your inventory taking. We need to approach each new day as David in the Old Testament did in Psalm 5:3 (TPT), “*At each and every sunrise you will hear my voice as I prepare*

my sacrifice of prayer to you. Every morning I lay out the pieces of my life on the altar and wait for your fire to fall upon my heart.” We need to take inventory of all God has given us; our possessions, time, home, relationships, intellect, history, family, passion, everything, and hand it all back and then be willing to wait. God’s fire will fall. We need to take inventory of our general life direction. Where are you headed, and what are you trying to accomplish? Have you found your voice? Are you living to serve yourself, or are you living to serve God and others? We need to take inventory of our relationships. We may say we love others, but what do our actions say? Who is important in your life? How are you showing them they are essential? We need to take inventory of our resources. Are you under the weight of a burden of debt? Are you living within your means? Are you resting enough? Are you eating as you know you should? Are you getting enough exercise? Have you checked your health status recently? Do you get your teeth cleaned? Have you evaluated your relationship with God lately? Do the people around you know you are a person of faith? When did you pour your heart out to God last? When did you spend a little time waiting on Him? Time and energy should be spent taking inventory of our attitudes and character. How do others see you? Are you seen as caring or callous? Are you seen as full of the Spirit or full of bitterness? Be honest – it is your life – God will guide you, but you need to evaluate continually and then walk the path.

I learned the value of ongoing inventory taking while in medical practice in northern Saskatchewan in Canada. During my time in the north, one of my goals was to become a skilled winter camper. Over the years, I gathered the necessary equipment and began taking short overnight trips. In time I discovered that I could survive best with little gear. Winter camping is fabulous; there are no mosquitoes, and water is everywhere, even though it is white. After several brief overnight trips, it was time to prove my proficiency as a winter camper. My plan was a seven-day solo adventure. I thought it would be a good idea if someone knew where I was before my wilderness solo, so I had a friend take me to my chosen camping spot on the back of his snowmobile. It was a great experience; it was March 1990; the weather was just below freezing; everything was perfect. Incredibly quiet but perfect. I would sit on a small hill by my tent and watch the wolves dance across the frozen lake in the early morning. I walked a lot, prayed a lot, and searched my heart. The day before I was to head the sixteen miles back to my cabin, the weather turned; it warmed up to just above freezing and began to snow. I packed up camp at 4 am and headed across the frozen lake now covered with eight inches of new snow. It was peaceful and beautiful.

You may rightfully ask, what does this have to do with taking a moral inventory? I used the time in solitude to do some

essential soul searching but realistically learned more about stock-taking on my trip back to my cabin. I had sixteen miles to travel on snowshoes, where the trail was now completely covered with fresh snow. To get to my destination, I had to rely on my compass and blaze marks left on the trees by the trapper who used to use the trail. A blaze is where a bark piece is cut away from a tree trunk, leaving an easily seen scar. I knew there was a road east of where I was camping. If I made it to the road, I would have no problem finding my cabin. I made it across the lake with only two compass stops and direction adjustments. When I made it to the trail, I was happy to see the blaze marks were still faintly visible. It was a constant pattern of looking for the next blaze mark; walk to that tree then pause to look for the next blaze mark. Then hike, pause, look, hike, pause, look. Sometimes I had to turn left, sometimes I had to turn right, sometimes I could trudge ahead.

I am thankful to that trapper, whoever he is, for leaving those marks on the trees. It was necessary to alter my course every time I checked my compass or looked for a blaze mark. It was an exhausting ordeal, and obviously, I made it out alive. Still, my one-day easy walk turned into two days of uncertainty with frequent inventory checking via compass and looking for the marks on trees left by someone else. I learned that inventory taking is not a one-time self-evaluation; it is an ongoing

continuous evaluation. At times you need a compass, and at times you need to look for marks left by someone else. Your survival depends on it. Is your path taking you where you want to end up?

Several barriers may limit your ability to take an honest, moral inventory. Barriers occur in the form of denial, distraction, or deception.

Denial barriers often arise out of fear. Fear of rejection, fear of death, or loss can set the stage for soul-protecting denial. Denial is when you start to believe your drummed up good intentions. Denial arises out of fear but comes to life out of pride. Do not allow your ego to make you the fool who believes his own lies.

Distraction barriers come in many various forms. The more advanced our society becomes, the greater the number of distractions. How does anyone have any time for inventory taking when their electronic devices continually monitor them. My cell phone should allow me to feel free, not at the end of a noticeably short leash. Distractions come in how others treat us or how we think others are treating us. The opinions of others can impact our freedom for accurate self-evaluation. Distractions can also occur in what we think we need to achieve. If I can get the car that would make me feel better about myself by working harder and longer, I can work harder

and longer. I no longer pause to take an inventory; I get on the treadmill and run as hard as possible. Distraction can also show itself in the reaction to a perceived injustice. If you respond with anger or bitterness when wronged or injured, it will distract you from an accurate evaluation. Bitterness and unforgiveness are deadly traps. Distractions are everywhere; be aware of them; they are not there to help you.

Other barriers to accurate inventory taking are deception, confusion, and distrust. It is challenging to do an appropriate inventory when you are drowning in a sea of uncertainty. It has become impossible to breathe without inhaling and choking on a lie. Who can you believe? Who can you trust? From fake news to pretentious Facebook postings, it is becoming more difficult to grab hold of any non-manipulated truth. Lord, help us!

We should make an evaluation an ongoing priority. We should judge ourselves. 1 Corinthians 11:31 (NKJV), *“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.”*

We need to evaluate and be honest about where we are with our faith. 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NKJV), *“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless indeed you are disqualified.”*

You alone are responsible for your self-evaluation and what

you do with that evaluation. Galatians 6:3-5 (TPT), *“If you think you are too important to stoop down to help another, you are living in deception. Let everyone be devoted to fulfill the work God has given them to do with excellence, and their joy will be in doing what’s right and being themselves, and not in being affirmed by others. Every believer is ultimately responsible for his or her own conscience.”*

Self-evaluation is necessary for becoming the person that God designed you to be to develop Godly grit and use your voice. 1 Peter 1:13 (TPT), *“So then, prepare your hearts and minds for action! Stay alert and fix your hope firmly on the marvelous grace that is coming to you. For when Jesus Christ is unveiled, a greater measure of grace will be released to you.”*

We all need to be comfortable taking a moral inventory. It should be part of our daily life. Finding God’s path for us is like my winter camping experience; we need to pause frequently, look intently, and stroll. There is no need to run. Get comfortable with inventory taking with the small things in life. It will be easier to take stock when it comes to the crucial elements like evaluating your attitudes and character.

Put aside all pretense and make it your goal to be authentic. A manufactured, false image will only foster incorrect, meaningless, pressure-filled connections with others. If you

want meaningful, genuine relationships, you need to be authentic. So, what does the path to authenticity look like in this crazy, fast-paced, noisy world? Only in silence and solitude will you find authenticity. In solitude is where isolation will make you stronger. It is a time of separation from the thoughts, actions, words, and opinions of others. It is time to honestly and humbly evaluate and reevaluate.

Another catalyst for accurate inventory taking is to have trustworthy people in your life who care enough about you to say, “no.” We all need people around us who are willing to challenge us. It is easy to see others' faults, and it is hard to see your own flaws. It helps to have others who understand your weaknesses report what they see. Be the kind of person who invites people with this level of integrity into their life and then consider what they are seeing and be willing to seek out and take advice and correction.

David wrote Psalm 139 in the later years of his life. He had witnessed God's love, forgiveness, and strength many times. He saw a giant fall with the impact of one small stone. He saw armies defeated and the wealth of a nation grow. He records in Psalm 139 how he is aware of God's expansive knowledge and presence. He acknowledges how God has formed us in ways beyond our ability to comprehend. Knowing all he knows and has experienced from God, he requests just one thing. He asks that God help him see if he is walking in any

path of pain. David asks God for assistance with taking an accurate inventory when he wrote Psalm 139:23-24 (TPT), *“God, I invite your searching gaze into my heart. Examine me through and through; find out everything that may be hidden within me. Put me to the test and sift through all my anxious cares. See if there is any path of pain I’m walking on, and lead me back to your glorious, everlasting ways - the path that brings me back to you.”* This proclamation should be our prayer as we place our heads on our pillows every night. God, show me the path of pain and the way back to you.

We should be watching over our hearts, taking moral inventory because this will determine our life's direction and outcome. You only get one life; spend it wisely.

Proverbs 4:23-27 (AMP), *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you a deceitful (lying, misleading) mouth, And put devious lips far from you. Let your eyes look directly ahead [toward the path of moral courage] And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you [toward the path of integrity]. Consider well and watch carefully the path of your feet, And all your ways will be steadfast and sure. Do not turn away to the right nor to the left [where evil may lurk]; Turn your foot from [the path of] evil.”*

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for

your life. Am I authentic? What path of pain am I on? Do I have people in my life who care enough about me to say no? Do I make any time for solitude? Am I asking God to help me see the destructive directions in my life?

Chapter 8 – Confession

A confession is the next step after taking a moral inventory. It is the recognition and declaration of a fault or weakness.

The subject of confession is the confessor. A confession is a statement without strings attached. It is not a request for forgiveness – that is, an apology. It is not a request for a second chance: repentance and mercy. It is not a request for restored trust – that is most often manipulation. Confession can be used as a form of deception where the confessor uses a confession to hide a more significant fault. The purpose of a confession is not to encourage others. This type of confession proclamation is most often a statement of arrogance that is demeaning to others. If you want to promote someone, help them from where they are and not from where you have been.

A confession, most often, is nothing more than speaking what other people know about you anyway. A disclosure or revelation verbalizes a deep dark secret about yourself that everybody else already knew. Others know your faults, but they do not know if you know or how you will react if you find out. You think you have successfully hidden your faults, but others know something is up. They may not know the specifics, but they are aware of the stench of deception in the air.

What should we confess? Why should we confess? To whom should we disclose? When should we acknowledge? The value of confession seems to raise more questions than it answers. Firstly, there are two broad categories of what we should confess. We should confess our sins, meaning our acts of rebellion and offense towards God and others. Secondly, we should admit our weaknesses, pointing our limits, inadequacies, and shortcomings.

Health care is complicated. You are dealing with multiple unknowns amid uncertainty and pressure, with patients that are not always willing to be responsible for themselves. The field of healthcare has many opportunities for errors. On a mild May evening in 1984, I was called to the emergency department to see one of my patients with bursitis problems in his shoulder. He was a rugged man of native descent returning home from a trip where he had sold some of the

pelts from his mink ranch. His work was physically demanding, and his painful shoulder made life exceedingly difficult. He had responded very well with previous injections in his shoulder, so I drove the short distance to the hospital and met him in the emergency department.

The nurse had kindly put the necessary supplies on the tray in the patient's room, so drawing up the solution and injecting his shoulder was a simple matter. The procedure went very well, and in a few moments, my grateful patient was on his way back to his trap line ninety miles to the north. As I finished my paperwork and cleaned up the used materials in the examining room, I noticed that the small vial of the solution I had just injected into my patient's shoulder was labeled "depo-provera." I had intended to give him an injection of solumedrol, a steroid, but instead injected his shoulder with a female hormone. This was in a day and era where healthcare quality improvements road on the backs of shame and blame. I felt the guilt and shame but had no one to blame. I waited for the two hours it took for my patient to get home before I called him to admit my error. I informed him that the medication may not help his shoulder and that he may feel a little strange and then offered to give him the proper injection the next time he passed through town. I did not report my error to the four other doctors I worked with; I just embraced my guilt and made sure I

double and triple-checked every vial of solution for the rest of my career. Fortunately for my patient, he did not suffer any ill effects; his shoulder improved. In the 1980s, this was the way healthcare errors were handled. Find someone or something to blame, increase the shame and pressure, and try harder. This practice encourages practitioners to hide mistakes and deny near disasters. This methodology did not improve healthcare quality.

In 1980 an American engineer, Bill Smith, who was working at Motorola, developed a set of process improvement techniques. These techniques and tools were applied to the business's operation at General Electric by Jack Welch in 1995. This set of quality management methods and practices became known as Six Sigma. Although the Six Sigma process's goal was to produce defect-free products, the principles of Six Sigma error reduction quickly spread to the field of healthcare. One of the very useful tools to healthcare quality was Root Cause Analysis. I was on the medical executive committee at Marshall Hospital in Placerville, California when the administration introduced the Six Sigma concepts. It was not easy to shift from the methodology of change through guilt and shame to a model that encouraged exposure of errors and solutions that were not individual-based but team-based. To perform a successful Root Cause Analysis required a significant

culture shift in the way errors were viewed. The medical staff had to be educated that errors and near errors needed to be exposed and investigated to find a successful system change that would prevent that error from happening in the future. It was an honor to facilitate a Root Cause Analysis meeting where everyone involved in the case could present their role in an atmosphere designed to find solutions and not look for someone to blame. The previously hidden mistakes began to surface in a way that could be addressed as a system, and the quality improved rapidly.

So, you may ask; What does healthcare quality, Six Sigma, and Root Cause Analysis have to do with the value of confession? Confession is a conversation about how we relate to our faults. The most common and destructive mechanism for dealing with mistakes is denying their existence and keeping them hidden. We all have flaws, and many of these faults cause harm and can be just as fatal as a medical error. Confession can unlock your resistance to seeing your weaknesses and allow you to deal with them productively.

Confessing our sins is a powerful antidote against the destructive forces of guilt and shame in our lives. As recorded in Proverbs 28:13 (TPT), *“If you cover up your sin you’ll never do well. But if you confess your sins and forsake them, you will be kissed by mercy.”* I do not need to list the

areas of possible sin in your life; you are aware of those areas and the guilt and shame they produce. This guilt and shame are heavy; confess your sins and receive mercy; let go of the unnecessary weight. Do not forget that once you have disclosed your offenses and obtained mercy, you need to forsake those offenses, meaning you do not continue to repeat the same offense. Repeated requests for forgiveness will only erode trust. This kind of confession is not the admission of wrong only when you are found out; that is nothing more than insincere spiritual dodgeball. This kind of disclosure involves owning your sin. It opens your eyes to why you need forgiveness, grace, and mercy. This type of confession prepares you for the next step: repentance and a sincere apology. Admission of your sins and rebellious offenses is the antidote for a life of guilt and shame. Psalm 31:17 (TPT) *“As I call upon you, let my shame and disgrace be replaced by your favor once again.”*

The other area of our lives that requires confession is the area of our weaknesses. We do not like to see or admit our shortcomings. To be open to the reality of our weaknesses causes us to face all those existential realities mentioned in a previous chapter. We believe our imperfections are a valid reason for us to face rejection by others and experience isolation. We believe that our weaknesses prevent us from finding our meaning and purpose in life.

Our physical deficiencies result in our mortality and physical inability to perform tasks necessary for daily life. Our felt weaknesses make us feel incompetent in issues that matter. We see our spiritual flaws as leaving us empty and separated from God. We work with all our energy and power to avoid the exposure of our weaknesses. Yet, in 2 Corinthians, Paul encourages us to look at our weaknesses differently. 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (TPT), *“But he answered me, “My grace is always more than enough for you, and my power finds its full expression through your weakness.” So I will celebrate my weaknesses, for when I’m weak I sense more deeply the mighty power of Christ living in me. So I’m not defeated by my weakness, but delighted! For when I feel my weakness and endure mistreatment—when I’m surrounded with troubles on every side and face persecution because of my love for Christ—I am made yet stronger. For my weakness becomes a portal to God’s power.”* You will not experience God’s power in your life if you avoid your weaknesses. Recognizing, embracing, and confessing your shortcomings is the antidote to your arrogance. Your arrogance prevents God’s power from being active in your life. Confess your weaknesses! If you do not confess your shortcomings, you will spend the rest of your resources and energy trying to deny your weaknesses, hide your flaws, overcompensate for your faults, or overpower your weaknesses. Denying your weaknesses will only burn you

out.

When it comes to confessing your weaknesses, it is crucial to remember Jeremiah 17:9 (AMP) *“The heart is deceitful above all things, And it is extremely sick; Who can understand it fully and know its secret motives?”* We are all plagued with pride and arrogance. We do a great job of deceiving ourselves. Be honest; ask for God’s help and do not hide or run from your weaknesses.

You need to be open and honest when it comes to productive confession. The world is full of mockers and gossips, so you need to be careful where and to whom you confess. Disclosure needs to be in an atmosphere that is safe, secure, confidential, and non-judgmental.

It would be best to start the path of confession by confessing to yourself. You will need God’s help to deal with your self-deception, so freely ask for help. You will need to take time and find a quiet place free of distraction. Make this time a regular occurrence and use God’s Word to open your heart. You will need to be humble enough to confess to yourself before you can admit to God or others. If you do not acknowledge your weaknesses, the only fool you will be fooling will be yourself. So, pause and take the time to consider and evaluate what is going on in your life. Look at how you act and react. How does your arrogance show?

Once you have become more honest with yourself, it is time to confess to God. Remember, you are not admitting anything He does not know already; He is just waiting for you to come out of hiding. An open and honest confession to God increases your ability to hear the voice of the Spirit. If you have trouble hearing God's voice, it could be because you are too preoccupied with trying to overcome your weaknesses. Confessing to God will improve your spiritual hearing.

Confession with another person that you trust will improve your honesty and authenticity. As you experience grace and mercy from another, you will find it less challenging to provide grace and mercy to others. If you have difficulty finding someone you can trust, write down your confession. If you want healing and restoration, the key is through confession. James 5:16 (AMP), *"Therefore, confess your sins to one another [your false steps, your offenses], and pray for one another, that you may be healed and restored. The heartfelt and persistent prayer of a righteous man (believer) can accomplish much [when put into action and made effective by God—it is dynamic and can have tremendous power]."*

Stay sensitive to the voice of the Spirit and be ready to confess at any time. Ask the Lord to remove the scales from your eyes. Psalm 119:18 (AMP) *"Open my eyes [to*

spiritual truth] so that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.”

The benefits of confession are social, personal, and spiritual. There are many social benefits to confession. Confession is a communication of transparency and authenticity, qualities that are lacking in today's world. Confession is a foundation for meaningful apology and forgiveness. Authenticity and forgiveness are necessary to rebuild broken trust. We all have many weaknesses and imperfections. Our strengths often cause separation because of comparison and competition, but our shared weaknesses can serve as a relational bond. Confession communicates trustworthiness and authenticity.

There are multiple personal benefits to living a life open to confession. Taking the time to pause and reflect on who you are, considering God's word, and asking the Lord to search your heart regularly will increase your self-awareness. This increased and more accurate self-awareness will increase your honesty and help you realize how much you need grace and mercy. To be capable humans, we need to see ourselves as others see us and not have our vision clouded by our arrogance and well-meaning intentions. It is not a lack of education that makes you stupid; it is a combination of denial and arrogance. Confession improves relationships by encouraging trust

and burden-sharing.

Confession is conscious cleansing; it is like a house cleaning of your soul. It is time for some major Spring cleaning. Pause, open your heart and take out the trash you have carried for decades. You will want to rid yourself of this trash of arrogance, guilt, and shame before it becomes soul-rotting and life-destroying bitterness. Psalm 119:116 (TPT) *“Lord, strengthen my inner being by the promises of your word so that I may live faithful and unashamed for you.”* You can live without shame if you do not get tripped up by your arrogance.

Confession will also increase your freedom to grow. With increased authenticity, humility, and honesty, you will be able to see the multiple areas where growth is needed and will be freer to move in that direction.

Another personal benefit of confession is peace. You can now live with freedom from the weight of guilt and shame. You may still have to live with remorse over past faults, but you will experience a renewed freedom without being held back by shame.

As you learn to embrace your weaknesses and shortcomings without guilt and shame, you will become more tolerant of others. The ability to provide grace to others will generate more mercy shown towards you.

The renewed freedom and emotional energy achieved through confession can strengthen your will and self-control. This increased strength can give the extra resilience needed to change destructive habits.

The most significant benefits of confession are spiritual benefits. Do you feel as if God has abandoned you? Do you feel spiritually lost? Arrogance and shame will leave you feeling far from God. Confession of weakness will weaken the hold of vanity and help you see your place in God's kingdom. There is a lot of unnecessary pressure in trying to be God. God has a place for you, and it is better than you could ever imagine. Confessing weaknesses will also open your heart to God's searching your heart, increasing your sensitivity to His whispers. In the face of guilt and shame for our rebellion and self-centered living, we will experience His grace and mercy if we confess to God. In my four decades of medical practice, I have witnessed a lot of life destruction. The life-destructive power of arrogance, shame, and bitterness is far greater than the destructive power of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer combined.

Confession feels like you are losing your life. Confession is admitting your weaknesses and facing your guilt and shame. Keep in mind the words of Jesus from Matthew 16:25 (TPT) *“For if you choose self-sacrifice and lose your*

lives for my glory, you will continually discover true life. But if you choose to keep your lives for yourselves, you will forfeit what you try to keep.”

Be committed to honesty. Keep up to date on taking your moral inventory. Be ready to confess to yourself, God, and another. Be on guard against the barriers that may interfere with your growth. You want to avoid living your life with pride clothed in guilt. The shame of living this way will result in you applying a filter to your life that has stamped on the edge, “Not loved by God.”

Your sins, faults, and shortcomings will leave you feeling isolated and alone. You are not alone; we are all in the same mess. Romans 3:23 (TPT), *“for we all have sinned and are in need of the glory of God.”*

Forgiveness is readily available; just confess and ask. 1 John 1:9 (TPT), *“But if we freely admit our sins when his light uncovers them, he will be faithful to forgive us every time. God is just to forgive us our sins because of Christ, and he will continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

We could all use more mercy in our lives. It is available through confession. Proverbs 28:13 (TPT), *“If you cover up your sin you’ll never do well. But if you confess your sins and forsake them, you will be kissed by mercy.”*

Confession will increase your grit and help clarify your life direction and purpose. James 4:7-10 (TPT), *“So then, surrender to God. Stand up to the devil and resist him and he will turn and run away from you. Move your heart closer and closer to God, and he will come even closer to you. But make sure you cleanse your life, you sinners, and keep your heart pure and stop doubting. Feel the pain of your sin, be sorrowful and weep! Let your joking around be turned into mourning and your joy into deep humiliation. Be willing to be made low before the Lord and he will exalt you!”*

Ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life. Am I a disciple of Jesus? Am I afraid of exposing my weaknesses? Am I too arrogant to admit my sins and shortcomings? In what ways do I hide? Do I feel isolated from God and others? What do I currently do with guilt and shame? Do I grant grace and mercy to others?

Do not hide from yourself, hide from God, or hide from others. What feels like weakness is a strength. Put on the belt of truth.

Chapter 9 – Surrender

In the following three chapters, we will look at the importance and significance of the breastplate of righteousness. You will want your storehouse stocked with protective righteousness. As a piece of armor, a breastplate protects your most vital organs, your heart, and lungs. Spiritually we are to pursue righteousness to protect our heart, the source of our emotions and desires, and our lungs, our God-breathed spirit.

I had a chance to check out a breastplate the other day. A nylon vest held two nine by eleven quarter-inch steel plates. One plate protected your front, and one plate covered your back. The vest guaranteed protection from the bullet of a high-powered rifle, but it weighed a hefty thirty pounds. As I carried the vest around a little, I thought, “why would you want to wear something so heavy?” The answer is obvious.

You would wear something this heavy to protect yourself against an attack by a bullet or arrow that you would not be able to see coming at you. It would give you protection against something you could not outrun. Righteousness seems cumbersome and sometimes confusing, but it will protect you against the enemy's attack that you do not see coming your way. Now, you will feel the impact of those bullets, they may even break your ribs, but they will not kill you. Our righteousness is a breastplate, not an isolated bunker. Our God-given light is to shine where the bullets fly.

How does righteousness serve as a breastplate? How can righteousness protect your soul and spirit? What is righteousness?

Righteousness is measuring up to God's standard. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines righteous as "*acting according to divine or moral law: free from guilt or sin or being morally right or justifiable.*" God has an exceedingly high standard that none of us can achieve with our efforts. If we do not meet God's standard, we cannot be accepted by Him, and we have no hope for a full and meaningful life, let alone where we will spend eternity. The good news of the gospel is that Christ paid the price for us, so God now sees us as righteous. Philippians 3:9 (TPT), "*My passion is to be consumed with him and not clinging to my own*

“righteousness” based in keeping the written Law. My “righteousness” will be his, based on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ—the very righteousness that comes from God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (TPT), *“For God made the only one who did not know sin to become sin for us, so that we who did not know righteousness might become the righteousness of God through our union with him.”* The God of the universe, who sees all and knows all, sees me as righteous because of the cross. This God-ascribed righteousness is only available through faith in His Son. The problem, however, is I know I am not righteous. I do not come close to living up to God’s standards.

So, if God sees us as righteous, what are we to do with our present unrighteousness? What is our part when it comes to honest living? Because Christ paid the price for our righteousness, we should do all we can to live that righteousness. This righteous pursuit is not legalism energized by condemnation. This pursuit is out of gratitude for all Christ has done for us. Proverbs 4:23 (TPT), *“So above all, guard the affections of your heart, for they affect all that you are. Pay attention to the welfare of your innermost being, for from there flows the wellspring of life.”* 1 John 3:7 (TPT), *“Delightfully loved children, don’t let anyone divert you from this truth. The person who keeps doing what is right proves that he is righteous before God, even as the Messiah is*

righteous.” Psalm 106:3 (TPT), “*The happiest one on earth is the one who keeps your word and clings to righteousness every moment.*” When it comes to righteousness, we have a part in the pursuing and the clinging.

Even though God sees us as righteous, we are still to pursue righteousness as we pursue our relationship with Him. This pursuit will protect our soul and spirit from the enemy's attacks. We will look at three components of this righteous pursuit in the next three chapters. We will look at the need for complete surrender, redemption, and restoration.

The surrender of our will and life to God is the ultimate act of humility that can free us from ourselves and our destructive self-centered paths. Surrender is an active step in living a life that is not all about me. Submission to God is the humble path to contentment. There is no healing in life without humility and surrender, no matter how hard you try.

We need to surrender all of who we are to God, but it is not our place to make someone else surrender. People are free and will determine their path, even if they die in the process. You cannot surrender on behalf of someone else; that is up to them. You can show by your life that there is contentment in surrender that is not available anywhere else. If you need

more power in your life to tear down a stronghold or to exercise your God-given voice, you need to surrender more.

If we rely on ourselves, we will end up arrogant and burned-out. When we are up against a seemingly impossible task, depending on what we know or what we believe worked in our past is common. We think and believe that we can do the impossible. Our arrogance drives us to work harder to prove ourselves, we begin to buckle under the burden of what we are trying to carry, and we fizzle out. We become another tragic statistic of burn-out with other well-intentioned, arrogant do-gooders. We are not the power that a struggling fellow human needs to restore their life.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you should not have an issue believing that God desires restoration of relationship with Him. He did not only give you just a guidebook for this restoration, but He also gave His only Son. God loves you more than you could ever understand. He also loves all of the other people in your world. Believe in His love, trust in His love, and lean heavily on Him for the power necessary for a life-saving change. Keep close to your heart Isaiah 40:28-29 (AMP); *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become tired or grow weary; There is no searching of His understanding. He gives strength*

to the weary, And to him who has no might He increases power.”

Surrender is the step of faith that frees you to move ahead in your life.

If you decide to live this way, you will find your will, and your desires will start to shift. You will mature in the direction that moves from self-service to serving God and others. God did not put you here on earth to get all you can get. He put you here to enjoy Him and give all you can provide. This type of life is where joy and contentment live. Follow the advice of Jeremiah when he wrote in Jeremiah 29:13-14 (AMP), *“Then [with a deep longing] you will seek Me and require Me [as a vital necessity] and [you will] find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” says the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and I will [free you and] gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ says the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.”*

Seeking and depending on God is a vital part of the restoration we all desperately need.

We lived in northern California when my sons were in high school. They were both very fit and strong and enjoyed rock climbing. We took classes on climbing at a local gym and classes on protection placement in Yosemite and went on

several guided climbs. My youngest son was fearless and could stick to the rock wall like a spider. I, on the other hand, was fearful and highly cautious. As our knowledge and experience grew, my trust in the equipment grew. Experience and familiarity lead to more experience and expertise, which develop into trust. Exercised trust became freedom to surrender to the protection provided by the equipment. God wants us to seek Him, get to know Him, experience Him, and His love for us. Seeking Him and experiencing Him will cause our faith to grow. Growing faith becomes a strength to hold us when we have fallen, just like the climbing rope when we stumble. Make no mistake; you have stumbled in the past and will stumble in the future. Surrender is terrifying. The first time you surrender to your climbing equipment and push away from the rock wall to begin to rappel to the ground is not a moment of great confidence. It is a moment filled with fear and uncertainty. What do you trust? To what have you surrendered?

As we walk this path of surrender, there are several things to consider. We all struggle with the same major issues, yet we seem to think that we are the only ones struggling. Do not allow periods of discontentment to pull you off the path. Life will continue to have significant struggles, and you will be tempted to seek contentment from sources other than God.

Our discomfort and discontent often do not lead us to the

cross; it leads us to actions within our power and control. What we pursue to attain comfort, we eventually become enslaved too. If you stumble and surrender to your stronghold, you will become a slave to that stronghold. There is no joy or freedom in being this type of enslaved person.

So, our options are to either become enslaved or to surrender. In surrender, there is strength and power. In slavery, there is discouragement and emptiness.

The strength you need to fight off the enemy's attack is only found in surrender to God. If you have ongoing issues with a stronghold, the answer is surrender. James 4:7 (TPT), *“So then, surrender to God. Stand up to the devil and resist him and he will turn and run away from you.”*

Surrender sets the stage for victory. 1 Peter 5:6-10 (TPT), *“If you bow low in God's awesome presence, he will eventually exalt you as you leave the timing in his hands. Pour out all your worries and stress upon him and leave them there, for he always tenderly cares for you. Be well balanced and always alert, because your enemy, the devil, roams around incessantly, like a roaring lion looking for its prey to devour. Take a decisive stand against him and resist his every attack with strong, vigorous faith. For you know that your believing brothers and sisters around the world are experiencing the same kinds of troubles you endure. And then, after your brief*

suffering, the God of all loving grace, who has called you to share in his eternal glory in Christ, will personally and powerfully restore you and make you stronger than ever. Yes, he will set you firmly in place and build you up.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 (TPT), *“Trust in the Lord completely, and do not rely on your own opinions. With all your heart rely on him to guide you, and he will lead you in every decision you make. Become intimate with him in whatever you do, and he will lead you wherever you go.”*

Galatians 2:20 (TPT), *“My old identity has been co-crucified with Messiah and no longer lives; for the nails of his cross crucified me with him. And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me—we live in union as one! My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, and dispenses his life into mine!”*

Psalms 37:7 (TPT), *“Quiet your heart in his presence and pray; keep hope alive as you long for God to come through for you. And don’t think for a moment that the wicked in their prosperity are better off than you.”*

The path of righteousness is the path of surrender, redemption, and restoration. It is a challenging path. Surrender to God, seek Him, find the peace that only He can give, and then work with diligence. Keep in mind the words

from Colossians 1:20-22 (TPT), *“And by the blood of his cross, everything in heaven and earth is brought back to himself—back to its original intent, restored to innocence again! Even though you were once distant from him, living in the shadows of your evil thoughts and actions, he reconnected you back to himself. He released his supernatural peace to you through the sacrifice of his own body as the sin-payment on your behalf so that you would dwell in his presence. And now there is nothing between you and Father God, for he sees you as holy, flawless, and restored,”*

Is there a shelf stocked with surrender in the righteousness section of your storehouse? Are you enslaved or surrendered? Have you surrendered your will, life, desires, ambitions, talents, and body to God? Are you seeking God with your whole heart? Where do you turn at times of discontentment? How are you living in denial? Are you living at peace? If you desire righteousness to protect your soul and spirit, you must start with surrender.

Chapter 10 – Redemption

We pursue a solution where we see a need; we become complacent where we do not see a need. We all know of multiple areas of our lives that require change. We live with the belief that a bit of effort here and there will accomplish all the needed change. Redemption is meaningless if we do not see a need for redemption. If we do not see the need, we will abandon contentment and cling to complacency.

Redemption is the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil. It is the regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment or clearing a debt.

Through redemption, God offers us a life of contentment, but we most often choose the life of familiar complacency. We are aware that there is a reality far superior to the one we are experiencing, but we are complacent enough to

refuse to leave our comfortable areas. As recorded in Romans 8:22 (TPT), *“To this day we are aware of the universal agony and groaning of creation, as if it were in the contractions of labor for childbirth.”* The redemption problem is that we desperately need it but do not realize how much we need it.

In 375 B.C. Plato wrote Republic. In this work is recorded an allegory about a cave. This parable is a story about a group of people that live in a cave deep beneath the earth’s surface. They are chained to the cave walls and can only see the wall in front of them. People walk by the entrance to the cave carrying objects that cast shadows on the cave walls. These shadows are what the cave dwellers define as reality. The cave dwellers do not want to leave the cave as this is the only reality they know. If one did escape the cave and experience a new existence, the sun's bright light would hurt his eyes, and he would run back to the cave. If one of the cave dwellers were forced out of the cave, they would become angry and experience pain because of the sun's overwhelming brightness. If, however, one would escape the cave and remain in the new, bright world, his eyes would slowly accommodate, and he would begin to see a new and superior reality. He would still not understand all aspects of this new reality, but he would know it is superior to the reality he experienced living chained to the cave wall. As

his eyes accommodated, his vision would progress from seeing shadows to seeing reflections in the water to seeing people and objects. If this freed prisoner were to return to the cave to report his findings, he would arrive with a sense of blessing for his new experience and feel pity for those still chained to the cave wall. As he enters the cave, his eyes accustomed to the light would be blinded by the darkness. The cave dwellers would believe that the returning prisoner was damaged by his time outside the cave and would respond with rage to anyone trying to encourage them to experience life outside the cave.

This parable of the cave is an excellent image of the issue with redemption. There is a reality of wonder to be experienced through righteous living, but we remain comforted by the familiar shadows on the wall. Our affluence has brought us some incredible, high-definition shadows. We do not feel comfortable leaving the cave. We will shut down and try to destroy those who encourage us to experience a world outside the cave.

On a recent trip to see our grandchildren, my wife and I drove north on Highway 217 in northern Oregon. We followed a new white Mercedes sports car that still had the paper DMV sticker on the back windshield. In the car were a young man in his early thirties and his female companion. The car was beautiful, pearly white with fancy gull-wing

doors. As we pulled up to the stoplight and signaled to turn left, we saw another young man in his early thirties. This second young man was standing on the side of the road with a cardboard sign that read, “need money to get home for Thanksgiving.” Within my field of vision were two young men of the same age.

Both young men were in desperate need of redemption, but one was more aware of his condition than the other. No wonder Jesus taught in Matthew 19:24 (TPT), *“In fact, it’s easier to stuff a heavy rope through the eye of a needle than it is for the wealthy to enter into God’s kingdom realm!”* Satan does not have to entice us to commit horrible sins to knock us off course. He just needs to see that we are comfortable in our complacency and busy with our distractions. Redemption means “to gain or regain possession of something in exchange for payment.” We need to be redeemed. Christ paid the price for our redemption so we can live the image of God in our lives as He first intended. As recorded in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (AMP), *“For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God].”* We need redemption from ourselves and comfortable complacency.

Ephesians 1:7 (TPT), *“Since we are now joined to Christ, we have been given the treasures of redemption by his blood—the total cancellation of our sins—all because of the cascading riches of his grace.”*

Colossians 1:14 (TPT), *“For in the Son all our sins are canceled and we have the release of redemption through his very blood.”*

Titus 2:14 (TPT), *“He sacrificed himself for us that he might purchase our freedom from every lawless deed and to purify for himself a people who are his very own, passionate to do what is beautiful in his eyes.”*

1 Corinthians 6:20 (TPT), *“You were God’s expensive purchase, paid for with tears of blood, so by all means, then, use your body to bring glory to God!”*

Psalms 130:7 (TPT), *“O Israel, keep hoping, keep trusting, and keep waiting on the Lord, for he is tenderhearted, kind, and forgiving. He has a thousand ways to set you free!”*

1 John 3:16 (TPT), *“This is how we have discovered love’s reality: Jesus sacrificed his life for us. Because of this great love, we should be willing to lay down our lives for one another.”*

Are you aware of how much you need to be redeemed? Are you grateful for the redemption provided to you? Do you

realize that you require as much redemption as the worse sinner? Are you living with the awareness of your redemption?

We are all tempted to turn our backs on God in similar ways but do not forget the next part of the verse that He has provided a means of escape. God provided the way of escape through the work Christ accomplished on the cross. He has paid the price for our redemption. We no longer need to be chained to a cave wall, interacting with shadows and reflections.

The image of God in us is fractured, and we need redemption. Because of Christ's work on the cross, we can now renew our relationship with God and live the image and the life that He intended.

God has promised that the work of redemption in our lives is an ongoing process, Philippians 1:6 (AMP) *“I am convinced and confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will [continue to] perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return].”*

Our redemption is not dependent on what we say, do, or our good intentions. Our redemption is dependent on Him. Ephesians 1:7 (AMP), *“In Him we have redemption [that is, our deliverance and salvation] through His blood, [which paid the penalty for our sin and resulted in] the*

forgiveness and complete pardon of our sin, in accordance with the riches of His grace.”

Even though we are the product of generations of chained cave-dwellers, we are free because of the cross to escape those chains and live as God has intended. 1 Peter 1:18-19 (TPT), *“For you know that your lives were ransomed once and for all from the empty and futile way of life handed down from generation to generation. It was not a ransom payment of silver and gold, which eventually perishes, but the precious blood of Christ - who like a spotless, unblemished lamb was sacrificed for us.”*

Stop and pause. Be thankful for the redemption that has been purchased for you. Colossians 1:12-14 (TPT), *“Your hearts can soar with joyful gratitude when you think of how God made you worthy to receive the glorious inheritance freely given to us by living in the light. He has rescued us completely from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom realm of his beloved Son. For in the Son all our sins are canceled and we have the release of redemption through his very blood.”*

Chapter 11 – Restoration and Reconciliation

The third part of righteousness is restoration and reconciliation. When you have done the work of taking an honest, moral inventory and experienced the impact of redemption, it is time to move ahead by admitting offense and harm and moving forward towards apology, forgiveness, and restitution.

We do not live on a desert island. Our relationship with God and our fellow humans is vitally important. The process of apology and forgiveness is how broken relationships are mended. It is also how relationships can strengthen and grow. Righteousness is not demonstrated in a vacuum; it is revealed in how you relate to others through apology and forgiveness.

One of the best examples of apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation is the parable of the prodigal son told by Jesus

in Luke 15:11-32.

This parable contains all the elements for a study of forgiveness and reconciliation. The self-centered son commits a relational offense. The father longs for a restored relationship. There is recognition of the wrongs committed by the wayward son. There is humility on the part of the rebellious son and his return to those he offended. There is a celebration of the restored relationship and status of the son. The older son's bitterness shows that the same event can cause different reactions by different characters.

How we relate to one another tells the world our character; it is what defines us. The Bible stresses this type of relational restoration. 2 Corinthians 13:11 (TPT) "*Finally, beloved friends, be cheerful! Repair whatever is broken among you, as your hearts are being knit together in perfect unity. Live continually in peace, and God, the source of love and peace, will mingle with you.*" We would all like to have God mingle with us and reassurance that He is always present.

It takes courage and humility to apologize and forgive. God does not desire us to be weighed down with guilt, shame, or arrogance. So, no matter how difficult it may seem, His plan for His people is to be forgiving and work towards restoration in relationships where possible. It is essential to

keep in mind the words of Jeremiah 29:11 (AMP) “*For I know the plans and thoughts that I have for you,*’ says the LORD, *‘plans for peace and well-being and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.’*”

Now is the time to put some feet on your integrity and work on your relationships.

The first step is to pause and write a list of those you have hurt. You need to take time, in solitude, to reflect. You need to be humble and honest. Your offense was not wounding the feelings; it was your arrogance, weaknesses, or self-centeredness. Take time to consider those you have hurt. Carefully make your list, including what you did to cause them harm.

Once you have your list, it is time to consider if an apology is appropriate. You will face situations where it is best not to deliver an immediate apology. A delivered apology with a request for forgiveness may inflame some cases and cause more harm to the other person. Your goal is to create an opportunity for relational healing and not cause a more significant division. So, have your apology well thought out and prepared in situations like this and be ready to deliver it should God open the door.

An apology needs to be sincere and nondemanding. You should be thinking more about the other person than

yourself. You are not in a position to demand forgiveness. Be prepared. Writing out an apology before it is delivered is immensely helpful. You need to consider when and where to offer the apology. Will it be given in a face-to-face conversation or sent in a letter? You want the person you have harmed to know they are in control of the conversation and that you are not pressuring them for an answer or immediate resolution.

An apology aims to address issues in a relationship where you have crossed a boundary and caused harm. It is an opportunity for humble and honest communication with another person because you value the relationship. It is doing what you can do to rebuild a relationship and, over time, set the framework for trust. It is an opportunity to express regret over the wrong you have committed. It is an opportunity for you to own every part of the wrong committed. “I’m sorry I made you feel bad” is not a sincere apology. This type of apology leaves the other person responsible for part of the issue, their wounded feelings.

An adequately delivered apology will help define and reestablish boundaries in the relationship. It should help you learn from your past mistakes and be a chance to rebuild lost trust. An apology can also help put the conflict behind you and not allow it to fester into unresolvable bitterness.

A humble apology can help you maintain your integrity and assist you in being able to forgive yourself. Many times, the most complicated person to forgive is yourself. There are many benefits to an apology, but what are the consequences of refusing to apologize?

We all know that relationships are essential, and healthy relationships are valuable. We also know that an apology is a useful tool in restoring the relationship when we wrong another. So, why do we refuse to apologize at times? A refusal to apologize may mean that I am indifferent, that the relationship was not meaningful, that I do not care. For example, if I accidentally cut off another driver in traffic, I would not chase him down to apologize; he would most likely be intimidated, and I could get shot. My relationship with the other driver is not essential; therefore, I do not see the need for an apology.

On the other hand, if I rudely honk my horn at an elderly couple, as I have done, who were on their way to see me in the office, then an apology would be appropriate. The relationship has some meaning in this case, and I crossed a boundary. You want to eat that crow before it has a chance of becoming a vulture.

Another reason for not apologizing is that I see the apology as a threat to my self-image. This excuse is not an attempt

to salvage my self-image but protect my arrogance. If this is your excuse for not apologizing, then you are in big trouble.

Another reason for not apologizing is the belief that an apology will not help or the impression that it will worsen the situation. This belief may be a valid reason but be sure that you are not using it as an excuse to soothe your wounded pride. As mentioned before, there are some situations where you should be ready to deliver the apology but wait for the appropriate time. Some apologies will never be offered.

Whatever the reason, there are consequences for not apologizing. A refusal to apologize when it is appropriate to apologize will damage personal and professional relationships. A refusal to apologize will erode trust and encourage destructive rumination. The rumination can quickly turn into anger, bitterness, or even hostility. These are not the ingredients for a healthy, meaningful relationship; they are the ingredients for a war.

How do we know when to apologize? You can use yourself as a filter. If what you did to another was done to you, and it would have bothered you, then it probably deserves an apology. You should take the time to think through and prepare your apology and be ready to deliver it when the

opportunity presents.

As you pause to ponder where you need to deliver an apology, keep in mind the necessary elements of a sincere and meaningful apology. You need to consider others more than yourself. The subject matter of the apology is what you did to cause harm. Make that subject matter the focus of the conversation and make it clear. The apology needs to be free of blame. You should not blame the other person, the circumstances, or anything else. You crossed the boundary and are taking full responsibility. It is time to state the offense, take responsibility, express regret, and ask for forgiveness. Once you have apologized, you can reaffirm the relational boundaries and start to build back trust.

When you are delivering an apology, you cannot guarantee the result. You may be asking for forgiveness, but you should not expect it or demand it. Do not manipulate the other person's response or pressure them in any way. You may have to wait for an answer. Do not forget the essential part, which is to communicate the value of the relationship.

It is not possible to wade through the murky waters of relational restoration without addressing the topic of forgiveness. We need to forgive if we expect our apologies to result in forgiveness from another. The Bible is clear on the importance of forgiveness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-

24 (AMP), *“So if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and while there you remember that your brother has something [such as a grievance or legitimate complaint] against you, leave your offering there at the altar and go. First make peace with your brother, and then come and present your offering.”* Apology and forgiveness take priority over sacrifice and service. The appropriate response when you have wronged someone else is to apologize. The proper response is to forgive when you have been wronged, even if an apology does not request it.

The actions, injustices, and abuse of others have hurt us all. Many people have suffered unimaginable damage and injustice. Forgiveness is not condoning the abuser or the offensive action; that would increase the abuse. Forgiveness is not excusing the offender or their responsibility because of extenuating circumstances. No circumstance, medical condition, or psychiatric condition justifies ongoing violence. Forgiveness is not forgetting; forgetting in the face of abuse is denial. Reconciliation is not forgiveness; it may be the goal of forgiveness, but just because you forgive someone you love does not mean you should automatically trust them; that would be foolish. Trust is the bedrock of a meaningful relationship and is only built over time.

What then is forgiveness? Forgiveness is letting go of anger and resentment. It is the recognition that anger and

bitterness cause more personal harm than any act of injustice or abuse. If you hang on to resentment and demand anything from the offender, you give them all your power; it will destroy you. Do not give in to anger and bitterness; let go of the offense and take your life back from the abuser. You need to get to the point where you can say and believe that the offender owes you nothing, that your life today is your life and that the past owes you absolutely nothing. Forgiveness is not easy, but it is essential. You cannot undo the injustice, but you can stop it from controlling your life. The act of forgiving is the freedom needed to escape the trap of the offense. A victim lives a lonely life in a prison of their own making.

Forgiveness will free you from that prison. It will increase your optimism and elevate your mood. Medical studies have shown forgiveness to guard against anger, bitterness, stress, anxiety, and depression. Forgiveness reduces cortisol, resulting in improved blood pressure, heart disease, and inflammation. The reduction of inflammation lessens the likelihood of developing diabetes or cancer.

Forgiveness will also lessen the likelihood of developing an addiction and reduce relapses in those who suffer from addiction.

Yes, we all want the benefits of forgiveness, but how do we

forgive? The first step in forgiving is, to be honest about how you were offended and that the offense made you angry. The process can be highly uncomfortable as many of us have been raised to believe that all anger is a sin. The reality is that denial about the anger caused by an offense is more likely to lead to sin than the anger itself. You need to be “angry but sin not.” This process is not an encouragement to act on your anger or act out your anger. It is time to honestly and humbly admit to anger resulting from an offense caused by someone else. If you do not expose the anger, you will not know what needs to be forgiven. It would be best if you then decided to forgive. You know why you should forgive, and you know the consequences of not forgiving, but it will still take choosing to forgive. Now, take some time to walk in the shoes of the offender. If you get close enough to any other human, you will find valid reasons to reject them and compelling reasons to be compassionate. We are all deeply flawed, and we have all caused harm to others. If you realize your need for forgiveness, it can help you develop some compassion for the offender. Forgiving does not mean that you should remain in an abusive relationship or try to restore a previously destructive relationship, but it does mean you can more easily forgive. Now is the time to let go of all those toxic, angry, vengeful, and bitter emotions. They now owe you nothing; you are free from the burden of the offense. Reflect on your growth and be thankful. Another tool to help with forgiveness

is therapeutic writing. This process can help you let go of harmful emotions.

Therapeutic writing can be beneficial in two more challenging areas of forgiveness; forgiving someone who is no longer alive and forgiving God. If you are blaming God for your present or past life trouble, you need to get to a place where you can forgive. Blaming God is never justified. He is not the author of your pain. He has provided the path away from your trouble. If you feel anger towards God, be honest, and tell Him; write down your thoughts and feelings and ask Him for help. It can also be challenging to forgive someone who is no longer alive. You may feel guilty when you feel anger towards someone who has passed away. After all, you are still alive, but they are not, plus this is a relationship where restoration is not possible. This situation is another time when writing your honest thoughts and feeling may be very helpful. If appropriate, you should write your apologies, ask for forgiveness, and then write out the steps of forgiveness as it applies to that relationship.

The Bible teaches that forgiving others allows God to forgive us. To the disciple of Jesus, forgiveness is not an option; it demonstrates submission to Christ. It is essential to realize that unforgiveness is a willful act of hostility and reflects a lack of faith. Matthew 6:14-15 (TPT) *“And when you pray, make sure you forgive the faults of others so that*

your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you withhold forgiveness from others, your Father withholds forgiveness from you.” So, just how much do you need God’s forgiveness? That is how much you should forgive others. Forgiveness is a serious spiritual matter; do not take it lightly.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (AMP), “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor [perpetual animosity, resentment, strife, fault-finding] and slander be put away from you, along with every kind of malice [all spitefulness, verbal abuse, malevolence]. Be kind and helpful to one another, tender-hearted [compassionate, understanding], forgiving one another [readily and freely], just as God in Christ also forgave you.*” We need to model this life of righteousness. It is the kind of life you should be living if you are a disciple of Jesus.

So, move ahead with your life. Pause to consider how much you need forgiveness; find where you need to be apologizing and let go of the prison of past offenses, and forgive.

Today may be your time for a significant life breakthrough. Consider the words of David in Psalm 51:12 (TPT), “*Let my passion for life be restored, tasting joy in every breakthrough you bring to me. Hold me close to you with a willing spirit that obeys whatever you say.*”

When it comes to apology and forgiveness, ask these questions when using this principle as a filter for your life.

Who have I offended? How have I hurt others? Am I aware of my anger? Who has hurt me in the past? Who is hurting me right now? Am I willing to let go of past harm and forgive? Do I realize how much God has forgiven me? Do I realize how much it cost God to forgive me? Is my life a demonstration of negativity? Is my life a demonstration of the positive emotions of forgiveness, love, hope, joy, compassion, faith, awe, and gratitude? Protect your soul and spirit by pursuing righteousness. You will need a prominent place in your storehouse for the breastplate of righteousness.

Chapter 12 – Service

We must choose our footwear carefully. Our footwear must fit properly and be appropriate for our purpose. Your footwear is your contact point with the world. If you are golfing today, you will need footwear that will give you traction, and if you are ice skating, you will need footwear that will allow you to glide across the ice. If you are a disciple of Jesus, your footwear should be the gospel of peace. The gospel of peace is your faith in action. It is your place and purpose where you connect to your world with your God-given voice. It is your service and generosity demonstrated to others for the glory of God. It is your faith, in action, in your community.

Service is a natural byproduct of genuine living faith. Galatians 5:13 (TPT) *“Beloved ones, God has called us to live a life of freedom in the Holy Spirit. But don’t view this wonderful freedom as an opportunity to set up a base of*

operations in the natural realm. Freedom means that we become so completely free of self-indulgence that we become servants of one another, expressing love in all we do.” The opposite of love is not “hate;” the opposite of love is “blinding self-indulgence.” The dictionary definition of freedom is “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint.” The freedom worth pursuing should produce joy and contentment, not pressure and disappointment. Freedom used for limitless self-indulgence can only provide very short-lived pleasure and satisfaction. The freedom that results in long-lasting peace is the freedom found serving God and others. As you serve others, you will find your grit will grow.

So, what does it mean to serve? Service is nothing more than love in action. If you know your needs, you know how to serve others. Service requires the ability to see past your wants, conditions, and desires so you can see a little more clearly what is going on with those around you. Service is living and breathing the life of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (TPT), where Paul informs us, *“Love is large and incredibly patient. Love is gentle and consistently kind to all. It refuses to be jealous when blessing comes to someone else. Love does not brag about one’s achievements nor inflate its own importance. Love does not traffic in shame and disrespect, nor selfishly seek its own honor. Love is not easily irritated or quick to take*

offense. Love joyfully celebrates honesty and finds no delight in what is wrong. Love is a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others. Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up.” This kind of love is not humanly possible. As self-centered beings, we are all too wrapped up in ourselves to love in the way that God intended that we love. To love God’s way, we need supernatural comfort when we are troubled, supernatural guidance when we are confused, and supernatural joy when we feel discouraged. The comfort, guidance, and joy we need to love is the promise of the Holy Spirit’s witness to our spirit. With this kind of love, we can prefer others above ourselves and live God’s intended life. We can provide others with a meaningful level of respect and compassion. “God so loved the World,” so if we are His children, we should love as He loves.

As we race through life, it is easy to become numbed by reports of people in anguish. We hear media reports hourly of wars, natural disasters, and human tragedy. Lord, help us slow our pace so we can see others as you see them. The temptation is to see people as statistics on a graph, but those parents who just lost a child to a drug overdose are not numbers on a chart; they are creations of God who are in deep pain. Pause, consider their pain, pray for them, be available, and be ready to reach out a hand if God opens the door.

This kind of service is not what we would call a “doormat” type of service. There must be a balance between love and trust. To “love” your drug-addicted child who asks for money by giving them what they ask for is not love; it is dangerous codependency. For service to be meaningful, there must be boundaries. God loves us, but He has also established limits and boundaries. Boundaries are for our benefit; they are not meant to constrain us. Setting boundaries is complex when we are more concerned about ourselves than the other. In the example of the child asking for money, if you need the child to love you for a sense of meaning in your life, you will have a significant problem setting boundaries. Boundaries are necessary and can be lifesaving.

This kind of service is not for show or personal recognition. Service for personal gain is not authentic, and it will eventually fail. When you receive praise for your service, do not let it go to your head. Remember who you are serving.

Serving is not pressuring someone to go in a direction they are unwilling to. You can and should set boundaries, but you cannot compel a desirable response — an apparent change in lifestyle that occurred under pressure will collapse.

We should serve because we were made and designed to serve. We were meant to be free from the destructive force of living a life of self-focus and self-centeredness. God created man for service as recorded in Genesis 2:15 (AMP), *“So the LORD God took the man [He had made] and settled him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it.”* We are made to cultivate and keep the garden – we are designed to have a fulfilled life in caring for what God has provided. We were created to serve.

We were also made to serve and uplift each other as recorded in Genesis 2:18 (AMP), *“Now the LORD God said, “It is not good (beneficial) for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper [one who balances him—a counterpart who is] suitable and complementary for him.”* God has put us in families and communities to complement each other, not compete. We are to build one another up and not tear each other down.

We get ahead by serving, not by being served. Now, this concept goes against all we frail humans hold dear. We are far more likely to grasp any opportunity to get ahead, even if it hurts someone else. We resist the promotion of others. We live in a world where it is all about me. In God’s kingdom, it is not all about me. Mark 10:44-45 (TPT), *“The path to promotion and prominence comes by having the heart of a bond-slave who serves everyone. For even the Son of Man*

did not come expecting to be served by everyone, but to serve everyone, and to give his life as the ransom price in exchange for the salvation of many.” In God’s kingdom, the top spots are for the servants. Mark 9:35 (TPT), *“Jesus sat down, called the twelve disciples to come around him, and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he must be content to be last and become a servant to all.”*

God wants you to be content, and God made you so that you would experience joy and fulfillment in your life through service. Do you want to succeed in your life? Do you want to get ahead? Do you want to be promoted? If you do, then look at where you could be serving. No level of fame or fortune will give you as much contentment as there is in being in the place where you were designed to serve. God has given you your voice; it is now time to use it and continue to use it. There are service areas during all the seasons of our life; there is no retiring from service.

If we claim to be followers of Jesus, His disciples, our faith should be seen in our lives' actions. Deeds of service should accompany our words of faith. If I claim that God is my provider, I should not feel I have to hang on tightly to everything I have, and if I declare God is my protector, then I should not be living in constant fear. Keep in mind the words of James 2:14-17 (TPT), *“My dear brothers and sisters, what good is it if someone claims to have faith but demonstrates no*

good works to prove it? How could this kind of faith save anyone? For example, if a brother or sister in the faith is poorly clothed and hungry and you leave them saying, "Good-bye. I hope you stay warm and have plenty to eat," but you don't provide them with a coat or even a cup of soup, what good is your faith? So then faith that doesn't involve action is phony." Is your faith genuine? Are you a phony? As you move out of your self-protective comfort zone to serve others, it will express your faith and cause your grit to grow.

We were made to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We are members of God's team and a vital part of building His kingdom. No membership in any group or club will be able to replace the significance of being part of God's work. God made us so that we would do His good works as recorded in Ephesians 2:10 (TPT), "*We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!*" Do you know your part in God's kingdom? Have you found your voice? What gifts or talents do you have to offer to others? Are you providing them or hanging on to them?

We should be serving the Lord and those He created. Our lives should echo the words of John the Baptist regarding Jesus when he stated in John 3:30 (TPT), "*So it's necessary*

for him to increase and for me to be diminished.” How do you measure up? Who is increasing in importance in your life? Living God’s plan for your life does not mean that you are to spend endless hours in prayerful meditation and never interact with your world. No, your world needs the light you possess. So, pray, work hard, be passionate, be committed, love those God has placed in your life and follow the advice of Colossians 3:23-24 (TPT) where we are told to, “Put your heart and soul into every activity you do, as though you are doing it for the Lord himself and not merely for others. For we know that we will receive a reward, an inheritance from the Lord, as we serve the Lord Yahweh, the Anointed One!” Put on your shoes, exercise your voice, build bridges, write music, and throw yourself entirely into the life God has blessed you with, but remember the glory goes to Him. 1 John 4:19-20 (TPT) gives us a way of measuring our stated love of God; “Our love for others is our grateful response to the love God first demonstrated to us. Anyone can say, “I love God,” yet have hatred toward another believer. This makes him a phony, because if you don’t love a brother or sister, whom you can see, how can you truly love God, whom you can’t see?” We are to love and serve God and love and serve those He created. It is not good enough just to state we love God. Those words alone are meaningless.

James 1:27 (TPT) tells us about the evidence of this kind of

love and service; *“True spirituality that is pure in the eyes of our Father God is to make a difference in the lives of the orphans, and widows in their troubles, and to refuse to be corrupted by the world’s values.”* How do you view those who are struggling? Do you see them as suffering from the results of their irresponsibility? Do you see them as being loved by God? Do you believe Jesus died for them as much as you know He died for you? How do you view other humans who struggle with addiction? How do you see their parents? Are you empathetic or judgmental? Remember Matthew 23:11 (TPT), *“The greatest among you will be the one who always serves others from the heart.”* Who are you serving from the heart? You should be serving your spouse, your family, your neighbors, your community, and to some degree, the world. Do not become overly frustrated with the slow progress of others. Keep in mind what we are told in Romans 15:1 (TPT), *“Now, those who are mature in their faith can easily be recognized, for they don’t live to please themselves but have learned to patiently embrace others in their immaturity.”* Are you living to please yourself? Never forget that when we are serving others, we are also serving the Lord as recorded in Ephesians 6:7-8 (TPT), where it states, *“Serve your employers wholeheartedly and with love, as though you were serving Christ and not men. Be assured that anything you do that is beautiful and excellent will be repaid by our Lord, whether you are an employee or an employer.”* Do you see

your employer or employees as if they were Christ, or do you see them as being agents of the devil? Do not become a prisoner of your arrogance and self-indulgence.

We can serve others in many ways. We serve by taking the gifts and talents that God has given us and, in turn, offering them to others by our example, observation, hearing, being, and doing.

We serve by example. Whether you like it or not, you are being watched, and not just by Google or your cell phone. Your life's message has more to do with how you live your life than the words you speak. How you live your life will communicate if you are authentic and trustworthy. Live your life deliberately; your life speaks loudly. Jesus is our example as to how we should live our lives as recorded in Matthew 20:28 (TPT), *“For even the Son of Man did not come expecting to be served by everyone, but to serve everyone, and to give his life in exchange for the salvation of many.”* Be an example of this type of service. Are you willing to sacrifice for others? What kind of example are you?

Service requires observation. We become aware of a need through observation. It is essential to realize that the other person's needs and stated demands may not be the same. To serve means to address a need, not to give in to a request automatically. Do not be quick to offer solutions for

assumed problems. Be patient, take your time, ask questions, and observe.

We also serve by hearing. The Bible instructs us to be quick to hear but slow to speak and slow to become angry. Listen carefully, and do not assume you know what someone is trying to say. Ask lots of questions and be as specific as possible. It can be incredibly challenging to remain in any relationship with someone continuously deceptive. Do not be shocked when you discover that much of what you have been told may have been a lie. Remember the be slow to anger part.

We also serve by being. Serving by being means we should not see ourselves as better than others. Humble yourself and be willing to learn from others, even those you are helping. Live by the words of Paul to the Philippians and walk together with purpose. If we walk with a common goal, we will be less likely to get off track with self-promotion. Philippians 2:1-11 (TPT), *“Look at how much encouragement you’ve found in your relationship with the Anointed One! You are filled to overflowing with his comforting love. You have experienced a deepening friendship with the Holy Spirit and have felt his tender affection and mercy. So I’m asking you, my friends, that you be joined together in perfect unity—with one heart, one passion, and united in one love. Walk together with one harmonious purpose and you will fill my heart with*

unbounded joy. Be free from pride-filled opinions, for they will only harm your cherished unity. Don't allow self-promotion to hide in your hearts, but in authentic humility put others first and view others as more important than yourselves. Abandon every display of selfishness. Possess a greater concern for what matters to others instead of your own interests. And consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation. He existed in the form of God, yet he gave no thought to seizing equality with God as his supreme prize. Instead he emptied himself of his outward glory by reducing himself to the form of a lowly servant. He became human! He humbled himself and became vulnerable, choosing to be revealed as a man and was obedient. He was a perfect example, even in his death—a criminal's death by crucifixion! Because of that obedience, God exalted him and multiplied his greatness! He has now been given the greatest of all names! The authority of the name of Jesus causes every knee to bow in reverence! Everything and everyone will one day submit to this name—in the heavenly realm, in the earthly realm, and in the demonic realm. And every tongue will proclaim in every language: "Jesus Christ is Lord Yahweh," bringing glory and honor to God, his Father!" Do you see yourself as being better than others? Do you see yourself as the answer to others' problems? Are you willing to learn from others? In your next interaction with someone, focus on what you can learn from

them and not what you can teach them, and see how that works out. Exercise your voice through your ears.

So, you are grateful for all God has done for you, you have observed those you want to serve, you have listened and are not all wrapped up in yourself, and you want to live a life of service, so now it is time to do something. Service requires action; it is a verb and not a noun. We have all been given unique gifts, interests, passions, and abilities intended to be given away in service to others to build God's kingdom. 1 Peter 4:10 (TPT), "*Every believer has received grace gifts, so use them to serve one another as faithful stewards of the many-colored tapestry of God's grace.*" These God-given gifts are not to be used to gain fame or an inflated sense of self-importance. Your gifts were given to you. Give your gift; do not hide it. You need to give them back to God and then to others in the form of service for the glory of God. Matthew 5:16 (TPT), "*So don't hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven.*" God's bountiful gifts are numerous and become spiritual gifts when offered to others for the glory of God. If you want a fulfilling life, you will find it in service as you exercise your voice delivering the gospel of peace. You will want to set aside a large area in your storehouse for service.

Chapter 13 – Faith

We claim to live by faith, yet we live most of our lives as if we are part of a grand science experiment. We use our senses to gather data; we formulate a hypothesis, test, sample, and then proceed down a path we consider is the best and the safest. Now we can look at a chair and feel confident it will hold us. We apply the same formula and determine that some people are safe and others are dangerous. We consider this faith, but it is not faith. Confidence based on our senses may help us pick a secure chair, but it will not help with many of life's more significant issues. To be the person God designed you to be will take genuine faith and grit.

What is faith, and why is it important? The Bible speaks a lot about faith. Hebrews 11:1 (NKJV), *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”* The Greek word for faith is “pistis,” which means

persuasion, moral conviction, assurance, belief, faith, and fidelity in this verse. Faith is more than just intellectual belief in something; it is a conviction about the truth of something. Christian faith is a conviction about the truth of God, Christ, and God's Word. Faith in God is the confidence that He exists, is the creator of everything, and desires a relationship with humanity. Faith in Christ is the confidence that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through Him, we have eternal salvation and a restored relationship with God the Father. Faith in His Word is the confidence it is His inspired Word and that God is a keeper of His promises.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV), *“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”* We are genuinely content, as people, only when we are pleasing God. Faith in God and His promises are necessary if we are to please Him. Our familiarity with the word “faith” has caused it to lose much of its essential meaning. We give each other high-fives and proclaim, “keep the faith” when cheering for our favorite losing sports team. Faith in God is much more than a casual cliché. A better word may be “aplomb.” Aplomb is complete and confident composure because of a belief. Aplomb comes from the French word meaning “straight up and down.” It also means being unable to be upset, not quickly excited, calm, or undisturbed

composure. Faith in God is our aplomb, our ability to remain confident and assured during trials. Faith will show itself as quiet confidence amid crises.

If we are to stand and see our grit grow, we need this confident, unwavering faith. Ephesians 6:16 (TPT), *“In every battle, take faith as your wrap-around shield, for it is able to extinguish the blazing arrows coming at you from the evil one!”* Our storehouse needs to be stocked with a faith that functions as a shield. When Paul wrote this passage, Roman soldiers would cover their shields with animal skins soaked in water before a battle. The wet skins would extinguish the flaming arrows that hit their shield. If you have found your God-given purpose and use your voice to build His kingdom, you will face many flaming arrows. You will need to keep your shield of faith soaked with the water of His Word. Ephesians 5:26 (TPT), *“to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.”* The darts coming your way are filled with highly flammable contents of doubt, fear, worry, anxiety, isolation, powerlessness, insignificance, confusion, weariness, despair, arrogance, pain, and betrayal. The enemy uses these darts to weaken your defenses and prevent the fulfillment of God’s plan for your life.

Is your shield ready for battle? Where does your confidence lie? Are you confident that God exists, that He loves you, and

that He is the creator and sustainer of all? Are you confident that Christ is your savior? Are you confident in God's Word and His promises?

Bible scholars tell us there are over 30,000 promises of God in the Bible. Let us soak our shield of faith in some of these promises to prepare for the darts that may come our way today.

God has promised that He will never leave you and has sent you a comforter. Psalm 23:4 (TPT), *"Even when your path takes me through the valley of deepest darkness, fear will never conquer me, for you already have! Your authority is my strength and my peace. The comfort of your love takes away my fear. I'll never be lonely, for you are near."* Matthew 28:20 (NKJV), *"teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Hebrews 13:5 (TPT), *"Don't be obsessed with money but live content with what you have, for you always have God's presence. For hasn't he promised you, 'I will never leave you, never! And I will not loosen my grip on your life!'"* God will never abandon you or betray you. You may experience times of palatable isolation, betrayal, and loneliness, but God has not left you.

God has promised that He will protect you. Isaiah 54:17 (NKJV), *"No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And*

every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their righteousness is from Me,” Says the LORD.” Psalm 121:7-8 (TPT), “He will keep you from every form of evil or calamity as he continuously watches over you. You will be guarded by God himself. You will be safe when you leave your home, and safely you will return. He will protect you now, and he’ll protect you forevermore!” As you face the fiery darts today, God will protect you. You have no reason for fear or intimidation.

God has promised that He will be your strength. Psalm 28:7 (TPT), *“Yahweh is my strength and my wraparound shield. When I fully trust in you, help is on the way. I jump for joy and burst forth with ecstatic, passionate praise! I will sing songs of what you mean to me!”* Philipians 4:13 (TPT), *“I know what it means to lack, and I know what it means to experience overwhelming abundance. For I’m trained in the secret of overcoming all things, whether in fullness or in hunger. And I find that the strength of Christ’s explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty.”* The fiery darts are present to wear you down and exhaust you. In your times of exhaustion and weakness, God will be your strength.

God has promised that when you cry out to Him, He will answer you. John 16:24 (TPT), *“Until now you’ve not been bold enough to ask the Father for a single thing in my name,*

but now you can ask, and keep on asking him! And you can be sure that you'll receive what you ask for, and your joy will have no limits!" Psalm 91:15 (TPT), *"I will answer your cry for help every time you pray, and you will feel my presence in your time of trouble. I will deliver you and bring you honor."* God will answer you if you are close enough to hear His voice. Be calm and still and listen.

God has promised He will provide for you. Philippians 4:19 (TPT), *"I am convinced that my God will fully satisfy every need you have, for I have seen the abundant riches of glory revealed to me through Jesus Christ!"* Psalm 34:10 (TPT), *"Even the strong and the wealthy grow weak and hungry, but those who passionately pursue the Lord will never lack any good thing."* God has given and will continually provide you with all you need to be the person He created.

God has promised to give you peace. John 14:27 (TPT), *"I leave the gift of peace with you—my peace. Not the kind of fragile peace given by the world, but my perfect peace. Don't yield to fear or be troubled in your hearts—instead, be courageous!"* Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV), *"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You."* The only peace that is lasting comes from God. The enemy will do all he can to steal your peace. Rest in this promise of God's provision during times of uncertainty or crisis.

God has promised He will always love you. 1 John 4:16 (TPT), *“We have come into an intimate experience with God’s love, and we trust in the love he has for us. God is love! Those who are living in love are living in God, and God lives through them.”* Isaiah 54:10 (NKJV), *“For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, But My kindness shall not depart from you, Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,” Says the LORD, who has mercy on you.”* As unlovely as we all are, God still promises His eternal love.

While living in northern Canada, we observed a unique event that only occurred about every three to four years. When the weather was perfect, meaning a week of average temperatures of minus 20, the lake would freeze over like a perfectly formed piece of glass. On one of those occasions, we arrived at the cabin on a bright, frigid night. The conditions would be perfect for limitless skating. As the temperatures dropped that night, the ice on the lake thickened and cracked with the sound of an aluminum baseball bat hitting a 45-gallon metal drum. The sound was terrifying. We tied up our skates the following day and headed out onto the lake surface. The first emotion that hit when we stepped onto the lake was fear. The lake was clear, clear enough to see fish swimming under the ice. We moved onto the surface with an anxious feeling until we noticed something that gave us confidence. Every hairline

crack in the ice gave us a visual picture of the ice thickness, and we could skate without anxiety. Faith is like that; it produces fear and anxiety from a distance, but when we can see where God has come through for us in significant ways, like the cracks in the ice, it gives us the confidence to move ahead and not be held back by fear. Faith is genuine when you are standing on ice that looks like it will not support you. The antidote to fear is an active and living faith.

How do we grow in this type of faith? The starting point is to ask yourself where your faith or trust is currently. Proverbs 28:26 (TPT), *“Self-confident know-it-alls will prove to be fools. But when you lean on the wisdom from above, you will have a way to escape the troubles of your own making.”* Faith in your abilities, knowledge, and wisdom will not get you far. It is necessary to recognize your need for more faith to make room for faith to grow in your life. You will want an ample supply of faith in your storehouse.

Your faith will grow if you are honest about where your current confidence is placed and then ask God for more faith. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (TPT), *“The message I preached and how I preached it was not an attempt to sway you with persuasive arguments but to prove to you the almighty power of God’s Holy Spirit. For God intended that your faith not be established on man’s wisdom but by trusting in his almighty power.”* Hebrews 12:2 (TPT), *“We look away from the natural*

realm and we focus our attention and expectation onto Jesus who birthed faith within us and who leads us forward into faith's perfection. His example is this: Because his heart was focused on the joy of knowing that you would be his, he endured the agony of the cross and conquered its humiliation, and now sits exalted at the right hand of the throne of God!" If you ask in faith, He will grant you more faith.

Our faith will show itself and strengthen by our actions. What do your actions say about your faith? James 2:17-18 (TPT), *"So then faith that doesn't involve action is phony. But someone might object and say, "One person has faith and another person has works." Go ahead then and prove to me that you have faith without works and I will show you faith by my works as proof that I believe."* As you put your faith into action, it will create more opportunities for your faith to grow. It was one thing to believe the ice would hold me; it is another to step onto the ice and begin to skate. It requires faith in action to express your God-given voice.

Your faith will grow as you put God's word into your mind. You need to soak that shield of faith in His Word frequently. Romans 10:17 (NKJV), *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* Take God's Word with you everywhere and not just as an app on your phone; place it in your mind and meditate on it continuously.

Your faith will grow by observing the lives of others who walk in faith. The Bible contains many examples of people of faith. Read biographies of people of faith, talk to seniors whose faith is authentic and inspiring. We would have had less initial fear of stepping onto the ice if we had seen someone else standing there first.

Your faith will grow if you pause to consider and record the cracks in the ice. I mean taking time to record where God has fulfilled His promises. Recording these experiences will build your faith and be a legacy record of faith for others.

When you are weary, He will give you strength. When you feel you have no might or ability to change, He will increase your power. If you work or live to promote yourself, you will eventually fail. Let faith be the shield God designed it to be. Pick up your shield of faith and march forward with calm confidence. A shield is not effective when you are retreating. Keep that shield saturated in the water of God's Word and His promises. Quench those fiery darts of doubt, discouragement, fear, anxiety, offense, and despair. There is a world out there in dire need of a demonstration of God's love and your voice. Fill your storehouse with faith.

Chapter 14 – Sanctification

How do we improve as people? How do we become the people that God intended us to be? In the world of theology, the term for this process is sanctification. Unfortunately, there is no place for stable stagnation; we are either growing or dying. The path of faith is a lifelong journey. This process of growth and sanctification requires persistence and grit. The goal is to become the people that God intended. The path is narrow and uncrowded. Philippians 1:6 (TPT), *“I pray with great faith for you, because I’m fully convinced that the One who began this gracious work in you will faithfully continue the process of maturing you until the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ!”*

The enemy loves to attack our thoughts and senses. Our salvation and sanctification are a helmet that will protect our minds and thoughts from the enemy’s attacks. Ephesians

6:17 (TPT), *“Embrace the power of salvation’s full deliverance, like a helmet to protect your thoughts from lies.”*

Sanctification is one of those vague theological terms that we do not understand very well. Its most fundamental meaning is “being in a proper functioning state.” My first car was a yellow 1970 Toyota Corona. On a frigid winter night, while in university in Canada, I would have to use a credit card to hold the carburetor’s butterfly valve open to get the car to start. It was a painfully cold process that worked most of the time. I have also used a credit card to open my college apartment’s locked door and scrape the frost off my frozen windshield. That little credit card was handy, but these accessory uses were nothing compared to what that card could do when it performed as intended.

A sanctified credit card is a beautiful thing. In the context of spiritual growth, sanctification means “to be set apart for the intended use of the designer.” In other words, sanctification is the process of becoming more holy. It is becoming more like Christ. Sanctification is not the appearance of a change but a fundamental transformation. A transformation into the image of Christ. Romans 8:29 (TPT) *“For he knew all about us before we were born and he destined us from the beginning to share the likeness of his Son. This means the Son is the oldest among a vast family of brothers and sisters who will become just like him.”*

The Bible teaches that at salvation, faith in Christ caused our spirit to become alive, and then His Holy Spirit is present in our lives to help transform us into beings that resemble Christ. The question then is, are you more like Christ this year than you were last year? What does it mean for you to be more like Christ? God breathed into man His image at creation. Man's image was damaged when Adam and Eve turned their backs on God. Salvation with ongoing sanctification is the opportunity we now have because of the work of Christ on the cross. We can become what God intended us to be, and our restored selves will then demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 (TPT) *"But the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit within you is divine love in all its varied expressions; joy that overflows, peace that subdues, patience that endures, kindness in action, a life full of virtue, faith that prevails, gentleness of heart, and strength of spirit. Never set the law above these qualities, for they are meant to be limitless."*

If we had any understanding of our potential as God's created beings, we would quickly recognize the need for sanctification. Sanctification is restoration; it is becoming what God intended for each of us. Too quickly, we settle for the mundane when we could be experiencing magnificence. We strive to the point of exhaustion to obtain what God freely offers. Our God-given image was injured when Adam and

Eve rebelled against God. We now, through Christ, can regain the restored image.

Why is sanctification necessary? Why do we need to change? All you must do is pause for a moment and look at the world around you. The rates of addiction and suicide are rapidly rising, trust is declining, and love has grown cold. We have never been more affluent, yet we remain in despair. Improving the economy will not solve the main issues facing humanity. We need a spiritual awakening. We need a community of Jesus followers who are courageous enough to be honest and humble enough to put down their pride and wholeheartedly seek the Lord. Our hurting world desperately needs the light that only God can give through His people. We can be the people God intended, people who have an intimate relationship with Him, who have purpose and meaning, who can live without fear with the vitality necessary for a full and meaningful life. We should be living as if God is restoring the image that He gave us.

Jesus came from God the Father and sacrificed His life for our salvation and sanctification. Salvation is only the first step in lifelong growth and spiritual maturity. Be grateful for your salvation and be diligent about your sanctification. The road to holiness is for all who are Jesus' disciples.

In Hebrews 12:14 (TPT), we are encouraged to pursue

sanctification, *“In every relationship be swift to choose peace over competition, and run swiftly toward holiness, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.”* Do you want to see the Lord? Run with all you have toward holiness. Do not dance with compromise or rest in complacency. He has promised an abundant life, and He does not neglect His promises.

If you feel your faith is weak, then what should you do? Sanctification will strengthen your faith. 1 John 2:3-6 (TPT), *“Here’s how we can be sure that we’ve truly come to know God: if we keep his commands. If someone claims, “I have come to know God by experience,” yet doesn’t keep God’s commands, he is a phony and the truth finds no place in him. But the love of God will be perfected within the one who obeys God’s Word. We can be sure that we’ve truly come to live in intimacy with God, not just by saying, “I am intimate with God,” but by walking in the footsteps of Jesus.”* If you feel your faith is weak, you are most likely not walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

The enemy attacks us through our thoughts. Thoughts of weakness, self-importance, isolation, fear, anguish, and despair are the weapons he uses to interfere with our growth. We need the helmet of salvation. We need to trust the Lord and take those thoughts captive as a part of our sanctified life. 2 Corinthians 10:5 (TPT), *“We can demolish every deceptive*

fantasy that opposes God and break through every arrogant attitude that is raised up in defiance of the true knowledge of God. We capture, like prisoners of war, every thought and insist that it bow in obedience to the Anointed One.”

You may ask, how will we know if we are on the right path? We should be progressively growing into God’s desired likeness. We should be becoming Jesus. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (TPT), *“We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are being transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* Do others see Jesus when they see you or do they see someone wrapped up in their arrogance? Yes, the transforming work of sanctification will only be complete when Christ returns, but we should expect to see some noticeable changes while we are still here on earth.

Wouldn’t it be nice to be thankful for our salvation and then kick up our feet and cruise through life until we enter the golden gates. Scripture teaches that sanctification is not an option. 1 John 1:8-10 (TPT) *“If we boast that we have no sin, we’re only fooling ourselves and are strangers to the truth. But if we freely admit our sins when his light uncovers them, he will be faithful to forgive us every time. God is just to forgive*

us our sins because of Christ, and he will continue to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we claim that we're not guilty of sin when God uncovers it with his light, we make him a liar and his word is not in us."

Sanctification is one of those concepts that is understood best by uncovering what it is not. Sanctification is a process; it does not occur instantaneously at salvation. Paul reported in the book of Romans the battle between our fallen humanity and our regenerated spirit continues after salvation. Romans 7:14-25 (TPT) *"For we know that the law is divinely inspired and comes from the spiritual realm, but I am a human being made of flesh and trafficked as a slave under sin's authority. I'm a mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. And if my behavior is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but will-power is not enough to accomplish it. My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do the things I want to avoid. So if my behavior contradicts my desires to do good, I must conclude that it's not my true identity doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin hindering me from being who I really am. Through my experience of*

this principle, I discover that even when I want to do good, evil is ready to sabotage me. Truly, deep within my true identity, I love to do what pleases God. But I discern another power operating in my humanity, waging a war against the moral principles of my conscience and bringing me into captivity as a prisoner to the “law” of sin—this unwelcome intruder in my humanity. What an agonizing situation I am in! So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death? I give all my thanks to God, for his mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So if left to myself, the flesh is aligned with the law of sin, but now my renewed mind is fixed on and submitted to God’s righteous principles.” Sanctification is not instantaneous, it is a struggle and takes time, but we have help and promised guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Like salvation, sanctification is not something we obtain by our efforts. The same power that saved us also sanctifies us. Ephesians 2:8-10 (TPT), *“For it was only through this wonderful grace that we believed in him. Nothing we did could ever earn this salvation, for it was the gracious gift from God that brought us to Christ! So no one will ever be able to boast, for salvation is never a reward for good works or human striving. We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined*

to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!”

Sanctification is not a fruit of the Spirit, but authentic fruit will only be present in the lives of those on the path to holiness. Self-generated fruit may look good, but it is toxic if eaten.

Sanctification is not a gift of the spirit. The gifts of teaching, preaching, helping, or praying are gifts God has freely given to serve others. They are used to express your sanctification; they do not prove you are sanctified. The gifts are not a badge of honor to be worn as a sign of spiritual superiority. They are to be used by servants.

Sanctification is not resilience or grit. Ongoing spiritual growth will produce grit, but being resilient does not mean you are sanctified. God has promised us that He will strengthen us where we need strength. Philippians 4:13 (TPT) *“I know what it means to lack, and I know what it means to experience overwhelming abundance. For I’m trained in the secret of overcoming all things, whether in fullness or in hunger. And I find that the strength of Christ’s explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty.”* We should be living and growing with God-infused strength.

Sanctification is not self-control. Evidence of our spiritual growth should be a growing restraint, but self-control by itself

is not sanctification. We are encouraged in scripture to purify ourselves because of God's promises. 2 Corinthians 7:1 (TPT) *"Beloved ones, with promises like these, and because of our deepest respect and worship of God, we must remove everything from our lives that contaminates body and spirit, and continue to complete the development of holiness within us."* Our self-control should be out of respect and gratitude for all God has done for us, not out of pressure to feel better about ourselves or as an attempt to gain God's favor.

Sanctification is not strict adherence to religious rituals. We are called to true holiness, an authentic change of heart, and not ritualistic appeasement. 1 Peter 1:15 (TPT) *"Instead, shape your lives to become like the Holy One who called you."* Yes, if you are on the sanctification path, you will pray more, worship more, and read God's word more, but this is not sanctification.

Living as if our spiritual growth depends on what we can do, our good intentions or strict adherence to a specific code quickly becomes stifling legalism. Sanctification is a work of God's Holy Spirit. Romans 8:4 (TPT), *"So now every righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled through the Anointed One living his life in us. And we are free to live, not according to our flesh, but by the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit!"*

We should be motivated to grow out of gratitude. 1 John 3:1-3 (TPT) *“Look with wonder at the depth of the Father’s marvelous love that he has lavished on us! He has called us and made us his very own beloved children. The reason the world doesn’t recognize who we are is that they didn’t recognize him. Beloved, we are God’s children right now; however, it is not yet apparent what we will become. But we do know that when it is finally made visible, we will be just like him, for we will see him as he truly is. And all who focus their hope on him will always be purifying themselves, just as Jesus is pure.”*

We live in the time of God’s new covenant, a covenant of grace. To live believing we can perform to gain God’s approval is to substitute the law for God’s grace. Ephesians 2:10 (TPT) *“We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!”*

How does one get sanctified? How can we become the people that God intended? Do we have an active role in our sanctification?

Firstly, sanctification is through the body of Christ. If it were not for the cross, there would be no sanctification. Hebrews

10:10 (TPT) *“By God’s will we have been purified and made holy once and for all through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus, the Messiah!”* The necessary sacrifice for our salvation and sanctification has been made; it is not gained by strenuous, sacrificial effort on our part. Our role in this is small but significant. We are to believe, live by faith, and seek Him with our whole being.

Through faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, sanctification is possible. It is as if the road back to a relationship with God is a path where Christ, through His sacrifice, opened the door; the Holy Spirit then guided us to the door and now directs us on the way. Galatians 5:16 (TPT) *“As you yield freely and fully to the dynamic life and power of the Holy Spirit, you will abandon the cravings of your self – life.”* Living in a dark, godless world, the Holy Spirit is the light on our path and the breath in our lungs. Is the Holy Spirit guiding you? Are you becoming more like Jesus? What motivates you? Romans 8:5-6 (TPT), *“Those who are motivated by the flesh only pursue what benefits themselves. But those who live by the impulses of the Holy Spirit are motivated to pursue spiritual realities. For the mind-set of the flesh is death, but the mind-set controlled by the Spirit finds life and peace.”* Are you struggling? Are you trying hard under your strength to become Christ-like? Do you realize your efforts will never be good enough? Romans 8:8-10

(TPT) *“For no matter how hard they try, God finds no pleasure with those who are controlled by the flesh. But when the Spirit of Christ empowers your life, you are not dominated by the flesh but by the Spirit. And if you are not joined to the Spirit of the Anointed One, you are not of him. Now Christ lives his life in you! And even though your body may be dead because of the effects of sin, his life-giving Spirit imparts life to you because you are fully accepted by God.”*

One of the Holy Spirit's tools in guiding our sanctification is the inspired Word of God. John 16:13 (TPT) *“But when the truth-giving Spirit comes, he will unveil the reality of every truth within you. He won't speak his own message, but only what he hears from the Father, and he will reveal prophetically to you what is to come.”* 2 Timothy 3:15 (TPT) *“Remember what you were taught from your childhood from the Holy Scrolls which can impart to you wisdom to experience everlasting life through the faith of Jesus, the Anointed One!”* God's Word was inspired by the Holy Spirit and is alive and applicable today. Ephesians 5:26 (TPT), *“to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.”* As we live in a fallen world, we pick up dirt throughout the day. We need regular washing of the Word of God. When I was a younger man, I wrongfully thought I knew enough of God's Word to last a lifetime. After all, I learned a lot of scripture on a Bible quiz team while in high school, and

I had attended three years of seminary. Little did I realize that knowledge of the Word and being washed by the Word were two different things. If you are on the sanctification path, you will crave the daily washing and refreshing that is only available in God's Word. We need God's Word to help the scales of self-centeredness fall from our eyes to see more clearly. Hebrews 4:12 (AMP) *"For the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as the division of the soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart."* We need to pause and take time to consider while meditating on God's Word what it means to have the mind of Christ. Philippians 2:5 (TPT), *"And consider the example that Jesus, the Anointed One, has set before us. Let his mindset become your motivation."* What is your motivation? Is your motivation self-promotion and affirmation? Is your motivation the mindset of Christ?

The process of sanctification is an act of faith. Romans 12:1-2 (TPT) *"Beloved friends, what should be our proper response to God's marvelous mercies? I encourage you to surrender yourselves to God to be his sacred, living sacrifices. And live in holiness, experiencing all that delights his heart. For this becomes your genuine expression of worship. Stop imitating*

the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God's will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes." Faith is necessary for sanctification because it is a work of the Spirit that produces growth. God is kind and gentle, He will not force you to grow, but He is there to facilitate your growth if you want it bad enough. Do you want to grow? Do you see the need for the Holy Spirit to be working in your life? Are you complacent about where you are at right now? How does your life measure up to the fruit of the spirit listed in Galatians 5:22? Are you painfully aware of where you need God's help to become what He intended?

If you were to X-ray a child's bones, you would find something that looks very unusual. In a growing child, there are clear lines visible on the X-ray. These lines are called an epiphysis or growth plate. The cells at these growth plates are different from those that make up the rest of the bone. These cells divide and multiply, resulting in a lengthening of a bone. The rest of the bone cells provide a healthy skeletal structure so the child can learn to walk, run, and perform other physical functions. Like the growing, immature bones of a child, our spiritual growth also has growth plates. If you want to see where God is working in your life, you should be aware of your spiritual growth plates. For example, meditate on the fruit of

the spirit, and you will find many of these spiritual growth plates. When we look for evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we should see areas of significant growth and change, but we will also see the places we lack. Where we recognize the need for more love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is where the Spirit is ready and able to work. Do you see the limit to your ability to love? Do you know where you need to love others more to become the person God intended you to be? If you see the need for improvement at this point and just try harder, you will fail. At this point in our spiritual growth plates, we need to cry out to God for help. We are dependent on Him for the changes that are desperately needed. With faith He will change you, Hebrews 11:6 (AMP) *“But without faith it is impossible to [walk with God and] please Him, for whoever comes [near] to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He rewards those who [earnestly and diligently] seek Him.”* Take time to consider each fruit of the Spirit, be honest, ask for God’s help, and grow.

Spiritual growth is a process that, at times, is both messy and painful. Keep pressing in; never give up or become complacent. Remain thankful. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (TPT), *“Let joy be your continual feast. Make your life a prayer. And in the midst of everything be always giving thanks, for this is God’s perfect plan for you in Christ Jesus.”*

Are you in His will? Are you thankful?

Are you growing or dying? How is the fruit of the spirit demonstrated in your life? Sanctification is a component of your storehouse that you will want to be adding to daily.

Chapter 15 – The Holy Spirit

Our culture has devolved into an individualistic, self-centered, “all about me” society. We have lost our connection with God and our compass to find our way back to God. We have turned our backs to God and pursued selfish interests with passion and rage. We may still have “In God, We Trust” stamped on our coinage, but it is gone from our culture’s heart. As a society, we have rushed down this disastrous path as fast as possible, and we are a mess. As a disciple of Jesus, if you hope to survive this upheaval, you will need the comfort, guidance, reassurance, and power of the Holy Spirit. Your communication connection to God is through the Holy Spirit, who is present to interpret God’s Word and pray on your behalf. You will need your storehouse filled with the Holy Spirit. This upside-down, crazy world you live in hurts profoundly and needs your God-given Holy Spirit empowered voice.

The previous storehouse items have been reworded and adapted in medicine and psychology with some success. After all, they are spiritual laws of living set in place by our creator. They are the foundation of many self-help programs and twelve-step programs to deal with various addictions and psychological issues. Success with these programs is dependent on adherence to these laws, plus willpower and accountability.

The following are examples of how these laws have been “borrowed” and used in modern psychology.

The spiritual law regarding truth stresses being honest with yourself and others as a foundation for growth. It recognizes that there is no room or opportunity for improvement if you are not genuine.

The spiritual law regarding confession stresses the need to put honesty into practice. The focus is on the importance of humility and transparency to build willpower.

The spiritual law regarding evaluation stresses the importance of not allowing yourself to become complacent. It encourages ongoing assessment on the pathway to recovery.

The spiritual law regarding surrender addresses the reality that our problems are more significant than our ability to overcome. It stresses the truth that we need help and that

there is added strength in asking for help.

The spiritual law regarding redemption stresses the need to see that a change is necessary and that continuing to live in a current manner will be destructive or fatal.

The spiritual law regarding restoration stresses the need for forgiveness and apology. It focuses on the significance of personal responsibility and a movement away from the powerless victim role.

The spiritual law regarding service stresses the power in giving to others out of gratitude. This law is a potent mechanism and why former addicts run many of the addiction programs. Many of these workers need to help others to remain sober themselves.

The spiritual law regarding faith stresses that a belief in higher power or force greater than you is vital in overcoming your problem. If your problem is bigger than you, you will need a greater strength than yours to overcome the problem.

The spiritual law regarding sanctification stresses the importance of never becoming complacent. It focuses on the reality that you are only one weak moment away from a relapse.

The secularization of God's laws may produce some behavior change, but there is no absolute freedom with this form of

pseudo-sanctification. To become the people God intended, we need a complete restoration. This restoration is more than just a change in thought and emotion; it is a change in spirit. Our dead spirit needs resuscitation, and that new life can only come from the work and power of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17 (NKJV), *“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”* Our spirit is our contact point with God. John 3:6 (TPT), *“For the natural realm only gives birth to things that are natural, but the spiritual realm gives birth to supernatural life!”* Salvation is the quickening of our dead spirit. This rebirth is the path to freedom. It is now possible to become who we were created to be. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit if we expect to tear down strongholds, find our God-given voice, and stand for His kingdom.

The work of the spirit will not be understood by many. To those whose spirit is still dead, it will sound like insanity, like you have found an invisible imaginary friend. The truth is the Holy Spirit is a person who is alive and very real. 1 Corinthians 2:14 (TPT), *“Someone living on an entirely human level rejects the revelations of God’s Spirit, for they make no sense to him. He can’t understand the revelations of the Spirit because they are only discovered by the illumination of the Spirit.”* You now have the Spirit of Christ alive within you. Romans 8:9 (NKJV), *“But you are not in the flesh but in the*

Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives to guide us, protect us, comfort us, and pray for us. After Jesus rose from the dead, He went to heaven and sent us the Holy Spirit to be our helper. Jesus could not physically be in more than one place at a time, but the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and is present with all believers. He is in Texas and France at the same time. John 16:7 (TPT), *“But here’s the truth: It’s to your advantage that I go away, for if I don’t go away the Divine Encourager will not be released to you. But after I depart, I will send him to you.”* A life of faith will have trials and difficulties, and we will need help and encouragement from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is necessary as an encourager during those overwhelming times.

The Holy Spirit guides us on the sanctification path. 1 Corinthians 6:11 (TPT), *“It’s true that some of you once lived in those lifestyles, but now you have been purified from sin, made holy, and given a perfect standing before God—all because of the power of the name of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, and through our union with the Spirit of our God.”*

The Holy Spirit drew us to God and Christ, to begin with, and now continues to lead us in our path of holiness. You cannot become holy without the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is present in your life to make you more like Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (TPT), *“We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are being transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

Becoming Christ-like should be our goal. If your goal is self-promotion, you do not have the Spirit of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the one who gifts you for ministry. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (TPT), *“It is the same Holy Spirit who continues to distribute many different varieties of gifts. The Lord Yahweh is one, and he is the one who apportions to believers different varieties of ministries. The same God distributes different kinds of miracles that accomplish different results through each believer’s gift and ministry as he energizes and activates them. Each believer is given continuous revelation by the Holy Spirit to benefit not just himself but all.”* What he has given to you is for you to use to build His kingdom. Lean into Him to find your unique gifts and voice. What we possess are gifts from the Spirit; they are not self-generated. You are on planet earth at this specific time, for a particular purpose, with a unique life experience and voice to give God glory and build His kingdom.

The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us hope when all hope seems lost. Romans 15:13 (TPT), *“Now may God, the fountain of hope, fill you to overflowing with uncontainable joy and perfect peace as you trust in him. And may the power of the Holy Spirit continually surround your life with his superabundance until you radiate with hope!”* Do you radiate hope, or do you cast despair? Life is an exhausting battle. At times it feels like the only direction to swim is upstream. Strongholds need tearing down; the enemy constantly attacks, and there are times when all seems lost. It is easy to lose hope when we get exhausted. We are in desperate need of Holy Spirit-generated hope.

The Holy Spirit is the one who imparts love. It is impossible to love as God would have us, love, without the Holy Spirit. The evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is not speaking in tongues, not performing miracles, it is not prosperity, and it is not proclaiming accurate prophecies. The evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit is love. What do others see when they see you? Do they see someone struggling to make a name for themselves, or do they see God’s love? I spent the last several years of my medical career as a physician working with individuals struggling with drug and alcohol addiction. I became adept at accurately identifying the physical signs of heroin, methamphetamine, Ecstasy, or alcohol. Your countenance, especially your eyes, is quite

revealing. Your countenance is powerful and will impact the atmosphere where you are present. What does your countenance say about you? Do others see God's love when you enter a room? Does the atmosphere become more peaceful and pleasant? Romans 5:3-5 (TPT), *"But that's not all! Even in times of trouble we have a joyful confidence, knowing that our pressures will develop in us patient endurance. And patient endurance will refine our character, and proven character leads us back to hope. And this hope is not a disappointing fantasy, because we can now experience the endless love of God cascading into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who lives in us!"* The most potent force available to change your world is love. The problem is that it is impossible to define this kind of love. At times love means giving grace, and at other times it means applying the law. There is no formula for knowing how to love. Loving is not just giving in and not only setting boundaries. We need to depend on the Holy Spirit to know how to dispense God's love with precision.

The Holy Spirit teaches and gives insight. John 14:26 (TPT), *"But when the Father sends the Spirit of Holiness, the One like me who sets you free, he will teach you all things in my name. And he will inspire you to remember every word that I've told you."*

The Spirit opens the meaning of God's Word to make you

more like Christ.

The Holy Spirit confirms you belong to God. Romans 8:16 (TPT), *“For the Holy Spirit makes God’s fatherhood real to us as he whispers into our innermost being, “You are God’s beloved child!”* The Spirit’s affirming whisper during times of trouble and confusion is vital. Have you heard it? Are you listening for that whisper?

Our storehouse needs an area where we can communicate with God. This area is only available through the Holy Spirit. We need to hear God through the Holy Spirit’s interpretation of His Word and His gentle whisper. We need to communicate to God through prayer guided and delivered by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 6:17 (NKJV), *“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;”* We need the razor-sharp sword of the Spirit to tear down strongholds and defeat the enemy’s lies. The sword of the Spirit is both defensive and constructive. It is defensive in that it can be used to defeat the enemy’s lies like Jesus did when Satan tempted him in Luke 4. God’s Word is truth, John 17:17 (TPT), *“Your Word is truth! So make them holy by the truth.”* God’s Word is light, Psalm 119:105 (TPT), *“Truth’s shining light guides me in my choices and decisions; the revelation of your Word makes my pathway clear.”* The truth and the light of God’s word come alive through the work of the Holy Spirit. If you are to become what God intended, you will

need to wield the Spirit-inspired Word of God to carve your way through the numerous lies of the enemy.

The sword of the Spirit, the living Word of God, is also constructive in that it is a vital part of how we become more Christ-like. We are God's works of art, Ephesians 2:10 (TPT), *"We have become his poetry, a re-created people that will fulfill the destiny he has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born, God planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it!"* As God's work of art, we are a sculpture and not a painting. Unfortunately, many believers feel they are God's painting. They focus on the outside, adding a little red here and little blue there, believing all is fine. They see no need to address the inside. As God's sculptures, the Holy Spirit interprets God's Word to our spirit to cut away our flesh to reveal His perfect work of art. Hebrews 4:12 (TPT), *"For we have the living Word of God, which is full of energy, like a two-mouthed sword. It will even penetrate to the very core of our being where soul and spirit, bone and marrow meet! It interprets and reveals the true thoughts and secret motives of our hearts."* In this sense, the Spirit-inspired Word is more of a sculptor's chisel than a sword. Michelangelo was a famous painter and sculptor of the Renaissance. He stated that *"Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it. I saw the angel in the marble and carved*

until I set him free.”

In the same way, the sword of God's living Word will cut away slabs of confining bitterness, rage, selfishness, greed, lust, and covetousness. Some slabs will cut away easier than others. We arrived in this world as a twenty-ton block of marble. The spirit within that marble came alive at salvation, and its heart began to beat. The figure within the marble was still confined, but the figure slowly is freed with time and trials when you invite the Holy Spirit to work. Eventually, the outcome will be a perfect, living sculpture of Jesus. His work will not be complete until Jesus returns, but that does not mean we should give up and become complacent. So, humble yourself, seek God, invite the Holy Spirit to bring God's Word alive, and hopefully, we will start to see the emergence of Jesus in our lives.

We do not know how to love without the Holy Spirit, but we also do not know how to pray without the Holy Spirit. How should we talk to God? What language does He speak? What do we request? Is there a protocol? The Holy Spirit guides our prayers, Romans 8:26 (TPT), *“And in a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us in our human frailty to empower us in our weakness. For example, at times we don't even know how to pray, or know the best things to ask for. But the Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs too deep for words.”*

Prayer can be audible and intelligible, audible and unintelligible, silent, or a time of listening. You will want to have room in your storehouse for all types of prayer. For what should we be praying? Paul was near the end of his ministry when he wrote Ephesians. He had experienced a lot of God's power and revelation by this time, and yet he requests prayer for boldness and freedom. He asked that they pray for him and each other. Ephesians 6:18-20 (TPT), *"Pray passionately in the Spirit, as you constantly intercede with every form of prayer at all times. Pray the blessings of God upon all his believers. And pray also that God's revelation would be released through me every time I preach the wonderful mystery of the hope-filled gospel. Yes, pray that I may preach the wonderful news of God's kingdom with bold freedom at every opportunity. Even though I am chained as a prisoner, I am his ambassador."* We should be asking the Holy Spirit for assistance as we pray for others. This kind of prayer will force you to set aside your "all about me" attitude and begin to focus on what matters to God.

Take time to talk to God, ask Him questions, look for answers to your questions in His Word. Invite the Holy Spirit to use God's Word to make you more Christ-like. Follow the instructions given in Philippians 2:4 (NKJV) and *"Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."* Do not just rapidly pray for others;

take time to consider their “personal interests.” Ask yourself, what is it like to be that person. If you find your love for others has grown cold, you will find it starts to warm again if you take the time to consider their “personal interests.” To help with this a little more, I would like to introduce “burden filtering.” Your love grows cold because you have become preoccupied with the miseries and concerns of your own life.

The pain of life’s burdens and demands results in a self-focus, which causes our love for others to grow cold rapidly. Following the advice in Philippians 2:4 will begin to warm your compassion. Now “burden filtering” is not just thinking about them; it is filtering your thoughts about them through the struggles and strongholds they may be facing. Make a list of the people you are going to consider. The list should include a parent, spouse, close friend, someone much younger than you like your child or grandchild, a person of prominence you admire, a homeless person that stands on the street corner with their cardboard sign, and a friend. You should also include someone you dislike, like someone who has mocked you or caused an offense. Now take time to consider that person in the light of their struggles. Do they struggle with a sense of isolation and meaninglessness? Are they struggling with their decisions and purpose? Are they struggling with their mortality? Are they spiritually whole? Are they struggling with issues of trust? Are they aware that God loves them?

Are you aware of any specific strongholds that are holding them back? Do not use this time to compare their struggles to yours. Assume that their battles are currently more intense and painful than yours. Remember, we must consider others above ourselves and not less than ourselves. Once you have completed this time of “burden filtering,” it is time to pray.

Start by thanking the Lord for them, thanking Him that He loves them more than you ever could, thank Him that John 3:16 applies to them as much as it does to you. Ask that the word of God’s love come to them and offer yourself to deliver the message of hope. Ask the Lord to prepare your words and provide the opportunity. Ask the Lord to bless them. Ask that the Lord send other believers across their path who can guide them to Him. Ask that the scales of doubt, denial, self-centeredness and spiritual blindness fall from their spiritual eyes. Ask that the Lord protect them so they may feel the consequences of their life direction but not suffer harm in pursuing that direction. If this “burden filtering,” followed by prayer, becomes a regular part of your life, you will find you start to see others as God sees them, and your compassion will warm. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray and love others.

The Holy Spirit should infuse every element in your storehouse. You now have a foundation for ongoing growth and a process for increasing your Godly grit. It is now time to stand.

Chapter 16 – Stand!

The first man was created complete and placed in God's perfectly designed world. God created man to experience fulfillment in a quality relationship with Him, aware of his value and purpose, active and creative, with power, and an eternal spirit. We were made to be both physically alive and spiritually alive. God created humanity with everything we needed to be completely content. With disobedience came a fracture in our God-image. Now there was a problem. We still have God's image, but its expression and experience are severely distorted.

God is patient, God is kind, and God has provided, through His Son, a path of restoration. God loves you and wants to relate to a humble, honest, and thankful humanity. Psalm 139:5-6 (TPT) is an expression of His love. *"You've gone into my future to prepare the way, and in kindness, you follow*

behind me to spare me from the harm of my past. With your hand of love upon my life, you impart a blessing to me. This is just too wonderful, deep, and incomprehensible! Your understanding of me brings me wonder and strength.”

We do not need to fear the future; God has gone into our future to prepare our way. Even when things seem dark and uncertain, God has prepared your future. You do not have to be paralyzed by your past, controlled by guilt, shame, offenses, past abuse, or injustices. You do not have to live a life of misery and bitterness. There is hope. You can be free from anxiety about the future and harm from the past and live with thanksgiving today because of a loving God. A relationship with God is the only effective treatment for life's misery. You can now be free to pursue and fulfill your God-given voice to glorify Him as you work to build His kingdom. It is time to stand!

Ephesians 6:13 (NKJV), *“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”* Are you standing, or have you decided to remain seated? Do you have the strength and stamina to stand? Have you done all? To do all means, you have done all you can to set aside those weights that so easily trip you up. You have acknowledged and torn down strongholds and are not living a self-centered life. You can now stand, meaning you are established in your faith, using

your voice and not wavering. Are you strong enough to stand, or will you fall over with the faintest breeze of adversity?

If you follow Jesus and begin to use your voice, you will face much adversity. John 16:33 (NKJV), "*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*" How you react to these tribulations will determine how close you can get to fulfilling God's plan for your life. You will need the mindset of a warrior. 1 Timothy 1:18-19 (NKJV), "*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,*" 2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV), "*You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*" Warriors act righteously. They know what is right and what is wrong and act accordingly. A warrior is courageous in defending righteousness. A warrior is benevolent, respects others, and treats others with honor. A warrior is honest and sincere. A warrior is self-controlled, disciplined, and able to follow orders. Do you have what it takes to be a warrior? I am not talking about a physical combat warrior but a spiritual warrior who has the strength and

stamina to seek God, tear down strongholds and use their voice. God is looking for men and women willing to be His warriors. Most Christians are content just wearing their team colors and cheering from the sidelines. God did not call and equip you to be a casual fan; He called you to be part of the game.

Warriors must be humble, and confident, but not arrogant. They must acknowledge where they are weak and vulnerable. Philippians 2:5-9 (AMP). *“Have this same attitude in yourselves which was in Christ Jesus [look to Him as your example in selfless humility], who, although He existed in the form and unchanging essence of God [as One with Him, possessing the fullness of all the divine attributes—the entire nature of deity], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped or asserted [as if He did not already possess it, or was afraid of losing it]; but emptied Himself [without renouncing or diminishing His deity, but only temporarily giving up the outward expression of divine equality and His rightful dignity] by assuming the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men [He became completely human but was without sin, being fully God and fully man]. After He was found in [terms of His] outward appearance as a man [for a divinely-appointed time], He humbled Himself [still further] by becoming obedient [to the Father] to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* If we expect to thrive and

grow, we must humble ourselves as Christ humbled Himself. We must lay aside our self-centeredness and pride and seek Him. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (ASV), *“if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* Humble yourself and pray, God will sustain you, and He will restore your strength and resolve as you find your value in Him.

Warriors prepare through training and discipline. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 (NKJV), *“Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus, I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* Start training and disciplining yourself by learning to trust God for the little things in life. If your reflex is to turn to Him and His Word when you do not feel threatened, you are more likely to turn to Him when adversity increases. Do you reflexively turn to Him, or do you turn to Google? What you train yourself to do when the pressure is low is what you will do when the pressure is extensive.

Warriors are reliable, trustworthy, and not self-centered. Strive to be authentic. Be honest and humble. Cherish your solitude time with God, ask Him daily to search your heart, then be willing to change what needs to be changed.

Warriors are honorable; they live by an ethical code and are respectful. A warrior has learned to live life considerate of others. Psalm 15:1-5 (NKJV), *“LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart; He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change; He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.”* A warrior will perish on the battlefield if consumed by self-centered thoughts.

Warriors recognize they are part of something much bigger than themselves. They know they have a specific task, at a particular time, for the benefit of all. 1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV), *“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;”* Do not complain about the evils of this age and remain seated. God has placed you on earth for this time to stand; this is your time, and He has equipped you and trusts you to do your part.

Warriors have a keen sense of justice. The warrior is ready

and willing to stand up for the weak and vulnerable. A warrior knows the necessary boundaries. Titus 2:11-14 (NKJV), *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”* James 1:27 (TPT), *“True spirituality that is pure in the eyes of our Father God is to make a difference in the lives of the orphans, and widows in their troubles, and to refuse to be corrupted by the world’s values.”* Do you stand up against injustice? Do you see the struggles of the vulnerable? Do you know the boundaries?

Warriors live a sacrificial life of service. The warrior does not seek death but is willing to fight to the end if needed. 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NKJV), *“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”* How much are you willing to sacrifice? Are you living for anything for which you are ready to die?

Luke 9:23 (NKJV), *“Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”* Your value does not come from your gifts or talents; they were given to you by God; you do not own them; you are a steward. Use what He has given you, whether that is much or little to serve others. 1 Peter 4:10 (AMP), *“Just as each one of you has received a special gift [a spiritual talent, an ability graciously given by God], employ it in serving one another as [is appropriate for] good stewards of God’s multi-faceted grace [faithfully using the diverse, varied gifts and abilities granted to Christians by God’s unmerited favor].”* We are to be co-creators with God and other believers. We can rely on our God-given creativity and curiosity to pursue our dreams with passion and commitment.

We are free to use our God-given talents and abilities to dream and imagine solutions, businesses, inventions, and so on to serve God and others. Acts 2:17 (AMP), *“And it shall be in the last days,’ says God, ‘That I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see [divinely prompted] visions, And your old men shall dream [divinely prompted] dreams;”* It is time for God’s people to wake up and dream! Find your voice and use it!

Warriors strive for excellence in all they do because their life

and the life of others depends on it. Push ahead with diligence. Colossians 3:23-24 (AMP), *“Whatever you do [whatever your task may be], work from the soul [that is, put in your very best effort], as [something done] for the Lord and not for men, knowing [with all certainty] that it is from the Lord [not from men] that you will receive the inheritance which is your [greatest] reward. It is the Lord Christ whom you [actually] serve.”* If you live to serve yourself, your diligence will dissolve, and you will become discouraged. Do all you do as if you are serving the Lord. You can now live your birthed dream with passion and commitment with the energy to see that vision come to reality. 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NKJV), *“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.”*

Warriors know their place and position in a chain of command. 2 Timothy 2:3 (NKJV), *“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* We are followers of Jesus, He is our captain, and we are His soldiers.

Warriors live in constant preparation. After a period of intense training and physical preparation, a warrior must live in a state of continuous preparation, always on the ready. As a soldier of Jesus, we must be continuously prepared by renewing our minds and presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice. Romans 8:6 (AMP), *“Now the mind of the flesh is death [both now and forever—because it pursues sin]; but the mind of the Spirit is*

life and peace [the spiritual well-being that comes from walking with God—both now and forever];”

Warriors adhere to ideals that govern their actions and priorities. As God’s warriors, we can now live with the right priorities with a restored spirit. We no longer need to live in denial because of fear produced by our sense of inferiority or mortality. We can begin to see and prioritize as God sees and prioritizes. We can understand what will last and what will burn.

Warriors do not prepare and go to battle for themselves; they go to war on others' behalf. If we lived in a perfect world, relationships would be straightforward; people would love one another and be trustworthy and authentic. We will have to wait for that world. We should be living with a Philippians 2:5 (AMP) attitude as a guide to relationships on this side of heaven. *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit [through factional motives, or strife], but with [an attitude of] humility [being neither arrogant nor self-righteous], regard others as more important than yourselves.”* This attitude will impact our relationships' quality, give love a definition, help with proper placement of trust, and encourage authenticity. The Bible tells us that they will know we are Christians by our love and that we are to love others as we would love ourselves.

Warriors must be trustworthy and must trust their fellow warriors. Trust needs to be based on someone's actions and not just their words. Some of the most brutal criminals will speak some of the sweetest, kindest words. Trust is essential, but it must be with caution. Be patient in your judgment. The Bible tells us it is by their fruit we will know someone. Develop your skills as a fruit inspector. You need to maintain clear boundaries while you wait to see the fruit of their life. Be honest and trustworthy but be wise when it comes to trusting others.

In an ideal world, we would all work together, and our meaning and value would be secure in who we are in a relationship with God. We would all cooperate and work to elevate one another. There would be no competition or striving for meaning, value, or purpose; we would have a clear understanding of our God-provided value. We would have no problem going to battle together.

Warriors are goal-oriented. Warriors know what they are fighting and why they are fighting. Our battle as God's warriors is to tear down strongholds, stand against the attacks of the enemy, glorify Him, and make Him known. 2 Timothy 4:2-5 (NKJV), *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires,*

because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” Are you living with a clear purpose? Do you know your mission?

Warriors know how to stand steadfast and unwavering. A warrior does not allow room in his life for excuses to knock him off track. You will never use your voice if you wait until you are better prepared or for the perfect opportunity. When warriors are called to battle, they do not delay or wait until their shoes are shined and their garage is clean. We should be living with an eternal purpose and not just living for what we can get for the moment. We should be living with eternity in mind and living to build and support God’s kingdom, not striving to create our own little empire. Is eternity in your mind?

We should value what has eternal value. Pause to consider what will last and what will not last. Where is your focus? What do you value? What do you treasure? Luke 12:34 (AMP), *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* If your heart is troubled, it is because you have rotting treasure. Live today with eternal priorities and values. Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV), *“Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.”*

Stand for your voice. You are God's warrior. You are unique. God loves you. You can have a meaningful relationship with God. As His child, you have substantial value. You have God-given creative power. God gave you an eternal spirit. So, go out and live the image as God intended, free from loneliness, meaninglessness, the pressure to perform, and anxiety about your mortality. Exercise and use your voice with commitment and passion.

Stand for righteousness. Do what is right. Protect and serve the vulnerable. Be honest and authentic even when the world around you may hate you for your honesty.

Stand against self-centeredness, strongholds, the attacks of the enemy, and the spirit of antichrist.

Our flesh is greedy and self-serving. We need the Holy Spirit to rescue us from ourselves. Our only experience of this world is through our own eyes, and we become blind to others' life and struggles. Apart from a relationship with God, we all follow a self-serving life path, whether sweet or nasty. If we are not God-serving, we are self-serving. What has been self-serving soon becomes self-consuming. All the self-serving acts we have performed, and the self-serving stuff we have gathered will eventually lead to our destruction.

Seek the Lord and ask Him to reveal the strongholds in your life. Tear down those strongholds so you can freely become

the person you were designed to be. Do not allow the strongholds to create a self-focused offense. Our spirit has been renewed, and we can live as God intended, but we still have an unrestored mind, habits, emotions, and desires. We need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, and our minds need ongoing renewal. Romans 12:1-2 (AMP), *“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [dedicating all of yourselves, set apart] as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, which is your rational (logical, intelligent) act of worship. And do not be conformed to this world [any longer with its superficial values and customs], but be transformed and progressively changed [as you mature spiritually] by the renewing of your mind [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His plan and purpose for you].”* Our minds are renewed or washed by God’s word. Ephesians 5:26 (TPT), *“to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God.”* We are now on the path from misery to peace. The process is one of humbly coming before the Lord, asking Him to search our hearts to identify and root out the irrational thoughts, the untamed emotions, the damaging habits, and the ungodly desires. We can rest confident in Philippians 1:6 (AMP), *“I am convinced and confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will [continue to]*

perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus [the time of His return].” If you are drowning in misery, take time daily to ask God to search your heart and then have the courage and faith to change what He reveals to you. At the end of your day, as you prepare for bed, pray Psalm 139:23-24 (TPT), “God, I invite your searching gaze into my heart. Examine me through and through; find out everything that may be hidden within me. Put me to the test and sift through all my anxious cares. See if there is any path of pain I’m walking on, and lead me back to your glorious, everlasting ways - the path that brings me back to you.” If you abandon this growth process, it will not take long, and you will find you will again be struggling with the same strongholds that once held you back.

If you follow this path, do not expect appreciation from your previous group of family and friends. You will need to stand amid rejection from others, often others you have been close to in the past. If you have been part of a group that shares their bitterness and you move on to a godly path, you will face rejection from your former bitter friends. Your contentment is a threat to their beliefs, irrational thinking, and way of life. You bring with you God’s light, and this is a threat to those hiding in the darkness. They hide, knowing they are not living as they should; they know their deeds are self-centered and evil. They do not want your light around. If you become offended because your previous social group rejects you, you may

resort to your previously destructive irrational thoughts as a way of escape. These attacks can leave you feeling more isolated, causing you to question your purpose and meaning. They will challenge your dreams and abilities. The turmoil caused by these attacks can be noisy enough to impact your ability to hear God's still small voice. Stand firm; God is faithful, even when your family and friends are not.

As God's warrior, you live to bring glory to God, and therefore, you will be an insult to Satan and come under attack. The enemy will do all he can to steal your peace, kill your voice and destroy your legacy. Put on the whole armor of God and stand!

As God's warrior, you should also expect to be attacked by the culture of antichrist. So, what is the culture or spirit of the antichrist? How do we identify it? God, the Father, through Jesus Christ, has promised to meet your deepest needs. He has provided a way for the restoration of your God-image. He has promised you peace and security in Him. Any culture or system that offers these promises in the absence of Christ is the culture of antichrist. 1 John 4:2-3 (TPT) informs us of the test we can use to identify the antichrist spirit. *"Here's the test for those with the genuine Spirit of God: they will confess Jesus as the Christ who has come in the flesh. Everyone who does not acknowledge that Jesus is from God has the spirit of antichrist, which you heard was coming and is already active*

in the world.” The spirit of antichrist is the proclamation of God’s promises without Christ. The spirit of antichrist masquerades as “the truth” when it is a lie. The spirit and culture of antichrist promise compassion but then cause division by elevating one group over another. Groups based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or financial status have special treatment. It appears to be loving on the surface, but it is only causing more profound division. The antichrist culture promotes the belief that what I can make of myself is more important than how God made me. It supports the wrong notion that I can find peace by changing who I was made to be. The culture of antichrist glories in deception – lies for the sake of lying. It promotes a life of hiding and a life of secrets. Bonds develop with those you share secrets, not relationships based on God’s truth. With the antichrist culture, there is a loss of the sacredness of life. The economy and convenience are more important than human life, especially the most vulnerable lives – the unborn and the elderly. Antichrist's culture is a twisted road; it looks like it is going one way when it is going another. The antichrist culture may also overtly show itself as being perverse through open rebellion and open denial of God’s existence. The antichrist culture promises protection as it promotes fear; the greater the fear, the greater the need for the protection promised. The culture of antichrist fosters dependency. You are now dependent on me if I can simultaneously increase your fear of heart disease

and then guarantee solutions to that medical problem. I have become your savior. We live in an age where the culture of antichrist is flourishing. Be wise; do not get swayed by the subtle culture of antichrist.

As God's warriors, we should not be living controlled by fear. We can live with the promise in Romans 8:31(AMP) *"What then shall we say to all these things? If God is for us, who can be [successful] against us?"* We no longer feel the need to waste our life by hiding or guarding secrets with denial. God is big enough to handle any reality. We are free to be humble and honest. You no longer must live being controlled by fear. You are secure in your relationship with God and no longer need to be controlled by fear of failure or reliance on an excellent result to be confident in yourself. Isaiah 41:10 (AMP), *"Do not fear [anything], for I am with you; Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, be assured I will help you; I will certainly take hold of you with My righteous right hand [a hand of justice, of power, of victory, of salvation]."*

As God's warriors, we are more spiritually intact and aware. We know where the battle is and where the struggle is not. We understand the meaning of Ephesians 6:12 (AMP), *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood [contending only with physical opponents], but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this [present] darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly*

(supernatural) places.” We are aware that there is a lot more going on than we see on the surface. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 (NKJV), “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.”

You are God’s warrior. Seek Him with all your being. Find your voice, begin to exercise it, and use it for His glory. Put on all the armor He has provided and stand. God created you for this time, as difficult as it may seem. Stand!

Psalm 1:1-3 (TPT)

What delight comes to the one who follows God's ways!

He won't walk in step with the wicked,

nor share the sinner's way,

nor be found sitting in the scorner's seat.

His passion is to remain true to the Word of "I AM,"

meditating day and night on the true revelation of light.

He will be standing firm like a flourishing tree

planted by God's design,

deeply rooted by the brooks of bliss,

bearing fruit in every season of life.

He is never dry, never fainting,

ever blessed, ever prosperous.

The End

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A look at the image of God given to man.

Deadly Roots

A look at the destructive impact of bitterness.

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A Christian doctor's look at addiction.

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Poems on pondering.

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A look at five major causes of stress.

Now I've Gotcha!

A brief overview on the substances causing addiction.

Godly Grit

What it takes to be God's strong people.

Dismantling Destructive Strongholds

An in-depth look at 20 common strongholds.