

A photograph of a wooden bench sitting on a dirt path in a dense forest. The path leads towards the bench, which is positioned in the middle ground. The trees are lush with green leaves, and the lighting is soft, creating a serene atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

Traveling

**THROUGH THE
PROMISE
CONTINUES**

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF MARK, AND
THE EPISTLES OF PHILIPPIANS THROUGH JUDE

Traveling THROUGH THE PROMISE CONTINUES

"If you sometimes read the familiar stories of faith and wonder, 'so what?', 'what does that really mean?', 'how can I apply this verse to my life?', this series is for you. It matters not if you are a beginner or a scholar, this series will add value to your life and your pursuit of a deeper relationship with Jesus" (*Rick Owen, Senior Pastor, Pathway Church, Burleson, TX*)

"This [series], embarks on a transformative journey that seamlessly weaves personal narratives with theological insights... Whether you're seeking guidance, encouragement, or a deeper understanding of God's promises, these books serve as a thoughtful companion on your spiritual journey, illuminating the path ahead with wisdom and warmth." (*Dr. Aaron Summers, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Crowley, TX*)

Special thanks go out to the real-life contributors of THESE BOOKS: Tim Gould, Bobby Greene, Marko Solis, John Go Boncan. These exceptional individuals, with their authentic love for God, have infused these books with real-life wisdom and inspiration. Their contributions make this book an absolute must-read for anyone eager to deepen their faith and live a more connected, spiritual life.



Traveling Through the Promise Continues

A Journeying through the Gospel of Mark, and
the Epistles of Philippians Through Jude

By: Dr. Tim W Gould.

with contributions from Bobby Greene, Marko Solis,
and John Go Boncan

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Javier Herrera Photography Ft. Worth, TX.

(The cover is a path to a bench. The bench represents the
periods of rest and time of contemplation on our journey with God.

Remembering; He is our Rest.)

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Acknowledgments

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There are many more, but I digress so that we can all begin our journey together.

Introduction

This book is a continuation of “Traveling Through The Promise” in my three book series I refer to as: **The Journey Collection**.

While this book covers the majority balance of the New Testament, my final book called “Traveling Toward The Promise” will cover the book of Genesis, the gospel of Matthew, the book of Acts, and the book of Revelation. That third book does, in a very small way, highlights the Holy Bible with the plan and promise of Jesus (Genesis), the arrival of Salvation through Jesus (Matthew), the birth of the church age (ACTS), and the ultimate goal of Jesus (Revelation). I sincerely hope and pray these books will enrich your faith walk, and encourage you to get your own Bible out and dig in! There is much more to see and learn!

A recap of how it all began:

It started July 11, 2023 at 0803am. I sent an email to a couple of co-workers, Bobby Greene and Mike Ferris. It went something like this:

Subject: Prayer?

When you all get in and settled, why don't we find a quiet place to have a little prayer to start the day?

Thoughts?

Respectfully,

Tim W. Gould

V.P. Compliance

In less than a minute, Bobby walked into my office, Bible in hand and a big smile on his face. I wasn't expecting him so soon—I thought I'd get a reply to my email first. But there he was, grinning. "Well, you said the word 'prayer,' and I am ALL IN!" he declared.

I wasn't quite ready, being in the middle of something, but I asked him to give me two minutes. Soon after, I scooped up my things, and as we passed Mike's office right next to mine, he jumped up and joined us. John Go Boncan overheard what we were up to and jumped in, too, and together, we all headed to the conference room in our front lobby area.

The four of us sat down together. All three were newcomers to our company. The conference room was new to us all, as we had just moved in from across the hall where our company was formed two years. With our Grand Opening just a few days away, all of us at the table, leaders of this new venture, had the same prayer on our minds... HELP us, LORD! That day, we opened our hearts to the Father in prayer, asking Him to guide our company, to take the wheel and direct us as leaders, and to use us and this company for His will. We confessed our weaknesses and our desire to let Him be in control. God's presence was palpable that day. Since then, God has answered our prayers many times over.

It also sparked something new. The next day, other colleagues joined our prayer meeting. As word spread, more and more people started to join, including the owners, Carlos and Martha. Things changed in our small company that day. Since July 11, 2023, we haven't started a workday without that prayer meeting. Our small

company has become a small company church, started and sustained by God.

Having a background in theology, I had been sending out a chapter of scripture every morning via email to our employees for a few years. I chose a book of the Bible and systematically copied and pasted a chapter in order into a company email. My heart was simply to offer everyone a little Word to start their day.

After the prayer meetings began, I started adding small commentaries or clarifications to the verses I sent, thinking it might help our colleagues, many of whom were seekers and young believers, to better understand God's Word. Our company was growing, and I thought this would aid them in their walk and discovery. This book is a compilation of those emails I sent to my coworkers. Encouraged by Bobby Greene, John Go Boncan, Marko Solis, and others in my company, they suggested finding a way to share these morning devotionals with more people. At first, I dismissed the idea, never seeing myself as qualified for such 'high work.' But the encouragement continued until one day, I felt the Holy Spirit telling me, "They are not saying this to promote you, but to bless others." That realization hit me hard, so I decided to humble myself and began compiling the emails.

I truly hope this work touches, encourages, corrects, inspires, and helps all who read it grow. The best part of this work isn't the commentary but the Word of God. Open your hearts to that, and I have no doubt the journey you will take will change your life, both naturally and eternally.

– Tim

GOSPEL OF MARK

Chapter 1

Do you remember being a young child, pondering what you wanted to become when you grew up? I wonder who didn't dream of becoming a veterinarian at some point? As we aged, our aspirations likely varied widely. Many of us might not have anticipated that life would lead us to exactly where we are today. Some might even feel that they are in an unremarkable place, merely existing. Yet, it's important to remember that our Father God often transforms humble beginnings into something extraordinary.

The text below is from the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark. Authored by John Mark, a disciple of Christ, it is commonly believed to represent the teachings of Peter as transcribed by this modest servant. Peter affectionately referred to Mark as his son. Mark accompanied his uncle and Paul on a missionary journey but, during his youth, chose to return home. Initially, Mark's faith seemed to direct his life, but he soon faced either fear or hardship—details remain unclear—and his path abruptly shifted. However, God was not finished with him. Despite setbacks, Mark was ultimately honored to document this Gospel alongside Peter. This shows that even in our humblest states, maintaining focus and trust in God and centering our lives around Jesus can impact generations beyond our own.

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This Gospel is particularly suited for contemporary times. It is concise, straightforward, and aligns well with the short attention spans common today. In contrast, the Gospel of Matthew was tailored for Jewish audiences, Luke's for Greek philosophers, and John's for a global audience. Mark's Gospel, however, specifically addresses the Romans, a notably pragmatic group. References to Old Testament scriptures would not resonate with them, as they did not hold these texts in regard. Thus, Mark's narrative moves quickly, making it very accessible compared to other Gospels.

So, sit back and enjoy this "CLIFF NOTES" version of the Gospel over the next 16 days!

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"³ "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

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The Baptism and Teaching of Jesus

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

Jesus Announces the Good News

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit

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21 They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. 22 The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

23 Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, 24 "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God!"

25 "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" 26 The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. 27 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching--and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Jesus Heals Many

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. 30 Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. 31 So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. 32 That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. 33 The whole town gathered at the door, 34 and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place

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35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. 36 Simon and his companions went to look for him, 37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!" 38 Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else--to the nearby villages--so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

39 So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy

40 A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." 41 Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" 42 Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. 43 Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: 44 "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

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Chapter 2

During my time at the police academy, we studied a myriad of laws ranging from penal codes to traffic and family laws. After graduation, I entered Field Training, where I was paired with a seasoned officer to learn how to translate "book learning" into "real life" application. It was here that I became familiar with the concepts of the "letter of the law" versus the "spirit of the law" and how to effectively enforce them. I can confidently say that no police officer would have a successful career by strictly adhering to the letter of the law alone. If that were the case, an officer would barely make it out of the station before having to address countless infractions—there are just that many out there. Striking a balance is essential.

In Mark's chapter two, I noticed a recurring theme. Jesus confronted the critical religious leaders. Being "critical" isn't inherently negative if one understands the term properly. For instance, a "critical examination" involves a systematic review of information about a problem, item, procedure, or source—akin to a "microscopic" examination. We should occasionally undertake a critical examination of the Bible, delving deeply into each word and dissecting it down to its root meanings. However, critical examinations can become problematic when the examination itself is seen as the sole source of truth and the spirit of the context is overlooked.

This issue has manifested repeatedly across various denominations over the centuries. Take baptism, for example, there is a denomination that insists only immersion baptisms are valid,

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based on a critical examination of the word "baptism," which means "immerse." For many years, people were excluded from the church if they refused to be re-baptized by immersion after confessing to having been only sprinkled or poured. This exemplifies how errors can arise from overly critical examinations.

The religious leaders Jesus addressed had fallen into a similar pitfall. They were so fixated on the minutiae of the words that they lost sight of the broader intent of the sentences or commands.

Let us always pray that the Word of God enriches us to live the truth and not get ensnared by the minor details. While it's important to study diligently and show oneself approved—yes!—we must always strive to grasp and share the underlying message of truth. This approach helps draw others closer to God and avoids sowing confusion.

Jesus Forgives and Heals a Paralyzed Man

1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting

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there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

8 Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? 9 Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? 10 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, 11 "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Jesus Calls Levi and Eats With Sinners

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus Eats with Sinners and Tax Collectors

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

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Jesus Questioned About Fasting

18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. 20 But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast. 21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. 22 And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

25 He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." 27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

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Chapter 3

As we delve into the next chapter, I find myself reflecting on the individuals who are being healed, those mentioned but not deeply discussed. Consider the "man with a shriveled hand" who stands before Jesus while "some of them" merely watch, eager to see whether Jesus would heal him. These observers, preoccupied with minutiae and legalism, failed to truly see the man or consider the challenging life he must have led. They took their privileged lives for granted, oblivious to their good fortune in not being in his place. Instead, they focused on petty legal interpretations and personal ambitions within the Temple and Synagogue, ignoring the suffering around them.

Oh, the peril of self-focused ambition! It relentlessly pursues personal glory, achievements, and honor, always comparing oneself to others—not to improve but to elevate oneself above them. Self-focused ambition is an insatiable beast, always hungry and never satisfied.

We all come from diverse backgrounds and have walked different paths. Some of us have faced severe trials, while others have enjoyed a life filled with love. Regardless of our origins, we all share one common experience: we were born into a sinful world and needed our Savior to bring us to the peace that grants us full access to God the Father. After this transformative moment, life continues with us harboring a dual nature—the sinful world that tempts us and the Spirit of God that draws and directs us towards the cross of grace. Many of us struggle with this duality. All of us will face this battle,

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but how do we ensure that the godly nature prevails over the sinful one?

The answer is simple: the nature we nurture most will dominate our lives. Therefore, let's immerse ourselves in the Word, maintain constant communication with God through prayer or meditation, and engage in fellowship with those who share our heart's orientation. Love others by remembering where you once stood—recognize your own stumbles and extend grace to those who falter. You have previously succumbed to anger and the flesh; now, offer love, guidance, and hope to those who currently struggle. We do this not because of who we are or what we have done but because of what Jesus has done and who He is.

Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand

1 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." 4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. 5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, *[if you ever want to know what makes our Father angry – here it is: stubborn hard hearts towards mankind. Blind to those in need. These judgmental people who never even saw the man in need only sat to criticize.]* said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees

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went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Crowds Follow Jesus

7 Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. 8 When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. 9 Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. 10 For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. 11 Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." 12 But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

Jesus Appoints the Twelve

13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. 16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Jesus Accused by His Family and the Teachers of the Law

20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family

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heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." 23 So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? 24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 A house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. *[If you feed your true Godly nature, and you will not battle as hard against your sinful nature. Trying to walk the Godly life while still living with the worldly nature (those focused on self) will constantly bring internal battles. Pick a side, commit to it, and follow that path. There will still be challenges, but your victory will be guaranteed.]* 26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. 27 In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house.

28 Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin." 30 He said this because they were saying, "He has an impure spirit."

31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. 32 A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." 33 "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. 34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my

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mother and my brothers! 35 Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

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Chapter 4

My father is nearing the end of his life. I visited him recently and saw that he has become a shadow of the man he once was. It's a natural part of life's cycle, but as I knelt beside him, whispering into his ear, I realized that soon I would be tasked with conducting his funeral service. This has prompted me to pause and reflect on how I will encapsulate his life in my eulogy, focusing not so much on his role as a parent but on his enduring legacy of memories, influence, and the lessons he imparted.

Now, turning our attention to the next parable, which is particularly profound, I want to dive straight in and make it relatable to our contemporary lives. In verse 14, the "farmer" can be seen as anyone who truthfully shares God's Word. The "seed" represents the Word of Truth, whether it be the written Word of God (logos) or a true word from God (rhema, spoken). You represent the earth; your heart is the soil.

Below are four examples that represent us at various stages of our lives. Yes, we can embody all these types of soils—week to week, month to month, even day to day—depending on our heart's openness when the Word is presented.

Reflect on verse 24, where Jesus advises us to “consider carefully what” (also translated as “how”) we hear and the “measure,” or purpose and intent, we apply when listening. Are we closed to the truth, hindered by a critical, distracted, worried, or self-absorbed mind? Whenever self is our priority, the fruit—or benefit—from the seed will be diminished or nonexistent.

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I hope this helps bring the Word closer to your understanding today.

The Parable of the Sower

1 Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. 2 He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said:

3 "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times." 9 Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

10 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. 11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables 12 so that, " 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"

13 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is

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sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."

A Lamp on a Stand

21 He said to them, "Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don't you put it on its stand? 22 For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. 23 If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

24 "Consider carefully what [how, with what posture of heart. What "soil" in your heart/] you hear," he continued. "With the measure [intent, purpose, motive] you use, it will be measured to you--and even more. 25 Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."

The Parable of the Growing Seed

26 He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain--first the stalk, then the head,

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then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come."

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

30 Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? 31 It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. 32 Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade." 33 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Jesus Calms the Storm

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. 40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" 41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

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Chapter 5

Last night, my family gathered after work to watch a program about Corrie Ten Boom and her family, devout Christians in Holland during WWII who helped over 300 Jews escape the Nazis. Corrie, her sister, and their father were eventually captured and sent to concentration camps, with only Corrie surviving. Despite the dire circumstances, Corrie and her sister continued to witness and testify about the love of Jesus, the hope of salvation, and their joyful relationship with God. It was remarkable to see how, even in such a dark place, a spirit of worship and love could still thrive.

Many prisoners struggled with understandable questions: "How can God allow such a thing? How can you say God loves us but take us through such a time?" Through this Hollywood portrayal, it was evident that Corrie and her family possessed something profound that others did not—a deep, unshakeable relationship with the Father. Their agape love remained strong, regardless of their circumstances.

This brings us to yesterday's discussion about the soils of our heart when God's Word reaches us. The Ten Boom family exemplified deep soil, ready to receive and nurture the seeds of faith. Below, we see three more examples of varying soils: the demon-possessed man, the woman with the issue of blood, and the religious leader—all had deep soil. Yet, observe the reactions of others around them. When God's Word manifested in miracles, some only mourned their financial losses (like the pig herders), while others scoffed at the notion of raising the dead.

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This reminds me of the seed sown among rocks and thorns—the cares of the world, the pressures of life, and the pursuit of material things overshadow the divine presence. It compels me to ask you, my brothers and sisters: Is your faith merely a philosophy, or is it a living, active, daily expression of your walk with God? When hard times come, can you find joy in scarcity as much as in abundance? Are you willing to sacrifice comfort if it means offering someone else eternal freedom? Don't answer now—just think and pray about it.

Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man

1 They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. 2 When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

6 When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. 7 He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!"

8 For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!" 9 Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." 10 And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

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11 A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. 12 The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." 13 He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

14 Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. 15 When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 16 Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. 17 Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. 19 Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." 20 So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

21 When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. 22 Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. 23 He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." 24 So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him.

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25 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. 26 She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. 27 When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, 28 because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."

29 Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. 30 At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

31 "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " 32 But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. 33 Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. 34 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

35 While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" 36 Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." 37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. 38 When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep."

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40 But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. 41 He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). 42 Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. 43 He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

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Chapter 6

The chapter we're discussing covers several themes, but a common thread of doubt and unbelief runs through it. I encourage you to read the Word directly, so I'll keep my commentary brief this morning. However, it's important to clarify the distinctions between faith, doubt, and unbelief to help you take a personal inventory of your walk with the Lord.

Imagine a doorway that represents the access point to your spiritual heart and your relationship with Jesus.

Faith means the door is unlocked and open. The extent to which the door is open reflects the degree of your faith in any given situation. In some cases, it may be wide open; in others, slightly ajar, requiring effort to pass through.

Doubt implies the door is closed but not locked. You are guarding your heart, yet it is still possible to open the door and allow God access if you make a conscious effort to do so. Think of doubting Thomas. Doubt can be perilous but is not unforgivable. It is precariously close to a permanently closed heart and may require significant effort to open. Although common, doubt should be approached with prudence.

Unbelief signifies that the door is both closed and locked. You have actively decided to shut off your heart and mind, securing them against any new perspectives or changes, maintaining your current stance firmly.

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Understanding these states can help you reflect on your own spiritual condition and guide you in nurturing a more open and receptive relationship with God.

A Prophet Without Honor

1 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? 3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

4 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

7 Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. 8 These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.

10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave

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that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

John the Baptist Beheaded

14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." 16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23

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And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. 25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. 35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

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37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five--and two fish." 39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Jesus Walks on the Water

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. 47 Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

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53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

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Chapter 7

The posture of the heart is a theme we often discuss and one that recurs throughout the Scriptures. How is it that we can become so engrossed and consumed by trivial matters that we "can't see the forest for the trees"?

Reflect on the individuals mentioned in verses 21-23, and then contrast their behavior with that of the woman described in verses 25-28.

In reflecting on these verses, consider how your own heart's posture can either cloud your vision, leading you to focus on the trivial and negative, or open you to deeper faith and closeness to God and others. As you meditate on these scriptures, ask the Lord to help you cultivate a heart like the Syrophoenician woman's, capable of seeing beyond immediate circumstances to God's greater grace and provision.

That Which Defiles

1 The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus 2 and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. 3 (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. 4 When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

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5 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?" 6 He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 7 They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.' 8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions."

9 And he continued, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! [*Their focus was misaligned*]" 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' 11 But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)-- 12 then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

14 Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. 15 Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them." 16 "If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

17 After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. 18 "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? 19 For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.) 20 He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. 21

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For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come-
sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit,
lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come
from inside and defile a person."

Jesus Honors a Syrophoenician Woman's Faith

24 Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25 In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 27 "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." *[Jesus was referring the Jews as the "children" and the "dogs" as the gentiles. He didn't feel that way, but rather tested her with that superior position.]*

28 "Lord," she replied, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." *[She didn't take a position of defense or offense. Rather, she recognized God was at work, and accepted her lowly "title" for the love of her child.]* 29 Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter." 30 She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Jesus Heals a Deaf and Mute Man

31 Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32 There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could

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hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. 33 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. 34 He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!").

35 At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. 36 Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37 People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

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Chapter 8

I had to visit the DMV yesterday to renew my driver's license. While there, I needed to take the vision test. I stepped up with my glasses on, and the young lady asked, "Do you need those for driving? If so, keep them on and read line 4." I read line four with ease—the letters were big, bold, and clear. She had me cover each eye and read forward, then backward. I passed with flying colors. Feeling confident, I asked if I could try without my glasses. She agreed, and I took them off. She asked me to read line 5... and she waited... and waited. I saw nothing but blurry black smudges! I said, "Never mind, guess I'll keep the glasses on."

I hadn't realized just how much I needed my glasses even to see the simplest letters. Now I do.

This chapter below, though it contains several different stories, seems to also focus on eyesight—both natural and spiritual. In our natural world, we live by natural laws. Sometimes, we can forget there's a spiritual, eternal world around us too. Which eyes do you use? If you're like me, probably both, depending on the situation. Maybe at church, your spiritual eyesight dominates. Perhaps at work, your natural eyesight prevails. It's easy to segregate our vision in our world. For example, consider this sentence and fill in the conclusion as I spell it out: "God is..." N O W H E R E. Do you see "God is nowhere" or "God is now here"?

Many who walk in faith can see God in many ways. However, those who are spiritually blind, focusing on natural law or themselves, tend to see only natural, intellectual rationalizations. But

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don't be too harsh on them. We—you and I—also tend to live there too. Even Peter, who declared a truth below in verse 29 that could only be revealed through his spiritual sight, lost that insight minutes later and was rebuked by Jesus for his natural sight declaration. So, here's our challenge: To not walk in spiritual blindness, to gain sight (sometimes it is not yet perfect, as seen in verse 24), and to continue to seek Jesus through prayer and the Word until we see clearly, as in verse 25.

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand

1 During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 2 "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. *[These were primarily gentiles mixed with some Jews in this area.]* 3 If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance."

4 His disciples answered, "But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?" *[notice the same question from the disciples even though Jesus had already feed the 5000. They lost their sight again. Looking at the natural world.]* 5 "How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Seven," they replied. 6 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people, and they did so. 7 They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. 8 The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left

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over. 9 About four thousand were present. After he had sent them away, 10 he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

11 The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. *[Word had surely spread about all the wonders Jesus has performed, yet they still wanted more.]* 12 He sighed deeply and said, "Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it." *[Jesus had already performed many signs. By saying "no sign" refers to the type of "sign" they wanted, that of a conquering king. Jesus did miracles to show the power of God in the context of mercy.]* 13 Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod

14 The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. 15 "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." 16 They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread." *[again their eyesight was fixed on the natural, so they missed seeing the spiritual lesson.]*

17 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. 20 "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you

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pick up?" They answered, "Seven." 21 He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"

Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida

22 They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. 23 He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" 24 He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." 25 Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. 26 Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

Peter Declares That Jesus is the Messiah

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." [*Peter had full spiritual awareness and sight at this moment.*] 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus Predicts His Death

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. [Peter put his eyes on the natural – loosing

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Jesus – and lost his spiritual eyesight. Is there a lesson here.] 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

The Way of the Cross

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? *[This life is but a seed pod to eternity. Those who reject the Good Soil of grace and forgiveness through Jesus will lose much more than they ever may gain in this very temporary place we know as the world.]* 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

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Chapter 9

Every day we face trials of various kinds: traffic trials, bill trials, work trials, family trials, social trials, and now that the holidays are upon us, some of us will even face holiday trials. These are common trials that most of us have trained ourselves to handle. We've figured out the right "formula" to manage these everyday stressors. But sometimes, life throws us a curveball. What starts as a common trial can quickly escalate into a full-blown storm, throwing us off course and causing us to pause or even stop in our tracks. Suddenly, we're facing a hurricane of trouble. What do we do now when our usual methods fail us? Where do we turn?

Jesus gave his disciples the authority to heal the sick and cast out demons. They went forth proclaiming his name and banishing those pesky devils. Then, one day, they encountered a demon that wouldn't flee. Jesus pointed out that in their routine of handling these common trials, they forgot something crucial: to pray. They were operating on autopilot, relying on their own understanding and habits. They lost sight of who was really handling their trials.

Prayer isn't complicated. It's essentially just talking to God our Father and incorporating Him into the daily elements of our life. Just like how I enjoy conversing with my wife and having her involved in my life, God wants us to involve Him in ours. Imagine being married and never speaking to your spouse. How close or intimate could your relationship be? Communication brings people together, while a lack of it drives them apart. The same is true with our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

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We humans have overcomplicated prayer, making it more formal than necessary. I invite all of you to join our morning prayer. You don't have to pray out loud if you don't want to. But I welcome you to come and join in the community conversation with our Father in Heaven. Start developing that personal, one-on-one relationship with Him and see if things don't start changing in your life.

1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

The Transfiguration

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them. 3 His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. 4 And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 6 (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

7 Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!" 8 Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. 10 They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

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11 And they asked him, "Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?" 12 Jesus replied, "To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? 13 But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him."

Jesus Heals a Boy Possessed by an Impure Spirit

14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. 15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. 16 "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." 19 "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." 20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do

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believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

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Whoever Is Not Against Us Is for Us

38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." 39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us. 41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

Causing to Stumble

42 "If anyone causes one of these little ones--those who believe in me--to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.

44 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 46 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched."

49 Everyone will be salted with fire. 50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

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Chapter 10

I believed in Santa Claus! How about you? When I was just a little lad, my dad used to tell us kids all about Santa Claus. We'd go see him every year and watch shows on TV about him—remember "Santa Claus is Coming to Town"? I believed in the North Pole, elves, and flying reindeer. It all had to be real because my dad said so, and if he said it, it was a fact. I remember thinking my dad was the strongest man in the world. He could lift me up with ease, give me a bear hug that squeezed the air right out of me. I even thought he could beat up Superman if they ever got into a fight. My dad defined truth for me.

Then I started getting "educated." The more I learned and gained "knowledge," the weaker my dad seemed. The more fallible he was, the more human I saw him.

This chapter has a consistent tone to it. Jesus lays down the foundation of the lesson in verses 13-16. The kingdom of God belongs to those like little children. Jesus says, let them COME to me. This is a great HINT for us all. Look at the other stories in this chapter, and you'll see some people rationalizing things with him, debating things with him, and some just freely coming to him. Look at the results of each.

So, what does "such as these" mean in verse 14? It means to be LIKE them—with the same level of trust and belief. When a young child is told something by their parent, it's FACT to them. No need to debate. No need for empirical evidence. No hours of research to confirm what their parent said. They just accept it and apply it. That's how the Father wants us to accept Him and His word.

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We complicate so much of our lives and faith walk because we want to know the ins and outs. We look for alternatives or loopholes. We strain to test the theory instead of just resting in what has been told to us. With God, our relationship needs to be simplified. If you're struggling in your walk with God, perhaps you need to relax a bit. Take some time with Him and open your heart to trusting what you don't know, and just accept that your Heavenly Daddy is in control. And yes, He can surely beat up Superman too!

So relax. He hasn't called you to know it all, only to accept Him because He said He is true.

Consider the Father's Promise for today... IMAGINE if you had that level of child-like trust, what could happen when you apply that promise!

Divorce

1 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. 2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 "What did Moses command you?" he replied. 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. 6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

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10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

The Little Children and Jesus

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

The Rich and the Kingdom of God

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18 "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'" 20 "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy." 21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

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23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" 24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?" 27 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." 28 Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

29 "Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields--along with persecutions--and in the age to come eternal life. 31 But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time

32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

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The Request of James and John

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight

46 Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means "son of Timaeus"), was sitting by the roadside begging. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 48 Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 49 Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." So they called to

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the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." 50 Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. 51 "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him. The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see." 52 "Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

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Chapter 11

Every year, my wife plants a garden at her son's house down the road from us. She adores having fresh veggies and appreciates the value of harvesting a bounty from just a few dollars spent on a pack of seeds. Together with her son, she tends the garden, watering the plants to ensure a vibrant crop of greens, reds, and yellows. Unfortunately, this year's tomato crop was not our best. Despite following the same care routine as last year—same tending, same watering, same dedication—the plants simply did not produce. We ended up pulling those underachievers right out of the ground and tossing them aside! Next year, we'll try again, but this batch was a flop. We did our part, but the plants just didn't deliver.

This situation makes me think of what we see in verses 12 – 14. It's also intriguing that the next story introduced in verses 15 - 18 is tied under the same heading: "Jesus Curses a Fig Tree AND Clears the Temple Courts." It suggests a connection. This reminds me of another time, about 20 years ago, when my wife and I were house hunting. We visited various builders, exploring beautifully staged model homes. These homes are dressed to the nines—cookie scents wafting through the rooms, tables set elegantly, kitchens displaying an array of fruits and veggies (albeit plastic), creating a dreamlike illusion of what your home could be. Of course, it's all for show; an emotional lure, but far from the reality of everyday living.

This staging is what was happening in the Temple courts, and why I believe verses 12 to 25 are interconnected. God created us to produce fruit in our lives—fruit that feeds and sustains others, not

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ourselves. The fig tree looked fine externally, but Jesus cursed it, not because the tree itself was suffering, but because it failed to give anything back. It wasn't fulfilling its purpose of nurturing others. Similarly, in our churches and within ourselves, we can go through the motions, play-acting love and faith. But if we are not genuinely producing a life that inspires, loves, and cares for others, we need to step back and reassess. Like the fig tree, are we fulfilling our God-given purpose? He desires active engagement with others from us and genuine worship, not just a plastic façade.

Today, I pray we all draw a little closer to our purpose and our Father.

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3 If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

4 They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5 some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?"

6 They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7 When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!"

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"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" 10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" 11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Jesus Curses a Fig Tree and Clears the Temple Courts

12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. 19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. 21 Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

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22 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. 23 "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." 26

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

27 They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders came to him. 28 "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you authority to do this?"

29 Jesus replied, "I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 30 John's baptism--was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!"

31 They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 32 But if we say, 'Of human origin' ?" (They feared the people, for everyone held that John really was a prophet.) 33 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Jesus said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

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Chapter 12

Throughout my life, I've often gotten distracted. I could clearly see the mission God had laid before me: "To tell the unknowing." Although I may not have known all the details, the overarching purpose was clear for many years. However, numerous distractions have veered me off course—jobs, hobbies, family struggles, and even worthy charities. I would become so absorbed that I'd suddenly find myself heading in the wrong direction, feeling lost and alone, until the Holy Spirit gently reminded me that the path God called me to was a mile back to the right. Each time, I needed to re-center, readjust, repent, and return to the path. This was especially true during my time as a police officer when my job became almost an idol in my life. It was fulfilling, and I was “doing good,” but it distracted me from my spiritual mission.

Perhaps some of you can relate. Even efforts to “do good” can lead us away from where God intends us to be. The religious men discussed below likely started with good intentions but ultimately lost their way, so much so that they missed recognizing the very Messiah they had prayed for. Whether due to pride, ambition, or jealousy, their personal agendas eventually overshadowed their desire for a relationship with God. Their hearts became their idols, and their “religion” replaced God himself.

Religion can be seen as man's effort to reach God, while Christianity is viewed as God's effort to reach mankind. This chapter vividly illustrates these two approaches. On one side, we have religious leaders defending the structure of their beliefs by trying to

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trap Jesus with his words. Yet, there is one man in verses 32-34 who is almost there, at a crossroads. Jesus tells him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." He's on the right path, but he hasn't fully embraced it yet. Knowledge alone is not enough; it must be fully received in our hearts and lives.

Today, I encourage everyone to re-examine their lives. Are you walking with a purpose for others or just for yourself? In your service to others, is it for their benefit and God's glory, or your own? Reflect on verses 41-44. God knows your heart and your ambitions. He calls us to self-examine daily so that our SELF may decrease and HE may increase. What motivates you? Is it God's esteem or self-promotion? If you find you're not where God wants you to be, take heart! Repent, turn back, and make the right adjustment. I've done it, and it works. God loves those who are humble enough to acknowledge their mistakes.

Consider these thoughts to avoid the detours I've faced.

Parable of the Tenants

1 Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. 2 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. 3 But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. 5 He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed. 6 "He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him

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last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

9 "What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 10 Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 11 the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" 12 Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.

Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

13 Later they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. 14 They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? 15 Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." 16 They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied.

17 Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

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Marriage at the Resurrection

18 Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 19 "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. 21 The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. 22 In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. 23 At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"

24 Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? 25 When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 26 Now about the dead rising--have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"

The Greatest Commandment

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your

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strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

32 "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Whose Son is the Messiah

35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? 36 David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: " 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' 37 David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?" The large crowd listened to him with delight.

Warning Against the Teachers of the Law

38 As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 40 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely."

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The Widow's Offering

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

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Chapter 13

My wife endured 21 hours of labor with her first child, which I'm told is quite normal. Although I've never been pregnant, I've suffered a kidney stone attack, said to be the closest pain a man can experience to childbirth. After that, I gained immense respect for what women endure. If I had to go through 21 hours of that pain, I'd probably be begging the Lord to take me way sooner, maybe around hour one! Despite the immense pain and the tears, there's a thrilling anticipation of what's to come. Years later, I asked my wife, "How, after enduring such pain, would you ever willingly choose to get pregnant again?" She looked at me with those eyes that spoke to a clueless man and said, "Once that child was placed in my arms, all the pain just seemed to fade away. You're so engulfed in a rapture of love that the struggle you went through becomes insignificant in comparison."

Theologically speaking, these "birth pains" mentioned in verse 8 are evident even today. A recent study shows that only 4% of Generation Z identifies as Christian. As each generation progresses, the number of believers dwindles, quickly turning the Christian faith into a minority. As self supplants God, it will inevitably become harder for these generations to comprehend our faith. But remember, God has placed you here now for a specific plan and purpose—to show the love of Jesus to all. What must come, will come. There is a glorious birth awaiting!

This next chapter discusses the end times, which Jesus refers to as the beginning of the birth pains. Many of us get so wrapped up in

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the labor pains that we forget the reward that follows. Read through this chapter to gain wisdom and understanding, but always remember that what is born from these trials will be a rapture of love and life unlike anything we've known. The troubles that precede it will pale in comparison.

The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times

1 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"
2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down." [*This was fulfilled in AD 70*]

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

5 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are

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arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again. 20 "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

21 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

24 "But in those days, following that distress, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' 26 "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

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27 And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. 28 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation [*also translated "people"*] will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The Day and Hour Unknown

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 35 "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back--whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "

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Chapter 14

We come to the longest chapter in the Book of Mark. It condenses a significant narrative about the last days of Jesus and is filled with many elements worthy of commentary. However, one aspect particularly stands out: the presentation of Jesus to others and their varied receptions of Him.

Two characters in the chapter, mentioned briefly yet profoundly impactful, caught my attention. Verse 3 introduces a "woman"—identified in other texts as Mary—and verses 13-16 mention a "man," unnamed here but pivotal in the story. These two individuals, represented simply by pronouns, exhibit a depth of heart and worship that others seem to miss.

Mary possesses a perfume so valuable it equates to a year's salary. I imagine she had been saving this treasure for a significant occasion. Her act of pouring this perfume on Jesus' head wasn't spontaneous. It appears to have been a premeditated act of worship, saved for just the right moment. This was not just a casual gesture but a planned, heartfelt offering.

Then there's the obscure man who, driven by a pure love for God, prepared a room in his house for a special dinner. Without explicit instructions, he undertook tasks typically reserved for women, like fetching water for ceremonial washing. His actions—getting water and preparing the room—were acts of sacrificial worship. This man, moved by faith, didn't know his humble service would be the sign that he had prepared the place for Jesus.

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These stories highlight the profound impact of acting on faith and genuine worship. It's remarkable what can happen when we respond to God's call with such dedication. May we all aspire to be like dominoes in God's design, strategically placed and ready to fall in such a way that ultimately glorifies Him.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

1 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 2 "But not during the festival," they said, "or the people may riot."

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. 6 "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

10 Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. 11 They were delighted to hear this

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and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

The Last Supper

12 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13 So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. 14 Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me--one who is eating with me." 19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"

20 "It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born." 22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." 23 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured

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out for many," he said to them. 25 "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' 28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." 29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." 30 "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today--yes, tonight--before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." 31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

Gethsemane

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." 37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? 38 Watch and pray so that

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you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. 41 Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Jesus Arrested

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." 45 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. 46 The men seized Jesus and arrested him. 47 Then one of those standing near drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. 51 A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, 52 he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.

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Jesus Before the Sanhedrin

53 They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, the elders and the teachers of the law came together. 54 Peter followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. There he sat with the guards and warmed himself at the fire.

55 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death, but they did not find any. 56 Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. 57 Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with human hands and in three days will build another, not made with hands.' " 59 Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

60 Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" 61 But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" 62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 63 The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. 64 "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. 65 Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, "Prophecy!" And the guards took him and beat him.

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Peter Disowns Jesus

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. "You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said. 68 But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." 70 Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." 71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about." 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

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Chapter 15

“Good Friday”

Silence is something many of us seldom find time for, especially when faced with injustice. It's almost in our American nature to vociferously argue our positions, to stand firm and make our voices heard in the pursuit of justice, ensuring that truth prevails over falsehood.

Yet, there is also a time for silence. There are moments in life when the highest road to take is one of quietude, especially when confronted with overwhelming challenges. In choosing silence, we surrender control to the Father, trusting Him completely—the ultimate test against the temptation of self.

We witness this profound lesson in Jesus' life. Before this chapter, He prayed fervently for any alternative to bearing the sins of mankind yet resolved to fulfill God's plan. As He stood before His accusers, He could have easily argued His way out, but He chose silence. He understood His purpose and that God was in control, allowing events to unfold as they must, thereby overcoming His final temptation—for us.

I like to imagine that during those moments of silence, Jesus envisioned the faces of all who would believe in Him and share in His heavenly kingdom. Perhaps He even pictured you. If you're uncertain, take a moment of silence. Quietly ask Him to reveal Himself to you, to enter your life as your Savior. What He endured, He did for you. He chose silence that day, so that today—and for all eternity—you could sing and praise His name.

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The Trial of Jesus Before Pilate

1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. 2 "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "You have said so," Jesus replied.

3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." **5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.**

6 Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. 9 "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. 12 "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. 13 "Crucify him!" they shouted. 14 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus

16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17

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They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

The Crucifixion of Jesus

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews. 27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 28 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

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The Death of Jesus

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). 35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

The Burial of Jesus

42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a

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stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.

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Chapter 16

“Easter”

Forget everything you think you know about Church and being a Christian. Forget the hymnals, the "three songs and a prayer," dressing up for church, the offering time, the committees, fellowships, and potlucks. Forget the children's programs and youth groups.

Look beyond the structure of the Christian faith. This chapter reveals what Christianity truly is. Having all the "stuff" just mentioned doesn't necessarily make one a Christian. You can be religious and still not be a Christian. This chapter clarifies the essential element required for the Christian faith: Jesus was dead, but now He lives. His resurrection offers hope to all mankind who believe. It's not a myth but a historical fact as solid as any event can be.

Jesus fulfilled His promise and rose again to demonstrate that there is life beyond this life—a life free from death, sadness, or despair, available to you, me, and anyone who asks for it. Jesus simplified it for us, understanding our tendency to complicate even the simplest matters. He died bearing our sins, taking the penalty so we wouldn't have to. All we need to do is accept His sacrifice and acknowledge that He took our place. It's a gift He's offering to everyone, with open arms, no strings attached.

If you can accept this, if you have accepted this, I assure you that you will understand Thanksgiving Day as never before.

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The Resurrection of Jesus

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" 4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.' " 8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

9 When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. 10 She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. 11 When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.

12 Afterward Jesus appeared in a different form to two of them while they were walking in the country. 13 These returned and reported it to the rest; but they did not believe them either.

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14 Later Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith and their stubborn refusal to believe those who had seen him after he had risen. 15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

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Chapter 1

Something remarkable happens when we go through trials with others—a bond forms. We often hear about this with combat veterans, like those depicted in the wonderful series "Band of Brothers," which is one of my favorites. Even watching the trials these men faced, you find yourself bonding with the characters, feeling a pang when one is hurt and hoping for their best.

Experiencing trials with others is indeed bonding; now, imagine how much stronger that bond is when the struggle centers on absolute truth.

Paul was under house arrest when he wrote this letter. He discusses the deep bond he formed with the church in Philippi. Despite his suffering, the church stood by him. When you read this, really tune into the depth of affection he expresses for this church.

They were so focused on the source of their truth that even the "selfish ambition" of others didn't faze Paul. His heart was so attuned to God that he rejoiced even when other preachers, perhaps not as pure in motive, still advanced the message of Christ. Paul harbored no resentment; his sole focus was the advancement of the Gospel, the message of the Good News that Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Nothing else mattered to him.

Everyone who shares this focus joins a very special "band of brothers and sisters."

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Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Pauls' Chains Advance the Gospel

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my

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chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,

To Live is Christ

19 for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

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Life Worthy of the Gospel

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Chapter 2

Holiday Season

It's holiday time and people all over the world are baking. Oh, the sweets and treats! Cookies, cakes, pies, candies—the baking onslaught is in full swing! Ever since I can remember, I've pored over cookbooks, marveling at the desserts adorned with powdered sugar and whipped cream toppings. Chocolate yule logs with holly decorations always looked so tempting! Of course, whenever I tried to replicate any of these treats... well... let's just say everything chocolate turned into brownies. Flat, hard, and chewy brownies. My cake icing would cling to the sponge, creating a mess, and the cake itself was like gnawing on a dry sponge. Clearly, my culinary ambitions didn't match my skills. As I got older, I realized that much of my baking disaster was due to using the wrong ingredients. Who knew? After all, baking powder and baking soda look the same, and they both include "baking" in their names—how different could they be?

Of course, we learn quickly that the right ingredients make all the difference in baking. But there's more to it. You have to apply those ingredients correctly. When I was young, I thought, "Why follow all these steps? Just mix it all together now—they end up in the same place anyway!" And "Why wait 45 minutes to bake? Double the heat and bake in half the time!"

I ignored the correct methods, focusing instead on my own convenience, my impatience, and simply getting to the end result as quickly as possible. As you can imagine, the results were not pretty.

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Below, I've included only a portion of Chapter 2, verses 1 through 11. In verse 1, Paul outlines the ingredients we have in Christ. Then in verses 2 to 5, he describes how to apply and process these ingredients. The key process, this major secret of the faith, is revealed in verses 5b through 8.

The Example of Christ's Humility

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

The Humbled and Exalted Jesus

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: *[This book speaks a great deal about Joy. But not circumstantial Joy that is fleeting and momentary. Real Joy that is lasting. How does one achieve lasting Joy? The answer is right here – have the MINDSET of Jesus. You can't change your heart, only God can do that. God can't change your mind, only You can do that. But... if you change your mind: your way of thinking and viewing things; God can then change your Heart. This is illustrated by our greatest example as you keep reading. Jesus did that for us. Look at his mindset as we continue.]* 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing *[Greek*

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work means he “completely emptied” himself. But of what? His divinity? NO, Jesus was still fully divine, but he DID willfully empty himself of ALL his divine power. This is very powerful, for it means that ALL the things Jesus did, he did AS A REGULAR HUMAN, not as God. That is impactful, because Jesus shows us what God can and is willing to do through us also. Jesus, therefore, is our relatable human example of what God can do through us, when we posture our lives correctly. How do we do that? Read verses 1 – 5 again and continue to verse 8. It is laid out for us.] by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Do Everything Without Grumbling

12 Therefore, *[Because of the above statements]* my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, "children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation." Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life.

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[Promise] And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. 17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

Epaphroditus Praised

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

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Chapter 3

Christmas Message

A funny thing happens as we grow in Christ: we learn more. Now, I'm all for learning, but even learning can have its pitfalls. "Facts" are not always helpful and may need some balancing. When I was a new Christian, I was dirt poor and a pretty pathetic sight. But boy, did I have Jesus in my life! As I grew older and more mature in my faith, I cleaned up and grew in knowledge about many things, including Christmas. I learned Jesus wasn't born in December, Christmas trees weren't part of the Bible, Santa Claus wasn't a Christian icon, and the three wise men didn't visit baby Jesus. Learning all this made me rethink how I celebrate the season. Several of my Christian friends even started removing Christmas trees from their homes. They took down lights, banned Santa displays, removed the wise men from the nativity scene, and stopped giving gifts because "Jesus was the reason for the season, so the focus should be only on Him and not on us." Even their Christmas dinner became a mock pauper's meal, meant to represent Mary and Joseph's first meal with Jesus.

Technically, I suppose they were right. But you know what? Something was missing. They spent most of the season defending their stance instead of enjoying the holiday with family and friends. It became almost a somber time. They went literal with the season. The biggest problem I saw was that they caused a lot of others, especially younger believers, to question their motives and faith; they even made some feel guilty for wearing holiday sweaters, as if it was almost paganism or idolatry.

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These hardline believers lost focus. They put so much importance on the literal that they lost the supernatural spiritual connection that the entire world seems to find every year—the wonderment of a savior entering humanity for us!

Just a quick tip for those who may question this Christmas season and wonder if you lost focus on Christ when putting up your Christmas tree, hanging lights, and wearing Santa shirts:

1. The first tree mentioned in the Bible was the Tree of Life in Genesis. a. A Christmas tree is an evergreen (never to die). At the top, typically, is a splendid display of light representing Heaven. On the body, smaller lights represent the stars God created. The ornaments represent the heavenly bodies. All around are wonderful gifts God has given us and mankind. The most important gift was also hung on a tree for us—Jesus. b. At the base, we place gifts, just like we will place all the rewards we will be given in heaven at the foot of God's throne.
2. Santa Claus WAS a real Christian. He was the RAMBO of the early Church and a literal and physical defender of the faith. He had a great love for others and was generous, but he also literally smacked down Arius at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 when Arius tried to deny the divinity of Jesus. He was one of the authors of the famous Nicene Creed.
3. Jesus was not born in December—But what better time, in the darkest coldest part of the year, when despair seems to take hold, to remember that LIGHT, JOY, PEACE, and HOPE has been brought into the world. For until the birth of Christ, that was the state of the world, and it still is for those who

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don't know Jesus. It reminds us to remember our hope in Him, and to spread that hope to others.

In this chapter, Paul deals with folks who are too focused on the literal and miss God. It's a warning to us as well, not to get so caught up in the "proper way" of doing things that we miss the grace and mercy that was given us. Look at verse 16. It's a key statement: "Let us live up to what we have already attained." Paul isn't telling us to attain more, but rather to live up to what we **ALREADY HAVE**. So, brothers and sisters, what did you receive when you accepted Jesus into your heart and life? And how can you now live up, live in, walk with, and demonstrate that which **YOU** received?

Righteousness Through Faith in Christ

1 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh-- 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the

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surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Pressing Toward the Goal

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Our Citizenship in Heaven

17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in

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their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

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Chapter 4

I have some "Debbie Downers" in my family, as my wife likes to call them. Perhaps you can relate? Those family members who can always find the dark side of any situation. On a mild, beautiful spring day, full of sunshine and flowers, they'd probably complain about the pollen. Do you know the type? I have a few in my family. Sadly, my sister is one of them. I spent a month with her one weekend. Within two hours of arriving, I was depressed and constantly checking my watch, wondering, "How long before I can pretend to be tired and need a nap?" Unfortunately, it was only 9 AM.

No matter how well things are going, these folks always find some reason to distrust the goodness. They suspect there must be some kind of "angle" to good-hearted news stories. I've also noticed that their lives tend to align with their gloomy predictions. It seems nothing ever happens to them that is of good report. So, are some people just "unlucky"? We know the answer—no. It would be unfair to everyone else to say yes. After all, every single one of us has faced trials and hardships, and we will continue to do so. The Bible is quite clear on that.

But we have hope and a key right here in Philippians 4—a wonderful, awesome key full of promises. If we apply them literally and liberally, the outcomes of ANY trial we face can be miraculous. Everyone wants to see God work a miracle. What's better than having one occur in your life that you can personally testify about?

We've been talking all week about having the mindset of Jesus and how it starts with changing our minds to be more Christ-like.

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That, in turn, changes our hearts. Below, we will explore another very practical, rubber-meets-the-road example of HOW to change our minds day by day, situation by situation. Verses 4-7 kick us off. Then verse 8 meets you in every moment. Verse 9 delivers the promise! Verse 11 teases us with how to be content, verse 12 reveals the secret to contentment, and verse 13 unwraps the secret.

I pray for all of you brothers and sisters out there. Grab hold of this chapter, write it down; memorize as much as you can. Trials will come. Don't focus on the moment of the trial. When we do that, we can't find what is "praiseworthy." But by looking ahead, past the trial, past the moment, we can remember that every trial in life has **ALREADY** been won for those in Jesus our Lord. The world will never win against us. It can only lie to you and hope to make you **BELIEVE** you have no hope. Don't drink the Kool-Aid! Redirect your mind, thoughts, and actions toward Jesus. Praise instead of curse. Speak good things instead of dwelling on the negatives. Bring light to darkness by bringing smiles to others instead of a grimace of despair.

Exhortation to Stand Firm and Be United

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

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Final Exhortations.

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Meditate on These Things

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think [meditate, consider, ponder, speak about, proclaim, testify, be convinced] about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. [Promise]

Thanks for Their Gifts

10 I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength. 14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out

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from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only;¹⁶ for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. ¹⁷ Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. ¹⁸ I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. *[Promise]* ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings

²¹ Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. ²² All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

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Chapter 1

We often talk about border crossing at work. Mexico is just down the street from us, and our business has us crossing it nearly every day. But there's another border that each and every one of us faces—the border between this material world and eternity. The TRUE border. Each of us is near that border, some closer than others, yet none of us knows exactly how close we are. We're all on the same journey, one that none of us can avoid. It's the common denominator for all humanity since the beginning of time. What happens AFTER we cross that border is what truly differentiates us.

On this side of eternity, we fret and fight, pick and moan about this group or that group, this culture or that culture, this nation or that nation, this gender or that gender. But in truth, the Bible tells us there are only two paths that separate mankind: one for sheep and one for goats. Those who know Jesus (sheep) and those who reject Him (goats).

So how do we discern truth from falsehood to know which path we're on? This is a common question, one that has been asked as long as the church has existed, over two thousand years. The next book addresses this very issue, as even those living shortly after Jesus were beginning to be plagued with false teachings and ideas. Even in this young church, the enemy of God tried to introduce heresies to mislead people. Gnosticism was a growing threat, trying to use

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"knowledge" rather than faith to build a system of beliefs, combining eastern mystical wisdom, astrology, Jewish law, and a mishmash of philosophies hanging around. Sound familiar?

The Bible describes in Revelation that the last church of Laodicea would be "lukewarm" in their faith, tossed back and forth by different ideas and philosophies regarding Jesus, God, and salvation. This church is known as the "end time church" to come. Sound familiar? The devil doesn't have any real NEW lies for us today. He simply repackages the old and recycles them.

Which is great for us because it makes the book of Colossians come alive. Here, Paul speaks directly and pointedly about WHO JESUS IS. This book could be seen as the definitive guide to identifying counterfeit Christs or vetting any claims about who Jesus was and is. It serves as the litmus test against all other claims. It's a book worth studying word for word, a book worth mastering. Read with an open heart toward God and ask His guidance to reveal its truth to you.

Then you will be prepared to make that decision on whom you follow—and you will KNOW if you are a sheep walking with the shepherd, or a goat following a lie.

Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Faithful in Colossae

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

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Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people~ 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world--just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Preeminence of Jesus

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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The Supremacy of the Son of God

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [*this English translation “firstborn” is NOT speaking to a firstborn, as in “created”, but rather a POSITION. A ranking. A supreme authority.*] over all creation. 16 For in him all things [*the Greek word PAS means ALL things, EVERY thing, the WHOLE, entirety, and absolute where nothing is lacking*] were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. [*Jesus was not just the Creator spoken of in Genesis 1 and John 1, but also the Creator of heaven (the destination) and the Angels, EVERYTHING in every dimension known and unknown to us.*] 17 He is before [*Greek: PRO – literal translation: “Above and Before”*] all things, and in him all things [*PAS*] hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn [*In the superior authority*] from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Reconciled in Jesus

19 For God was pleased to have all [*PAS*] his fullness [*another almost redundant word, Pleroma, for “total and complete without anything lacking”. So in this phrase ALL FULLNESS, it is superlative expression that is beyond measure or imagination. There is nothing in God that was not in Jesus. And nothing in Jesus that was not in God. They were that complete in each other. So, we read in the Gospels where Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”*] dwelt in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all [*pas*] things, whether things on earth or

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things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Paul's Labor for the Church

24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

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Chapter 2

Many people stumble over the concept of church, getting caught up in the "do's and don'ts," the structure, the form, the style, the rules. For many non-active Christians, CHURCH is the primary reason they steer clear of the faith. Humans have a knack for complicating the simple. The intentions might be good, but whenever we tack on extra rules or regulations to God's Word, we're bound to mess things up!

The church isn't the first to do this. We can trace this all the way back to Adam and Eve. God told Adam, before Eve was even created, that he could eat from any fruit in the garden except from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. One chapter later, Satan tempts Eve, and she tells him they must not eat or TOUCH the tree. So where did this "do not touch" rule come from? It came from one of two sources: Either Adam, wanting to add an extra layer of protection, told Eve not to eat from the tree and threw in "or touch" for good measure, or Eve herself concocted the "no touch" rule. Regardless, they added a rule to God's simple command of "do not EAT."

When we append our own "safeguard" rules to God's Word, we give a foothold to the enemy. I'm sure Eve looked at the tree, maybe even wanted to touch it. The truth is, she COULD. She could have picked the fruit, even tossed it around like a ball. The only prohibition was DO NOT EAT. This self-imposed rule only served to create a temptation and desire, providing a perfect opportunity for God's enemy to step in.

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The next chapter is incredibly powerful because it illustrates the true lordship of Jesus and the freedom we have in Him—freedom that comes with responsibility. Many churches hesitate to proclaim the true freedom we have in Christ because they fear we might go overboard and live without any boundaries. But the reality is, love is our greatest commandment. When we live in freedom, with love as our guide, we don't need man-made moral rules. Love is the rule.

I pray that the Word opens up to you today in a new way, that you recognize your freedom in Christ, and become aware of the power of Christlike love within you—and what you can do with it for others.

Paul's Struggle for the Faith and Unity of Believers

1 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Spiritual Fullness in Christ Alone

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

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8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Not Legalism but Jesus

11 In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self-ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Freedom From Human Rules

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole

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body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do [*for* “*WOULD*”] you submit to its rules: 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

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Chapter 3

Football season is here!!! One thing that always amuses me is this curious fact: while there are only a few paid sports experts that we watch on TV, on Sundays, Mondays, and Thursdays, it seems like there are millions of sports and football experts lounging on couches at home. Imagine if we could recruit those folks for the teams, or get them in front of the camera—every game would be astounding! I'm still puzzled why these coaches earn so much money when there are so many armchair experts readily dispensing advice every weekend. Football must be the easiest game in the world to master, strategically speaking. With such an abundance of expertise, you'd think coaching could be a minimum wage job!

But as we all know, there's a big difference between theory and practice. In leadership, if someone can only point out the flaws of a business or group, but never takes steps to correct them, we'd consider them a poor leader. They know all the answers yet do nothing to implement the solutions. In academia, we call them professors. They teach the theory of things, but rarely apply the theory themselves.

Ironically, in church, we label these kinds of folk's hypocrites. They are those who learn the Word, might even teach the Word, but never practically apply the Word to their lives or truly LIVE the Word. That said, it's important to distinguish between sin and hypocrisy—they are not the same. Someone who tries to live according to their beliefs and fails isn't a hypocrite; they're human and simply a sinful person in a sinful world. But those who vocally

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criticize others' errors yet fail to apply their knowledge to their own lives? Those are hypocrites (or "armchair quarterbacks").

The next chapter is one we could all benefit from reading daily. I guarantee that everyone who reads it along with me will find opportunities to GROW in their faith. This chapter moves us from merely understanding the theory of being a follower of Christ to actually walking as one. This is about putting theory into practice—the rubber meeting the road. It offers practical applications for daily life as a believer. Read it carefully, slowly, and often. Then, apply it directly to your life and witness wonders you never imagined.

The New Life in Christ

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or

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Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free,
but Christ is all, and is in all.

Character of the New Man

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness
and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any
of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave
you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all
together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your
hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And
be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as
you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through
psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with
gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or
deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the
Father through him.

Instructions for Christian Households

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the
Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.
20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the
Lord. 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become
discouraged. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and
do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but
with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working
for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will

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receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

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Chapter 4

Have you ever struggled to find something to be grateful for? If you stop right now and mention one thing you're grateful for, what would it be? Perhaps it would be your salary, job, spouse, home, country, family, or health? These are certainly valid reasons for gratitude. But what happens if your home burns down, your job lays you off, your spouse leaves, your country is overrun, your health fails, or your family passes away? What if everything you thought you were thankful for disappeared? Could you still find a reason to be grateful? It's easy to lose sight of gratitude and start feeling slighted. "If God has no favorites, why do some have so much, and we have so little?" I know some people think this—I have, too. But this question really answers itself because it's inward-focused.

Ironically, when we read the Bible, many of the churches faced persecution, yet the authors urged them to be thankful. Some even sang while in chains and prison. "HOW DO THEY DO THAT??" I wondered. Then it hit me like a hammer. When we look inward for reasons to be thankful, our gratitude is shallow, rooted in personal desires and comfort. But there is a deeper, truer thankfulness that comes from God. This is outward thankfulness, based on what Jesus did for us on the cross. It embraces the promise that no matter what we face in life, HE is with us through any trial. We are never, NEVER alone.

Thinking about my own struggles, both past and present, I can't imagine going through them without the peace of God within me. Strangely, even amidst these struggles, I find myself THANKING

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GOD. Verse two below captures the secret to thankfulness: “Devote yourself to prayer...” Something miraculous happens when we speak with God: He opens our understanding, and we can SEE with our spirit all the wonderful things He has done and is doing around us—and we grow more and more thankful.

So, I encourage you all to focus outwardly on your thankfulness this season. Even amid your momentary troubles or struggles, even in sickness, remember: Jesus loves you. He died for you, opened the door to heaven for you, and He is with you now, so you need not be alone. His hand is upon you, and He still has a plan for you. Take comfort in Him and be thankful!

1. Masters, provide to your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Further Instructions

2. Continue steadily in prayer, watching with thanksgiving; 3. And pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds; 4. that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. 5. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. 6. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Final Greetings

7. All my affairs shall Tychicus make known to you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord: 8. whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our state,

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and that he may comfort your hearts; 9. together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known to you all things that are done here. 10. Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him), 11. and Jesus that is called Justus, who are of the circumcision: these only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort unto me. 12. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, salutes you, always striving for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13. For I bear him witness, that he has much labored for you, and for them in Laodicea, and for them in Hierapolis. 14. Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. 15. Greet the brothers that are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church that is in their house.

Closing Exhortations and Blessing

16. And when this epistle have been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that you also read the epistle from Laodicea. 17. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it.

18. The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you.

BOOK OF 1 THESSALONIANS

Chapter 1

(New Year)

As we approach the end of the year, many of us engage in reflection and consider setting New Year's resolutions. Oh, the resolutions I've made over the years! And oh, how quickly I've forgotten them within days. It's the season when gyms make their most money! Who hasn't declared, "I resolve to get in shape," "eat right," or "start exercising" after indulging in the Christmas feast? Stripping away all the marketing schemes, the New Year does indeed provide a moment to pause and evaluate where we are and where we want to go. It's a natural time for internal reflection, offering a chance for a "do-over" or a "fresh start." It's a time for laying a clean slate, a time to "get it right." It seems to be a common denominator to search for purpose during this time.

But how do we know when we are walking in the purpose God created for us? Keep reading this short chapter, and Paul will outline some things to consider.

1. Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

Thanksgiving for the Believer's Faith

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2. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; 4 knowing, brothers beloved of God, your election, 5 how that our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; even as you know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake.

3. And you became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit; 7 so that you became an example to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 For from you has sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith to God word is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything. 9 For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had to you; and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

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Chapter 2

Throughout my life, I've witnessed some peculiar examples of parenting. Unable to have children myself, my perspective is more observational than practical. During my youth, my parenting experience seemed more distant and non-affectionate, but as an adult, I've observed the opposite: a style that's incredibly close, caring, and nurturing.

It's always struck me as slightly odd how deeply a parent can love their child. From the moment of birth, a big, tough, gruff man can transform, becoming as delicate as an orchid petal when holding his newborn. This transformation is profound—this rock of a man becomes as gentle as a dove, yet stands as a formidable wall of protection. I've seen parents' lives pivot in an instant, shifting from self-centered ambitions to focusing entirely on their child's well-being.

It's amusing, really. People often ask to see a miracle from God—I suggest they watch a person transform with the birth of their child. This was true for my wife, a supermom then and still one today.

However, not everyone experiences this. My mother, for instance, seemed to lack the "mom" gene. She came off as unaffectionate, uncommitted, and competitive. As a young adult, I was told that most parents hope their children will surpass them in life and success. Not mine. They displayed was felt more like jealousy. My achievements were often met with "congratulations," quickly followed by a snide remark like, "Don't start getting too big for your

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britches," or "I guess you must think you're really something now, huh?"

Interestingly, my parents were moralists, always emphasizing the importance of truth, doing the right thing, and taking the high ground. As a child, I heard one message but saw another, creating a rather confusing upbringing!

The Apostle Paul was somewhat of a parent too—a spiritual parent to the Thessalonians. While reading this chapter, I found myself underlining phrases that epitomize a true parent's heart. As we grow in Christ, we too become spiritual parents to others. Starting small, our faith grows, and Christ places people within our sphere of influence—some more mature, many less so. The Father will certainly use you to help others come to know Him, probably even as we speak. Reflect on the traits Paul discusses; once again, the posture of the heart is crucial.

We consistently pray for God to reveal Himself to us. Look around. See whom He has placed in your life. Each person is hand-selected by the Father to build you up as a child of God and for you to help lift your weaker brothers and sisters. Success in this endeavor depends on your heart's posture. We all share one common purpose: to use the gifts and talents God has given us, not for our own praise, greed, or approval, but to reveal the hope of the world to others. Be good children and listen; be good parents and inspire with truth.

1 For yourselves, brothers and sisters, know our entering in to you, that it has not been found in vain: 2 but having suffered before, and been shamefully treated, as you know, at Philippi, we stood bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict. 3 For

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our appeal is not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in trickery: 4 but even as we have been approved of God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proves our hearts. 5 For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as you know, nor a cloak of greed, God is witness; 6 nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have claimed authority as apostles of Christ. 7 But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherishes her own children: 8 even so, being affectionately caring of you, we were well pleased to impart to you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were becoming very dear to us. 9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail: working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

10 You are witnesses, and God also, how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe: 11 as you know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging you, and testifying, 12 to the end that you should walk worthily of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Their Conversion

13 And for this cause we also thank God without ceasing, that, when you received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, you accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which also works in you that believe. 14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judaea in Christ Jesus: for you also suffered the same things of your

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own countrymen, even as they did of the Jews; 15 who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove out us, and please not God, and are contrary to all men; 16 forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins always: but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Paul's Longing to See the Thessalonians

17 But we, brothers, being bereaved of you for a short season, in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more exceedingly to see your face with great desire: 18 because we would desired to have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even you, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? 20 For you are our glory and our joy.

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Chapter 3

Imagine trying to describe the view from the top of the Eiffel Tower in Paris during springtime to someone who has never seen it. You have to describe it in such vivid detail that they can visualize it with their eyes closed. If you've never been there, this might seem like a daunting, if not impossible, task.

Over the years, I've had many opportunities to sit with people bearing troubled hearts. They've faced great traumas, losses, and distress—losing a loved one, being laid off at the "worst possible time," enduring a divorce, or discovering a child is seriously ill. These trials and losses are numerous and varied. Many of these individuals are followers of the Way, believers, Christians. Inevitably, they circle back to the age-old questions: "Why me?" "Why us?" "Why, God?" We struggle to understand why we, who walk in "Christian victory," still face the same hardships as unbelievers. What then makes us "special"? Or are we special at all? Where is our benefit? Our minds race, applying human logic to divine matters: "If I am a child of God and He loves me so much, then WHY do I face things that even sinners and the wicked do not?"

Ironically, our answer is somewhat revealed in our question. Trials neither define nor destroy us; they reveal what is already inside us. It's a tough truth to swallow. When we face trials, our true nature is exposed—be it anger, doubt, fear, or selfishness. Reflect on the questions I posed earlier and notice the self-focus: "If I am a child of God, and He loves ME, why do I have to face things..."

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As believers, having given our lives to Christ, we have been purchased by Him. We are His servants, and He calls us ambassadors in 2 Corinthians 5. As His representatives on Earth, He desires us to embody and express His mission: showing love, comfort, mercy, and grace to others, just as Jesus did for us.

The Lord also understands that for us to genuinely offer comfort to others, we must first experience it ourselves. To experience this comfort, we must endure the trials that bring it. So, when trials inevitably come, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let them reveal what is in your heart. Allow the Holy Spirit and your fellow believers to minister His comfort to you. Embrace it, learn from it, so that you can then share those lessons with others who will face similar challenges. Our life experiences are not merely for our benefit—every experience, both good and bad, equips us to minister God's love to others.

1 Therefore when we could no longer bear it, we thought it good to be left behind at Athens alone; 2 and sent Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith; 3 that no man be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed. 4 For truly, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction; even as it came to pass, and you know. 5 For this cause I also, when I could no longer bear it, sent that I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.

Timothy's Encouraging Report

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6 But when Timothy came even now to us from you, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, and that you have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also to see you; 7 for this cause, brothers, we were comforted over you in all our distress and affliction through your faith: 8 for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanksgiving can we give again to God for you, for all the joy where we rejoice for your sakes before our God; 10 night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Prayer for the Church

11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way unto you: 12 and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also do toward you; 13 to the end he may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

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Chapter 4:1-12

I've never been a fan of vegetables. For most of my life, I avoided them like the plague, finding their taste unpleasant. While I ate them, knowing they were good for me, I never really enjoyed them. However, a recent health scare forced me to overhaul my diet completely, and I committed to taking this new lifestyle seriously. One major change was eliminating artificial sweeteners and processed foods—essentially, anything with white sugar and white flour. Something strange happened then. As I cut out the "fake" sweeteners, my taste buds seemed to evolve. Suddenly, I could taste a natural sweetness in vegetables. Who knew?! Vegetables turned out to be quite flavorful and even sweet!

During the holidays, I allowed myself to indulge in cakes, pies, cookies, and the like. I quickly noticed how overly sweet these items were and how the vegetables started losing their sweetness once more. It dawned on me: the fake overpowers the real. Just a few days of eating "right" brought back the natural sweetness.

This experience taught me a life lesson. God has designed a natural order of love for us to follow, while the devil, in his cunning ways, has crafted a counterfeit love called lust. When we hear "lust," many think of sexual lust, which is indeed a significant aspect. But just as there are multiple forms of love—erotic physical love, love of friends, patriotic love, love of contentment—so too has the enemy created lust in these areas. And like artificial sweeteners, lust distorts the natural, making it hard to see or experience the superiority of the real over the fake. Soon, the fake takes over, overpowering and

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obscuring the natural. But if we return to what God has created, the real deal, we can begin to appreciate and experience the true value of the authentic over the imitation.

Consider the difference between love and lust. Love looks outward to others, while lust looks inward to oneself. In a sexual relationship, lust seeks to please oneself, whereas love aims to satisfy the partner. In friendship, love seeks to protect and care for the other, while lust tries to extract whatever value it can from the relationship to elevate oneself. A lustful friendship asks, "What can I get out of this?" whereas a loving friendship asks, "How can I help my friend grow and develop? How can I lift my friend up?"

The love of contentment says, "I am happy with what I have, regardless of what the Joneses have, and want to share with others." This is selfless ambition motivated by real love. On the other hand, lustful discontent declares, "I want a bigger house, more cars, more stuff for my walls, more toys—and MORE TOYS! I need to keep up with the Joneses and try to surpass them." This is self-focused ambition driven by lust.

The devil offers an artificial sweetener—the counterfeit of love. It is physical, emotional, and psychological. But consider returning to the natural way. This will be discussed further in the chapters and verses below.

Living to Please God

1 Finally then, brothers, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, even as you do walk, that you abound more and more. 2 For you

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know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you abstain from fornication; 4 that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who know not God; 6 that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter: because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified. 7 For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. 8 Therefore he that rejects this teaching, rejects not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

A Brotherly and Orderly Life

9 But concerning love of the brothers you have no need that one write to you: for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do it toward all the brothers that are in all Macedonia. But we exhort you, brothers, that you abound more and more; 11 and that you study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you; 12 that you may walk becomingly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing.

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Chapter 4:13-18

My wife and I recently made the trek all the way to Washington state to visit her nephew. We spent several days catching up with Randy at his home, our first visit since we married 18 years ago. We've seen him occasionally at family events over the years, but those were rare occurrences given the distance. After a few days touring southern Washington, it was time to head back to Texas. That morning, as we packed the car, the cool, quiet dawn enveloped us. We tiptoed around, keeping the noise down—though everyone was already awake. There's an unspoken rule that the early morning demands hushed tones.

As we prepared to leave, I shook Randy's hand and hugged his wife, then settled into the car. I watched my wife as she hugged them both, tears streaming down her face. She then hugged them again, her sobs growing louder. Climbing into the car, she rolled down the window, waving and weeping, assuring them of our love.

This visit reminded me of a poignant truth. Randy and his wife were perfectly healthy, yet my wife wept. She wasn't mourning a loss or reacting to any immediate pain. Her tears weren't because she might never see them again—hopefully, that wasn't the case. Rather, she wept knowing it would likely be a long while before we could enjoy such closeness again.

Time and distance have their own unique way of creating loss—the loss of being physically present with those we love. Yet, this type of sadness carries with it a glimmer of hope.

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As believers in Christ, we understand the loss of friends and loved ones all too well. Paul urges us not to be ignorant about such matters but to be informed and comprehend the 'next step' we all face. For believers, death marks a swift passage from this earthly realm to eternity. The Bible states, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8), a transition sweetened by Jesus' assurance to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

For those who have endured or may someday face the physical loss of someone dear, take solace in these words. We are promised another reunion, and unlike your high school reunion, when that day comes, you won't have to worry about looking a bit 'wider' or 'fluffier'.

Believers Who Have Died

13 But we would not have you ignorant, brothers and sisters, concerning them that fall asleep in death; that you sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; 17 then we who are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

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Chapter 5

When I was a teenager, I loved horror movies. Back in the 80s, there was no shortage of them. Living in L.A., I occasionally got to preview movies before their release. One time, my family was invited to an early screening of a new movie called "Halloween." My mother, unaware of its content, thought it would make for a fun family outing. We were both quite surprised to discover it was definitely not a family movie!

Later, when it was officially released, my girlfriend wanted to see it. As teenagers often do, we snuck into the movie on a date night. Of course, I didn't tell her I had already seen it. Something amazing happened during the movie. Since I knew when the "jumps" and "shocks" were coming, I could anticipate them. I was well-prepared and remained unflinching. Meanwhile, my girlfriend jumped, squealed, and clung to me in terror. I simply sat there, comforting her with a smile. Afterwards, she commented on how brave I was, how nothing seemed to faze me. I became her "protecting knight in shining corduroys"—yes, that's a type of pants from way back then, for all the young folks.

I've kept this secret all these years because it taught me a simple lesson: If you know what's going to happen, you can prepare yourself emotionally for it.

Life, like a movie, is just a very short "clip" of the eternity we all face. Who do you want to portray in this story? You have the outline of the story below, and you have the choice to pick your part in this movie we call life.

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The Bible, and particularly this chapter, gives us a preview. It allows us to understand generally what kind of world we live in and what to expect. It also equips us with the right tools for when those days come. It's not about making us look like heroes. Rather, it reveals these truths so that we may stand confident and unshaken, not losing our way amidst chaos. It reveals this so that our strength and calmness may serve as a testament to others of the peace we have in Christ. It allows others to see this peace in us and desire the same. This gives us the practical witness to show them our hope in Jesus.

The Day of the Lord

1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need that should be written to you. 2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. 3 When they are saying, "Peace and safety," then sudden destruction will come upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall in no wise escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: 5 for you are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. 7 For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. 8 But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9 For God appointed us not to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that, whether we are awake or asleep, we should live together with him. 11 Therefore, exhort one another, and build each other up, even as you are currently doing.

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Final Instructions

12 But we ask you, brothers, to know them that labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 13 and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we exhort you, brothers, warn the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all. 15 See that none render to anyone evil for evil; but always follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all. 16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you. 19 Quench not the Spirit; 20 despise not prophesying's; 21 test all things; hold fast that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.

Blessing and Admonition

23 And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the brother and sisters. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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Chapter 1

Just the other day, as I was checking my email, I stumbled upon a notification that my school's license was about to be suspended unless I immediately verified the information on file. The email looked incredibly authentic; it included all my school's details and appeared to come from a federal source. My first thought was, "Oh man, how did I miss this deadline?" So, I clicked the "Update Information" link, which took me to another "government" webpage. Suddenly, a warning popped up on my computer: "Beware! This site is a recognized spoof. Do you want to proceed?" I immediately closed the website and revisited the email. Sure enough, it contained a spoof email address. I must admit, I was a bit embarrassed. I usually spot these phishing attempts quite easily, but this one was particularly convincing, tailored precisely to my compliance concerns, and nearly fooled me.

I have also received emails and texts supposedly from the owner of my company, using his personal name, asking me to buy prepaid cards and email him the codes for presenting them to our employees, with assurances of reimbursement upon his return. Fortunately, these attempts never fooled me, though they have deceived others. Hackers are indeed clever, and today, counterfeit personalities are pervasive in our online lives.

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However, hacking is not a modern phenomenon. Even in biblical times, there were hackers. This is why we have the book of 2 Thessalonians. Shortly after Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, a “hacker” sent a counterfeit letter in Paul’s name to the church. We can deduce from Paul’s second letter, which he wrote to reassure them, that the counterfeit letter falsely suggested that the church had missed the rapture of Christ—a topic Paul addressed in his first letter. The church was already suffering, and this deception targeted their greatest point of concern, sparking panic and fear. However, what was intended for harm, God used for good. We now have this wonderful book to enhance our understanding of the final days. This brief epistle provides us with clearer insight into what lies ahead, offering more hope, assurance, and peace in our relationship with the Father.

Greeting

1 Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Thanks

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. *[This was a time of severe persecution in this church, so much so that they thought the “end*

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*times” were now upon them. On top of this, a counterfeit letter was sent to the church in “Paul’s name”; making it necessary for Paul to pen this letter.]*⁵ All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.

God’s Final Judgement and Glory

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. *[This speaks about the second coming of Christ, but before that, the coming of Christ for his church (Bride). Paul outlines this to show them that this time of current suffering is not in fact the last days, for Jesus has not yet collected His Bride.]*⁸ He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord *[this outline and describes what Hell is: the absence of the presence of the Lord. Even today in our sinful world, mankind still has access to God’s grace, love, and hope; which is His presence. True Hell will have no presence at all, ever.]* and from the glory of his might ¹⁰ on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

¹¹ With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. ¹² We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus

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may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Chapter 2

When I was in the army, receiving letters from home was incredibly important. At 17, letters from my girlfriend were even more crucial! Being stripped away from everything familiar and thrust into a new, strange world caused significant instability in my life. I remember watching my platoon stand in formation during mail-call. I watched as each soldier broke formation and ran up to the Sergeant when his name was called to collect his letter from home.

Before leaving for training, both my mother and girlfriend affirmed their love for me, expressing eagerness for my return. Their words were exactly what I needed to hear. However, that afternoon, as soon as I was enveloped by that strange new world, their words seemed to lose their impact. I could no longer feel the same security I had felt just hours before. The letters were crucial in reaffirming my worth during those turbulent times.

This scenario mirrors the experience of the Thessalonians. Paul personally addressed their trials and the end times. However, shortly after his departure, as they faced trials, doubt crept in. Paul, learning of their struggles, wrote another letter to them. This subsequent correspondence offers us a vivid glimpse into the personal conversations he had with them. It serves as a letter of great encouragement for us all. Let's continue our reading...

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The Man of Lawlessness

Section 1. (Addressing the error sent to the Church)

1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him [*referring to the rapture Paul spoke of in 1 Thessalonians*], we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us [*referring to the counterfeit letter sent to the church*]-whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter--asserting that the day of the Lord has already come. 3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way [*referring back to the 3 points he just outlined*], for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs [*Greek: apostasia: means The Falling Away, to forsake, defection, apostasy*] and the man of lawlessness is revealed, [*this man may be the one to cause or influence the great falling away just mentioned.*] the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. [*An anti-theist, that is opposed to anything called god, possibly even other religions that have a belief in any god(s)*]

5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? [*Paul had already spoken these things to them, yet the letter stirred them up to doubt. Now WE have these spoken words from Paul written so we too can be enlightened and encouraged by them.*]

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Section 2. (Addressing the restraining the mystery of lawlessness)

6 And now you know what is holding him back *[restraining]*, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one *[The Holy Spirit]* who now holds *[hinderer]* it back *[restrains]* will continue to do so till he *[The Holy Spirit]* is taken out of the way *[Greek “meso” meaning, midst, among]*. *[Since Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to remain with us following His departure, He promised that the Holy Spirit would be with us always and forever. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit were to be taken away, we, too, would be taken away. This concept links directly to the notion of the rapture, which is seen as a marker for identifying the Antichrist and marking the commencement of his career.]*

Section 3 (Addressing the career of the antichrist)

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. *[Satan loves to counterfeit the works of God. The man of lawlessness with probably attempt to parallel what Jesus did.]* He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, 10 and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie *[not just lies, but THE LIE. A very clear lie, a very clear dividing line.]*

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12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Stand Firm

(Section 3 Our special election with purpose confirmed)

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

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Chapter 3

Throughout my life, I have had the opportunity to work in various fields, ranging from entry-level positions to senior management. Over the years, I've encountered many types of employees and attitudes. Some employees adopt the mindset of doing as little as possible for the maximum pay, focusing solely on their personal gain without considering the company's well-being. In contrast, I recently met an individual who exemplifies a remarkably different attitude. This young man joined our company over a year ago, initially just seeking any job available. We assigned him to work in a shop, and when that job concluded, we placed him elsewhere; he tackled each task without complaint. A few months ago, he expressed interest in a particular position, and when the opportunity arose, we gladly offered it to him.

Yesterday, I asked him about his weekend, and he shared that he had used his day off to drive to one of our office locations and voluntarily mowed and trimmed the entire area—not for pay or at anyone's request, but out of gratitude to the company. He used his own car, gasoline, and equipment to contribute, embodying a spirit of giving. Although he is a believer, he admits to not being confident in quoting scripture or walking someone through doctrinal explanations. However, his actions—his way of expressing thanks and being a faithful worker—are a vivid demonstration of his faith, more so than many theologians.

As believers, we should strive to be exemplary in our workplaces. Paul emphasizes this in his closing remarks to the church. While it is

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important to assist those unable to work, those who can work should do so willingly. Our actions should reinforce our spoken testimonies, aligning our deeds with our words. Even in times of severe trials and suffering, our actions can shine as a beacon to those around us. Our labor is an offering to God, a reflection of the grace He has bestowed upon us. What kind of gift are you presenting every day?

Request for Prayer

1 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified, even as also it is with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and evil men; for all have not faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and guard you from the evil one. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you both do and will do the things which we command. 5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ.

Warning Against Idleness

6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.

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10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." 11 We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

13 And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good. 14 Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

Final Greetings

16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 17 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write. *[Paul put this statement in here to counter act the false letter that was sent to the church. So they would know this letter was from him.]* 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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Chapter 1

In my last year of high school, I was enrolled in a mythology class that focused on the Greek and Roman gods, exploring their roles, personalities, and the petty antics and jealousies that seemed to consume them. I found it quite amusing. It was hard to believe that these flawed beings were once considered supreme rulers over mankind. However, I enjoyed history, so the class was entertaining.

Today, belief in these gods has largely faded, yet society remains deeply engaged with different kinds of myths. Consider some of the prevalent, yet untrue myths:

1. "If I am good, I can go to heaven."
2. Evolution, despite Darwin's theory being widely contested by modern, secular science, continues to be a dominant ideology.
3. The notion that wealth equates to happiness.
4. The concept of gender neutrality, a modern myth gaining traction.
5. New Ageism, essentially a rehash of ancient Gnosticism in modern terms.

Humanity invests significant time, energy, and money in these myths. Unfortunately, even believers often distract one another from the truth due to these misconceptions. Our situation is not unlike that of the church at Ephesus at the time these texts were written.

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As time progresses, the world becomes increasingly captivated by myths and moves further from God.

The books of First and Second Timothy are known as the "Pastoral Epistles." However, I urge you to remember that all believers are engaged in full-time ministry. We all have a divine purpose. Rather than viewing these chapters as distant or irrelevant, think of them as the "Influencer Epistles," because that is what we are called to be in this world. Each chapter speaks directly to us, guiding us on how to wield our influence in a world rife with deception.

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and Christ Jesus our hope;

2 to Timothy, my true child in faith: Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Timothy Charged to Oppose False Teachers

3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus [*the urging here implies that Timothy may have wanted to leave.*] so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer 4 or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work--which is by faith. [*silly distractions in the church were dangerous because it took the place of the faith and grace walk, and focused on others things like works or blood history.*]

5 The goal of this command is love, [*countering legalism, and myths with love.*] which comes from a pure heart and a good

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conscience and a sincere faith. 6 Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. *[vain jangling, meaningless babble that had no value.]* 7 They want *[desired, wish, intend, all self-focused to self-promote]* to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. *[they used big words and lofty ideas without even understanding the ramifications of their own theories, or the consequences of their logic.]*

8 We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. *[to point out and identify sin and lead people to the cross.]* 9 We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine 11 that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

The Lord's Grace to Paul

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, *[you don't have to be smart to be trustworthy or faithful; you don't have to be talented or gifted. Faithfulness is a posture of heart that all can attain by God's grace.]* appointing me to his service. 13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full

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acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The Charge to Timothy Renewed

18 Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, 19 holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. 20 Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

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Chapter 2

There is something strange that happens when a group of men get together. I have seen it outside of church, and inside church. We, in general, tend to puff out our chest, our voice gets lower, and we start to de-evolve into a more caveman like persona. We grunt at sports even if we don't know much about the topic. We talk about cars, football, guns, politics, grunt grunt grunt.

Likewise, women, (*I have heard...*), similarly when gathered, tend to revert into little pockets of birds clucking (*again, what I heard from other women, so don't shoot the messenger!*). They tend to look around at other women, talking about fashion, makeup, accessories, styles, etc, cluck cluck cluck.

Today's discussion mirrors the guidance Paul provided to Timothy, as seen in the first chapter where Paul encouraged Timothy regarding his overall mission in Ephesus. Now, much like pouring water into a funnel, Paul begins to narrow the topic. In this chapter, he addresses a more specific issue: the roles of males and females in the church. His message continues to emphasize the orderly structure of the church, specifically addressing the duties of both men ("Grunts") and women ("Clucks")—urging each group to maintain focus on their respective roles. My challenge to you is this: concentrate on the responsibilities of the group to which you belong and allow the other group to focus on their own mission. Let's delve into the Scriptures and explore where Paul leads us.

Pray for All Men [Instructions to Men]

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1 I urge therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; 2 for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. *[Men are encouraged to pray, rather than to debate and rebel—a posture of heart that is contrary to the usual prideful stance.]* 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; 4 who wills that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. *[Instead of cursing leaders and conspiring against them, or criticizing from a place of pride, God calls men to intercede for their leaders with humility, for God loves them as much as He loves you.]* 5 For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be born in its own times. *[God desires men to view the world and its people with humility, compassion, and mercy, recognizing that Jesus died for all, not just for us.]* 7 For this purpose I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth, I lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Men and Women in the Church

8 Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. *[Lifting up holy hands is a symbol of having clean hands. Free of judgement and condemnation. Free of self-pride and arrogance. Free and clean, not by their own accomplishments, but by the accomplishment of the cross. The message to men is to kill the grunting of pride and self-promotion and staying focused on the greatness of Jesus and not us.]*

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[Instructions to Women]

9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning *[Greek: "kosmios" from the root Kosmos, meaning to bring order out of chaos. From that the word cosmetics has been made? Maybe... lol]* themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. *[Ephesus, in its time, was akin to what New York or Paris represents today—a fashion hub. Many women there found themselves caught up in the trend of "stylizing." Paul, however, urged women not to let fashion dominate their lives or become an idol. He was not banning makeup or stylish clothing, but emphasizing that these should not be their main focus. If you find yourself stressed about going to church because you feel you have nothing suitable to wear, then you've lost sight of the true purpose of attending church. It is about worshipping God, not showcasing oneself. It is about how God sees you, not how others perceive you.]*¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness *[peaceable, without meddling]* and full submission *[The term "subjection" here does not imply being under someone's thumb, but rather refers to a military-style ranking, indicating being under authority. We are all under someone's authority. Without such a structure, chaos would ensue. Essentially, it promotes orderliness rather than rebellion.]*¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. *[peaceable, without meddling]*¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and

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became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing--
if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

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Chapter 3

We have all experienced times in our lives when we strove for something significant. Perhaps it was graduating from high school or getting into college—goals that seemed distant and required time and effort. Do you recall those moments? For me, a standout event was joining the Army. When I started high school, I joined the JROTC. Initially, I never thought I would be interested in military activities, but I soon made many good friends in the group. I earned promotions, handled guns occasionally, and met more wonderful people. That experience cemented my desire for a career as a soldier. Excitedly, I learned I could enlist at 17 and began the process. I met with a recruiter, took the ASVAB test, chose a job, and endured the grueling MEPS physical—a lengthy day of standing in lines, coughing, giving blood, and undergoing various tests to qualify for enlistment. Each new station filled me with fear that they might find a reason to reject my application. But eventually, it was over. I stood in a room, raised my right hand, and recited my enlistment oath. Yet, I had to wait. After finishing my junior year of high school, while others enjoyed their summer, I finally received orders to report to Basic Training. More waiting ensued at the airport, followed by the flight to New Jersey and the bus ride to Fort Dix. When the bus doors opened, a very loud Drill Sergeant ordered us off. I had made it! Little did I know, I was only at the starting line; the real journey had just begun.

The same principle applies when we consider Faith. Often, we focus on the salvation experience, which is undeniably important. However, the concept of "life after death" is merely the initial

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question—the starting gate. The subsequent question is how we will handle "life after rebirth"—our true starting line. Having gained entrance, this is where real life begins. We are granted a second chance, and now we get to act anew.

This next chapter is frequently overlooked by those outside the "ministry" and is typically seen as a formal checklist for those desiring to engage with the "church." However, I want to remind everyone that WE are the church. The church exists in each of our homes. Think less about the formal structured building we attend on Sundays and more about including YOU and your household, your workplace, your sphere of influence, and your friends. The church travels with you. With that in mind, consider the two "offices" below as charges you should aspire to. Each of us is called to one or more of these roles: leader of your family and servant to others. Each role relates directly to you. Embrace your role now, right where you are. Who knows what good the Father will make of it later.

Qualifications for Overseers

1 Faithful is the saying, If a man seeks the office of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 The bishop therefore must be without reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, orderly, given to hospitality, apt to teach; *[able to teach and instruct in God's ways and doctrines]* 3 no brawler, no striker, but gentle, not contentious, no lover of money; 4 one that rules well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; *[not given to rebellion against authority]* 5 (but if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) 6 not a novice, *[newly planted in the faith]* lest

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being puffed up he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

[referring to pride]

7 Moreover, he must have good testimony from them that are without, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. *[a sudden and unexpected trap or peril]*

Qualifications of Deacons

8 In the same way, deacons *[servant, attendant, caregiver]* are to be worthy of respect, *[by deeds and of personal demonstration]* sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. *[not seekers of money, greed]* 9 They must keep hold *[in the hand, wearing, possess, own, to adhere to, cling]* of the deep truths *[Greek, mysterion: meaning a hidden mystery now revealed]* of the faith with a clear *[pure, clean]* conscience. *[The soul distinguishing what is good and bad]* 10 They must first be tested; *[examined, to recognize as genuine, to approve, deem worthy]* and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. 11 In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers *[slanders, gossips]* but temperate and trustworthy in everything. 12 A deacon must be faithful *[singularly "one" To his one alone be faithful]* to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. 13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Reasons for Paul's Instructions

14 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. 16 Beyond all

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question, the mystery [*Greek, mysterion: meaning a hidden mystery now revealed*] from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

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Chapter 4

I have a close friend who has diabetes. He administers insulin injections daily to manage his condition. Despite years of advice on proper nutrition, he often remarks, “I am not going to stop enjoying life because of this. I will not give up my sodas.” Over time, his health has deteriorated. Recently, he began experiencing vision problems, necessitating additional injections into his eyes. Nevertheless, he maintains his refusal to forego sodas and other indulgences that he believes enhance his life. He is a devout believer.

This situation has led me to realize that my friend worships self-pleasure, manifested through his dietary choices. This revelation made me reflect on my own behaviors. How often do I knowingly disregard sound advice to satisfy my desires, thinking I can face the consequences later? Like my friend, I too have ignored wise counsel for selfish reasons. I do not judge him; instead, I empathize and continuously encourage him to adjust his diet and prioritize his health. My understanding stems from recognizing similar faults within myself in other aspects of my life.

In the next chapter of 1 Timothy, Paul warns Timothy that some will stray from the faith. These individuals, once part of the church, have become so self-absorbed that they now unwittingly serve as instruments for adversaries of God, diverting the church from its mission. This is a tactic employed by Satan. Historical evidence suggests that external persecution often strengthens the church, whereas internal strife tends to weaken it. This phenomenon is evident in the Book of Revelation, where it's noted that the Ephesian

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church had "left their first love" (Revelation 2:4). They overlooked the core of their faith—love for others—as they became embroiled in trivial doctrines and programs.

While this message in 1 Timothy may seem directed at pastors, it serves as a call to all believers to take a self-inventory to see whether they have allowed the enemy a foothold in their hearts. If so, do something now!. Don't wait to "pay the check later." Don't let blindness set in later. Full healing and restoration are possible today.

The Great Apostasy

1 But the Spirit said expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayer.

A Good Servant of Jesus Christ

6 If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the

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life to come. 9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. 10 That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe. 11 Command and teach these things.

Take Heed to Your Ministry

12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. 15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. 16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

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Chapter 5

Caring for our aging parents and grandparents in today's world is a bit like managing a high-tech startup. First, there's a lot of troubleshooting involved—everything from figuring out the TV remote to navigating the latest health gadgets. Then, there's the daily data analysis: counting steps, monitoring sleep patterns, and decoding the latest diet trends. And, of course, we can't forget customer support, where "Have you tried turning it off and on again?" becomes a universal fix—whether it's a glitchy hearing aid or just a stubborn mood. The goal? To keep operations running smoothly and morale high. Oh sure, there may not be any venture capitalist to win over, but the stakes are just as high. After all, we're dealing with the original investors in our lives!

This next chapter addresses the social role of the church in providing aid and support to the elderly. It is directed to Timothy, advising him on how to guide and manage his congregation. However, it also directly appeals to believers, emphasizing their moral, ethical, and emotional responsibilities in caring for their family members. It's crucial to maintain balance in these instructions to avoid falling into legalism. We must interpret this guidance through a lens of love and compassion to fully understand the outlined directives. There is no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to providing aid, as family circumstances are as varied as snowflakes. Instead, love should be the foundation of every solution when extending help.

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Treatment of Church Members

1 Rebuke not an elder, but exhort him as a father; the younger men as brethren:

2 the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, in all purity.

Honor True Widows

3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need *[widows with no family to support them]*. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. 5 The widow who is really in need *[widows with no family to support them]* and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. 6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. 8 Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. *[how can we claim to love others that we do not know if we can not show the practical love of our own family? First help your family, parents, grandparents, then too, extend your ministry to others as well. Otherwise, we are denying the very Faith of Love, we profess.]*

9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality,

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washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. *[the widow must be one unable to remarry, and a follower of Christ, still devoted and practicing their faith as they are able.]*

11 As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. 12 Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. 13 Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. 14 So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. 15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. *[It is said, "idle hands are the devils playground." The young still have energy that should be put to good use for the kingdom. These young widows labor and became idle gossipers, falling away from the Faith and into the devils trap by getting consumed with idle talk, and gossip which leads to actively destroying others and hence, the church itself.]* 16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her care, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

Honor the Elders

17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." 19 Do

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not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. *[not just two or three gossips, but two or three that are trusted and with integrity towards truth.]* 20 But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. *[If there is sin confirmed by the trusted witnesses, correction should be made publicly to show that all are held accountable in God's eyes, and in His church.]*

21 I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

23 Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

24 The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. 25 In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever. *[With good and bad works, sometimes what ones sees on the outside isn't really an accurate picture, so we need to temper our reaction and wait on God for discernment.]*

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Chapter 6

For most of my career spanning over 30 years, I've worked in typical secular jobs. Recently, I've been fortunate to work for a Christian employer and company, fulfilling a long-held dream of mine to use my skills in an organization with a purpose greater than merely making a profit. It truly is an honor to be part of this.

Interestingly, over the past few years, I've observed other believers joining the company, initially thrilled to be part of a faith-focused organization. However, as the initial excitement faded, their behavior began to change. They started arriving later and leaving earlier each day or opted to work remotely for various reasons. Unfortunately, their performance deteriorated, leading to some being dismissed. As part of the HR team, I was surprised to discover that many of these employees were not just mismanaging their time but were also stealing items and products from the company. Honestly, this was both embarrassing and disappointing, as it seemed they believed that working for a faith-based company allowed them unlimited leniency to act without consequences.

In America, we are constantly challenged by a culture of never-ending self-improvement. We're urged to acquire more, aim higher, and never settle, driven by advertisements that promise something better around the corner. This creates a relentless cycle of consumerism that seems insatiable.

However, it's comforting to know that our struggles are not unique to our time. Even in ancient times, people faced similar issues. The

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upcoming chapter discusses strategies to combat feelings of discontent, greed, and selfish ambition, providing practical tools to help us demonstrate Christian values effectively. Whether you are a leader or a team member, the chapter emphasizes focusing on your personal growth. Remember, self-improvement begins with oneself, and ultimately, we are accountable to God for our own actions.

1 Let as many as are under the yoke of bondage count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed.

2 And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brothers; but let them serve them the rather, because they that partake of the benefit are believing and beloved. These things teach and exhort.

False Teachers and the Love of Money

3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who

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want [*desire, focus*] to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Final Charge to Timothy

11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Instructions to the Rich

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they

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will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Guard Your Faith

20 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, 21 which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.

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Chapter 1

We live in the age of information. Not long ago, personal computers boasted a mere 256K of memory, and I remember using cassette tapes to load hand-written DOS programs. Now, we have the internet and artificial intelligence, offering an endless stream of knowledge. Of course, not all information is reliable. Who hasn't received those emails from a deposed prince needing help to unlock his billion-dollar fortune? I never fell for it, but I admit, the first time I got that email, it made me pause.

There have been many times in my life when I was convinced of certain truths. As a child, I believed in Santa Claus. In high school, I was certain I knew more than any adult. After seminary, I was convinced I had mastered every theological issue and doctrine. But as the saying goes, "There's always someone stronger or smarter."

We are now opening the second book of Timothy. Paul wrote this shortly before his execution, while he was chained and facing grim circumstances. It was just a few years before the burning and fall of Jerusalem. I have little doubt Paul knew this would be his last letter to Timothy. Imagine being in his shoes—if you had one last letter to send, what would you talk about?

Paul's message in this letter highlights a profound truth. He didn't say he was confident because of what he believed, but because of whom he believed in. This distinction is crucial. When we face

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trials, our strength is only as solid as our weakest belief. Relying solely on our knowledge is a fragile stance, as the world can use that very knowledge to shake us. But if our faith is in who we know—Jesus, and His sacrifice for us—then no debate or intellectual challenge can make us waver.

Consider the implications of this belief. How many of you believe in the Pre-Tribulation rapture? What if it turns out we are wrong, and the Lord returns Mid-Tribulation? Would that shake your faith? If your trust is in Jesus, even when things don't go as expected, your faith remains unshaken. It's okay to admit, "I guess I was wrong, but you know, Jesus still has a plan. He died for me, and in the end, He's in control. I'll just wait it out and trust that His plan will prevail." That's how believers endure through tough times. So remember, Brothers and Sisters, put your trust in the who and not the what, and you too will prevail.

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus,

2 to Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Timothy's Faith and Heritage

3 I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. 4 Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am

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persuaded, now lives in you also. 6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid [*cowardice*], but gives us power [*might, strength, virtue, a root word from which we derive the word dynamite*], love [*agape, the love of determined choice for the sake of others*] and self-discipline [*self-control, moderation, soundness of mind*].

Not Ashamed of the Gospel

8 So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. 9 He has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, [*if you let this statement sink in deep it will blow your mind. God, the Wonderful Creator of all things, had you on his mind before He even formed the first atom!*] 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know [*perceive, turn eyes, mind and attention to, see, understand, pay attention to*] whom I have believed [*entrust, credit, have confidence*], [*Paul relied on who he believed in, not what he believed in.*] and am convinced that he [*Jesus*] is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

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Be Loyal to the Faith

13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

15 You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. 16 May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. 17 On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. 18 May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

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Chapter 2

The Hippocratic Oath is a historic promise made by doctors, dating back to ancient Greece and the famous doctor, Hippocrates, often called the father of Western medicine. This oath guides doctors to keep secrets, do no harm, and always act in the best interest of their patients.

Shockingly, since the 1960s, there have been reports that doctors on Native American Reservations were forcing or pressuring Native women into sterilizations, affecting thousands. It's hard to understand how medical professionals, who swore to protect and help patients, could justify such actions. They clearly lost focus of their underlying mission.

We see similar issues where the Church has lost focus on the mission it has been given. Christians who once clearly understood the grace Jesus showed them can lose their way and their focus. Distractions from the world can easily lead us off the path God set for us, one small step at a time. Before we know it, years have passed, and we find ourselves far from where we should be. I'll admit, I've been distracted by programs, logistics, what my friends think, and my own wants, causing me to lose focus. Thankfully, other Brethren, and the Holy Spirit, have pointed out to me and continue to point out to me when I lose focus and get distracted.

In this chapter, Paul gives Timothy a dual message. He encourages Timothy to stay focused on his mission and shows him how to spot and handle those in the church who have strayed. This advice is crucial for keeping church leadership and membership on

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track. As a soldier of Christ our mission objective is clear: Share the grace and love of Jesus with the world. Let's stay focused!

The Appeal Renewed

1 You therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same I commit you to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. 3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier on service entangles himself in the affairs of this life; that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier. 5 And if also a man contend in the games, he is not crowned, except he have competed lawfully. 6 The farmer that labors must be the first to partake of the fruits. 7 Consider what I say; for the Lord shall give you understanding in all things.

8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. *[Paul's focus and mission for the sake of others motivated him to endure. He loved others so deeply that it enabled him to press through his own trials, knowing that the Word of God will continue through them after his departure.]*

11 Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown *[not accept, reject, to refuse]* him, he will also disown us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

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Dealing With False Teachers

14 Keep reminding God's people [Other Believers] of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. 15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. 17 Their teaching [distracted Believer's] will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. *[reference 1 Timothy letter. The weaker Believer who put their faith in what they believe, instead of who they believe struggle and stumble.]* 19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. 21 Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. 22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them

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repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

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Chapter 3

Throughout my life, I've owned a variety of cars, each featuring different capabilities. My most recent vehicle, particularly appealing due to my background in safety and law enforcement, came equipped with advanced safety features. This car includes comprehensive sensors on the front, back, and sides, monitoring for any potential hazards. Two features I find incredibly useful are the blind-spot monitor and the lane assist feature. These tools alert me to vehicles I might miss and assist in keeping the car centered in its lane, enhancing my driving safety significantly.

To fully benefit from these systems, there are a few necessary steps:

1. Activate the system.
2. Learn the operational rules and boundaries.
3. Commit to following these rules for optimal safety.

Despite these benefits, I've noticed some friends disapprove of the lane assist feature. The feature works by beeping and nudging the steering wheel if you drift from your lane without signaling. Some of my friends complain about this, not realizing that using their turn indicator prevents these alerts. Explaining this has often led to surprising reactions, with some preferring to disable the feature rather than adapt their driving habits.

That is a curious solution to me for the technology doesn't just protect my friends; it also safeguards other road users by reducing potential errors by my friends.

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This concept parallels the themes in the next chapter of 2 Timothy. It's important to recognize the context is that Paul's guidance is directed at Christians within the church. Like my car's sensors, Paul lists spiritual checkpoints or "sensors" to encourage self-reflection. He lists 19 specific behaviors for Christians to monitor in themselves, which can be uncomfortable but are crucial for personal growth and alignment with God's will.

After introspection, the next step is evaluating our influencers. Are these traits present in those we allow to shape our thoughts and actions? It's essential to remain a source of light and influence rather than succumbing to external darkness.

Like the safety systems that may be in our vehicles, we are then faced with the same choices. Are we willing to engage the Word (our eternal, spiritual safety system)? Are we willing to understand the boundaries it outlines? Are we willing to conform ourselves to the Word in order to get the most value from it? Not just for our personal sake, but for the sake of those around us?

Perilous Times and Perilous Men

1 But know this, that in the last days terrible times shall come. 2 For men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, haughty, railers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, no lovers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; 5 holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof: from these also turn away. 6 For of these are they that creep into houses, and take captive silly women laden

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with sins, led away by divers lusts, 7 ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 And even as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also withstand the truth; men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. 9 But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be evident unto all men, as theirs also came to be.

The Man of God and the Word of God

10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings-what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

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Chapter 4

Many years ago, while living in Waco, Texas, I joined a home group at my church. There, I met a couple who owned the house where the group met. Although I often saw them at church, it wasn't until these gatherings that I really got to know them. As it turns out, the wife was a nurse at the local emergency room. Initially shy, they warmed up over time, revealing themselves as genuinely kind people. After a few weeks, the wife began to share more openly with the group.

During one session, the conversation turned to the afterlife and the moment of transition. Her eyes lit up as she recounted her experiences. She had been an ER nurse long before embracing her faith in Jesus, and it was her work in the ER that drew her to God. As you might imagine, she witnessed many harrowing events, but what struck her most were the deaths she attended. She noted a profound difference between the departures of Christians and non-Christians. Christians often passed with smiles, reaching toward heaven, or speaking of angels, whereas non-believers frequently died in terror and despair. These stark contrasts drove her to seek out and ultimately find her faith.

This brings to mind the last chapter of 2 Timothy, containing the final words of the Apostle Paul. His closing messages, full of encouragement for Timothy, rings deeply with me, reminding me to read these last words thoughtfully. Paul continues to caution Timothy about the challenges facing the church, advising him on how to be a steadfast servant through trials. Yet, Paul's words are not for

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Timothy alone; they speak to all of us who have committed our lives to Jesus and are thus part of the full-time ministry.

These last words belong to us all, as does Paul's reminder in verse 7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me..."

Stay strong my fellow brothers and sisters. Stay focused on the Faith: the Love of Jesus that has rescued us all from the mouth of the Lion. And you too will understand Paul's final words.

Preach the Word

1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach [*herald, proclaim, declare, publish, public proclamation such as John the Baptist and Jesus*] the word; be prepared [*be present, be at hand stand ready*] in season [*as the opportunity occurs*] and out of season [*unseasonable, when unexpected*]; correct [*challenge, reveal, bring to light, conviction, rebuke*], rebuke [*to charge someone, forbid, censure, admonish*] and encourage [*console, strengthen, comfort, instruct, teach*]-with great patience [*endurance, constancy, steadfastness, slowing in avenging wrongs*] and careful instruction [*true doctrine, teaching*]. 3 For the time will come when people [*in the church*] will not put up with [*endure, bear with, sustain*] sound doctrine [*teachings, precepts*]. Instead, to suit their own desires, [*wanting to have their ears tickled, or hear only pleasant things*] they will gather around [*accumulate in great piles*] them a great number of teachers [*influencers*] to say what their itching ears [*desires, taboos*] want to hear. 4 They [*those in the church*] will turn their

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ears away from the truth [*Gods moral and devout truth, His Word*] and turn aside [*twist around*] to myths. [*fables, fiction, falsehood, invented ideas*]⁵ But you, keep your head [*be sober and calm and collected, be temperate and circumspect*] in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, [*a bringer of good tidings, heralds of the Good News of Jesus*] discharge all the duties of your ministry. [*service, purpose*]

Paul's Valedictory

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, [*used of the ones whose blood is poured out in a violent manner for the cause of God*] and the time for my departure is near. [*as in the casting off of the lines before a sailing*] 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The Abandoned Apostle

9 Do your best to come to me quickly, 10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

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14 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. 15 You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

16 At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.

The Lord is Faithful

17 But the Lord stood at my side [*to stand with, to appear, to be at hand, be present, metaphor of fellowship and intimacy*] and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. [*from the path of sin that was taking him into the abyss*] 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Come Before Winter

19 Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. 20 Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.

21 Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

Farewell

22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

BOOK OF TITUS

Chapter 1

The saying "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" really hit home for me as a young boy in Southern California. In fourth grade, I met Jennifer Adams, a girl with freckled cheeks, long brownish-red hair, and a shy demeanor who completely captivated me. To my surprise, some of my friends didn't see in Jennifer what I saw, but that didn't bother me—it was pure fourth-grade puppy love. Unfortunately, she moved away after that year, and I never saw her again.

That early experience taught me how differently people perceive things. Now, with grey in my beard and a bit more wisdom, I understand that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is a profound statement. Our perceptions of beauty are deeply influenced by the condition of our hearts.

Ironically, one of the most misquoted and misused verses in the Bible is found in Titus, verse 15. It has been twisted to justify ungodly beliefs and actions, despite the fact that the book of Titus emphasizes correct doctrine and the need to address and correct poor teachings.

The book begins by establishing the proper condition of the heart, making it clear that its messages apply not just to clergy, but to all born-again believers. Every believer is called to full-time ministry, so these opening verses are for you as well.

BOOK OF TITUS

Greeting

1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—2 in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 3 and which now at his appointed season he has brought to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior;

4 To Titus, my true son in our common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

Appointing Elders Who Love What is Good

5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. 6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. 7 Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. 8 Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Rebuking Those Who Fail to Do Good

10 For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of

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dishonest gain. 12 One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." 13 This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith 14 and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. 15 To the pure, all things are pure, *[one cannot think that that just because I am a Believer, anything I believe is now pure. Pornography cannot be deemed pure just because you are pure "in Christ" and have a "bend" toward sin. Sin is still sin. This verse speaks more to things like the dietary laws and rules of "don't not eat unclean things."], but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. *[Likewise, those without being "in Christ", cannot, by their works, purify something and make it holy.]* In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. 16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

BOOK OF TITUS

Chapter 2

When I was young and still in elementary school, I used to sit in awe of my teachers. To a nine-year-old, they seemed ancient, but undeniably wise! I often heard that they went to college—a mystical place where, I assumed, one learned absolute truth and facts to pass on to the next generation. This notion seemed straightforward enough, but as I later discovered in my own college years, it wasn't entirely accurate. Higher education doesn't just impart truth; it's also a breeding ground for "ideas." Sadly, ideas and truth aren't always synonymous, yet these ideas often trickle down to the young, even those thoroughly debunked by facts. In these next chapters, Paul delves deeply into teaching the difference between solid doctrine and mere ideas.

I stumbled upon a humorous take that illustrates how various doctrines might view "toys," which I find quite enlightening about the importance of foundational truth:

- Capitalists say, "He who dies with the most toys wins."
- Catholics say, "He who denies himself the most toys wins."
- Greek Orthodox proclaim, "They were the first toys."
- Amish declare, "Toys with batteries are sin."
- Calvinists announce, "Once played, always played."
- Baptists argue, "Only underwater toys count."
- Spirit-Filled believers assert, "He whose toys can talk wins."
- Mormons believe, "Every boy can have as many toys as he wants."

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- Christian Scientists state, "We are the toys."
- Jehovah's Witnesses claim, "He who sells the most toys door-to-door wins."
- Seventh-Day Adventists warn, "He who plays with toys on Saturday loses."
- Voodooists suggest, "Let me borrow that doll for a while."
- Polytheists think, "There are many toy makers."
- Agnostics ponder, "It is not possible to know if toys make a difference."
- Atheists deny, "There is no toy maker."
- Evolutionists speculate, "The toys made themselves."

Each perspective adds a layer of depth to our understanding of truth versus ideas, highlighting the diverse interpretations and teachings across cultures and beliefs.

Doing Good for the Sake of the Gospel

1 You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. *[The idea behind this phrase has to do with right living, not just right thinking]* 2 Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. 3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers *[gossiping is probably one of, if not the top causing pain point in churches, or other social gatherings. We downplay the seriousness of using our tongue to hurt and damage others. It is a sin that is too often glossed over,*

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and silently poisons the user, hearer, and receiver.] or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

6 Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness 8 and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

9 Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, 10 and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

Trained by Saving Grace

11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope--the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

15 These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

BOOK OF TITUS

Chapter 3

Sometimes we lose focus and need reminders, especially during tough times or when dealing with difficult people. The best way to show grace to those "pain-in-the-back" individuals is to remember that not so long ago, we were in their shoes. It's important to acknowledge that our blessings, holiness, and grounding in God aren't due to our own doing.

In baseball, three strikes mean you're out. I remember striking out often in little league, and how much I despised being the third out. Continually striking out is known as a slump. Similarly, we can lose sight of God's grace and find ourselves in a spiritual slump. If you find yourself questioning, there's a way to check if you're striking out spiritually. Here's a quick litmus test:

- "I'm as good as the next person" - Strike One (the next person's deeds are just as flawed).
- "I am doing the best I can." - Strike Two (your current efforts are inadequate).
- "I'm trying to do better." - Strike Three (even improved efforts will fall short).

We aren't far removed from the "lost," and only a thin veil of grace separates "us" from "them."

Saved in Order to Do Good

I Remind [*Greek: go on reminding, continue to remind*] the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good [*not just passive submission, but*

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active love], 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone. 3 At one time we too [*us - likewise, just like*] were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived [*led a life*] in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another [*a verb, the action of not showing love. To be loveless*]. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, [*to show, bring light, become clear*] 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done [*our work, our deeds, our doing, our labor*], but because of his mercy [*clemency toward the one who deserves punishment*]. He saved us through the washing of rebirth [*regeneration - a new life*] and renewal [*renovation, a complete change, a remodel*] by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured [*shed, spilled, to run out, gush*] out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified [*pronounced "not guilty"*] by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope [*expectation of good*] of eternal life.

8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things [*affirm, reaffirm constantly and with confidence*], so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote [*maintain*] themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Avoid Dissension

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. 11 You may be sure

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that such people are warped [*twisted, turned inside out, perverted intentions*] and sinful; they are self-condemned.

Final Remarks

12 As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there. 13 Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need. 14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives.

15 Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.

BOOK OF PHILEMON

Chapter 1

We are a nation that values choice, often advocating vigorously for our right to choose. One aspect that struck me during my time in the Police Academy was the concept of officer discretion. This principle grants law enforcement officers a range of options when handling situations. For instance, many people don't realize that in Texas, an officer has the authority to arrest someone for speeding, although this is rare and often governed by departmental policy. Typically, we think the officer will either issue a ticket or let us off with a warning, but arrest remains a possibility. This is known as "instantanar."

As an officer, I had to make numerous decisions. Should I adhere strictly to the letter of the law, or interpret its spirit? Different situations call for different responses: a conversation might suffice for some, while others might need a citation or even arrest to understand the seriousness of their actions. Wisdom is crucial in law enforcement.

This very short book delves into the theme of discretionary choices from the perspectives of both the issuer and the receiver. It explores the challenging decisions faced by a master and a slave. If the master is too lenient, he risks insubordination from others; too harsh, and he could compromise his witness and contradict his faith. How often do we flee from our mistakes, unwilling to confront those

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we've hurt or offended? And how often might we judge too harshly? This brief book is packed with personal insights, offering much to ponder about our own choices in life.

Greeting

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon [*name means "kindness"*] our dear friend and fellow worker-- 2 also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier--and to the church that meets in your home: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

4 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, 5 because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. 7 Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

8 Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, 9 yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love [*Paul could have appealed on his position as an Apostle, but rather appealed on love, giving Philemon a choice*]. It is as none other than Paul--an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- 10 that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus [*name means "profitable"*], who became my son while I was in chains. 11 Formerly he was useless to you [*Onesimus did not live up to his name but*

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lived contrary to it. Much like us, prior to coming to Jesus], but now he has become useful both to you and to me. [Paul uses the play on Onesimus' name to highlight that now he has come to the fullness of his name, and will also be profitable for Philemon as well.]

12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. 13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. 14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. *[Paul did not want to take the choice away from Philemon by just keeping his servant.]*

15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—*[Paul reminds Philemon that we do not always perceive that what may look like a curse in the beginning, God may have as a blessing later in store for us.]* 16 no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. *[Onesimus' status as a slave had not changed. His status in the world was still a slave; but his spiritual and eternal status was now one of a brother in Christ. Just like us. Our value is not measured by our earthly status, but of our heavenly position in Jesus.]* He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

Philemon's Obedience Encouraged

17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. *[Paul issued a blank check to Philemon and was*

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*willing to take on the debt of Onesimus. Does this sound like someone you know? Who paid your debt? Are you willing to do the same for another?]*19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand.

I will pay it back--not to mention that you owe me your very self. 20 I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. 22 And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

Farewell

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. 24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

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Chapter 1

Many of us are parents or grandparents and understand the profound bond between a child and parent. Over the years, I've asked many parents, "If a bus was hurtling down the road and your child stepped into its path, would you jump out to save them, even if it meant sacrificing your life?" Unsurprisingly, I've never heard a parent say "No." And I've certainly never heard anyone suggest, "Well, I'd send my maid or butler to take the hit instead." Sounds absurd, right?

As ludicrous as this idea might sound, many people believe something similar about God's sacrifice. They think that God sent a high-ranking angel to die for our sins, rather than coming Himself. This misconception arose shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection, as religious figures tried to rationalize the miraculous within their doctrinal confines. Today, two major cults propagate this belief, leading millions astray. When it comes to divine matters, worldly logic falls short. We should rely on faith rather than understanding when things seem beyond our grasp. Our human comprehension is infantile compared to God's.

In the text below, Paul addresses this heresy head-on. To deny who Jesus is, is essentially to deny His sacrifice. One cannot fully accept what Jesus did without acknowledging His true identity: God in the flesh, not an angel. Paul points to the Old Testament, which the religious Jews revered, to clarify that Jesus was worshipped—a

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practice reserved for God alone, according to the First Commandment. This reading reassures us that our Savior's death was the only sacrifice capable of redeeming us. Our divine Parent made the ultimate sacrifice for His children. Enjoy the scripture and find comfort in the knowledge that our spiritual Father did what only He could do.

God's Final Word: His Son

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, *[not a copy, not a counterfeit, but the exact thing in physical form]* sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

The Son Superior to Angels

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?

6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." *[1st Commandment is to only worship God]* 7 In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire." 8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of

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justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. 9 You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." 10 He also says, "In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. 11 They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. 12 You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

13 To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? 14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve [*Jesus was sent to save*] those who will inherit salvation?

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Chapter 2

One early morning, a man went fishing on a great river. He launched his boat and settled into a calm pool to fish. After a while, he grew tired, laid back in his boat, and decided to rest, quickly drifting off to sleep. Soon, the boat was rocking vigorously, waking him abruptly. He found himself caught in a strong current, rapidly approaching a waterfall. In a panic, he considered jumping out but the current was too forceful. Despite his attempts to steer the boat with his paddle, it was no use; the waterfall was imminent.

Our relationship with God can be likened to our relationships with a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Remember the early days of a relationship, filled with passion and the eagerness to be close to one another? That initial love drove us towards them. But over time, as comfort sets in, we might find ourselves putting the relationship on cruise control, just "floating" along. Many married folks will tell you about how they "drifted" apart until they found themselves pulled by strong currents towards inevitable disaster.

Similarly, our connection with God can suffer if we "drift" too, casually saying "Tomorrow, I'll read my Bible or go to church." Yet, tomorrow often slips away. You may be saved but feel distant from God... Have you been drifting? It's crucial to recognize that in any relationship, inaction or coasting on auto-pilot effectively means disengagement, allowing the sinful currents of the world to pull you further away.

As we learn more about Jesus, His plans, and purposes for our lives, don't just "make time" for Him—actively "TAKE TIME" to read,

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converse, and engage with your Father in Heaven. Every minute you invest, He meets you there, strengthening your bond. It's fertile ground for your seeds of faith.

Warning to Pay Attention

1 We must pay the most careful attention *[or hear carefully with urgency]*, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. *[It is like asking the question, "What must I do to be lost? The answer is "do nothing"]* 2 For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? *["if we ignore" is like disregarding the invitation to]* This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Jesus Made Fully Human

5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. *[Angels do not have dominion over the world. They are messengers sent by God to relay his Word and Will.]* 6 But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? 7 You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor 8 and put everything under their feet." In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them. *[The first chapter shows the deity of Jesus, this shows the humanity of Jesus. He was both fully God, yet fully human that*

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he could relate to us very personally.] 9 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Bringing Many Sons to Glory

10 In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. *[God's love for us had to show itself in sacrifice and God not sacrifice unless He added humanity to His deity and suffered on our behalf.]* 11 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. 12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises." 13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. *[The fear of death rules as a tyrant over humanity. But Christians have no need to fear death (though some, perhaps a fear of dying), not because death is their friend but because it is a defeated enemy that now serves God's purpose in the Believers life.]* 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason he *[Jesus]* had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he *[Jesus]* might become a merciful and faithful high

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priest in service to God, and that he *[Jesus]* might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he *[Jesus]* himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. *[No one can stand before God and say, "You don't understand what I've been through." He's been through it too. Because of His suffering, He offers the simplest path to salvation: believe and receive Him. You've failed, but He didn't. He's ready to exchange His success for your failures. What a trade!]*

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Chapter 3

According to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, by the time an average child reaches 18, they will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders on television alone. Does this mean they'll become violent? Not necessarily. However, such exposure undoubtedly affects them, potentially hardening their hearts to horrific sights that their eyes and minds should not have to endure.

To illustrate this, let me share a story from when I was in high school. I was in JROTC, and our leader, MSG Lee, was a Green Beret and Vietnam veteran. He was the toughest guy I've ever known, and we quickly became friends. He once shared with me his first experience in combat, where he took a life. "I fired, and saw the man fall. I knew I had just taken a life. That night was the worst I ever experienced. I was in a cold sweat and shaking all night. The next day, life went on and the killing got easier. But that first night was torment."

This type of experience has been recounted through decades and centuries of history. So, how does such a traumatic event become easier? Out of necessity, the heart hardens.

This same hardening can happen to us as we walk with Christ in a sinful world. The Bible repeatedly warns us not to let our hearts grow hard towards sin. In the text below, the author likens unbelief to sin. The notion that "My truth is my truth, and your truth is your truth" is one of the most common, popular, and deceptive lies circulating today. Unbelief in the Truth is a willful decision. It's not

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"I cannot believe," it's "I WILL NOT believe." It's a choice to deny, to reject acceptance. It's us choosing ourselves over God, claiming "my word is better than His WORD." And the more we engage in this, the harder our hearts become, and the easier it is to continue.

My dear brothers and sisters, guard your hearts! Keep God's word close. Learn it—the Word, the Truth—so that you can recognize the counterfeit when it presents itself.

Jesus Greater Than Moses

1 Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house," bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

Warning Against Unbelief

7 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your ancestors tested and tried me, though for forty years they saw what I did. 10 That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and

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they have not known my ways.' 11 So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.' "

12 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart [*"Unbelief is not inability to understand, but unwillingness to trust... it is the will, not intelligence, that is involved."* (Newell)] that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. 15 As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

Failure of the Wilderness Wanderers

16 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17 And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

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Chapter 4

The recent news about Israel can be unsettling. It's tough to hear about suffering and dying anywhere in the world, whether in Israel, Ukraine, Gaza, or America. Some of us may have experienced suffering ourselves during times of war or through domestic violence, gang-related incidents, or even robbery. The world is indeed full of dangers and hatred. So, how do we as believers balance the peace that God promises with the chaos of the "real world"? How do we find that "rest" mentioned in the next chapter?

Understanding what the author means by "rest" can bring comfort even in turbulent times. The Puritan John Owen said, "Rest means peace with God." In essence, finding Jesus is finding rest.

The opposite of rest is labor. To have God's rest means no longer needing to toil, work, or control. Unbelief is the root of labor and causes us to strive for peace. In Jesus, we rest in his peace. Unbelief drives us to work for our salvation, but in Jesus, that salvation is secure, and we can rest in the work he already accomplished. Unbelief compels us to fight for our security in this world, to protect our lives, to control our "world." In Jesus, we know our life in this world is already given to Him and is but a seed to be planted, that has died in Jesus in order to spring forth into real and eternal life. We rest in Jesus because we understand this life is but a grain of sand in time. Our hope lies not in the natural, but in the eternal.

Who wouldn't want to plant a rose seed to see the flower in bloom? What seed doesn't want to be planted to become what it was intended to be, in its full glorified, fragrant bloom!? In Jesus, we find

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rest when we look past the circumstances of the world and focus on Him and His promise. For He said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

If you do not have rest today, if you carry a burden that seems too heavy, turn your eyes and heart to Jesus. Release the control, and in believing faith, give it to Him, and let Him lead you into His rest.

A Sabbath-Rest for the People of God

1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "On the seventh day God rested from all his works." 5 And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

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8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Jesus the Great High Priest

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need

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Chapter 5

By: Bobby Greene

Today, I want to share something that ties in with Hebrews Chapter 5 and a powerful moment I experienced at an Elevation Worship concert. Hebrews 5 talks about how Jesus, like a high priest, understands our weaknesses and offers sacrifices for our sins. He's someone who gets what we go through.

At the concert, Pastor Steven Furtick gave a talk that really stuck with me. He mentioned that when we face tough times—like issues with health, relationships, or money—it might actually be because the devil sees something special in us that we haven't yet seen in ourselves. This got me thinking about how Hebrews 5 says Jesus faced challenges too, yet he overcame them and helped us in the process.

Hebrews 5:8-9 mentions, "...though He was a Son, [yet] He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him," This means that Jesus went through hard times to become a perfect leader for us, showing us that our own tough times can make us stronger and bring us closer to God.

This connection made me see my struggles in a new light. Just like Jesus, we can grow through what we face, and these challenges are actually signs that we're important to God's plan. With Jesus as our high priest who's been through it all, we can face anything knowing that these difficulties are helping us grow.

So, if you're feeling weighed down by problems, remember what we learn in Hebrews 5. These challenges aren't just random; they're opportunities to grow and show how strong we really are. Let's tackle these

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problems with confidence, knowing we're getting stronger and that Jesus is with us every step of the way.

Qualifications for High Priesthood

1 Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

A Priest Forever

5 In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."

6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." 7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. 11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.

Spiritual Maturity

12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid

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food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

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Chapter 6

By: John Go Boncan

We're all in different stages of our spiritual journey, but one thing remains consistent: the need for daily engagement with God's Word. This consistent engagement is crucial for deepening our relationship with God. If you haven't already made it a habit, consider setting aside time each day for reading the Bible, interpreting its messages, praying, and applying these lessons to your daily life.

Hebrews Chapter 6 continues the discussion from Chapter 5, highlighting the risks of deviating from the core teachings of the gospel to embrace a version of faith that fits better with popular culture. It also warns against the dangers of spiritual immaturity. When we remain spiritually immature, we can't grow properly in our faith. This stunted growth leads to doubt, discouragement, and eventually, if not addressed, to judgment.

The text warns that those who merely scratch the surface of their Christian faith and then slip into disobedience find it very difficult to restore their relationship with God without facing some consequences first. To avoid this, the passages encourage us to fully trust in God's promises and the work of Jesus Christ, while actively seeking to grow in godly wisdom.

While this sounds straightforward, it can be challenging to implement. One practical step is to use a Bible reading plan, which can provide structure and guidance. Many Bible apps offer a variety of reading plans for free. You might start with a commitment to read the Bible every day for the next 30 days. This regular, disciplined practice can significantly enhance your understanding and strengthen your spiritual foundation.

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The Peril of Not Progressing

1 Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. 3 And God permitting, we will do so.

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age 6 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

7 Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. 8 But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

A Better Estimate

9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case--the things that have to do with salvation. 10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. 11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. 12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

God's Infallible Purpose in Christ

13 When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "I will surely

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bless you and give you many descendants." 15 And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. 16 People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. 17 Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. 18 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged.

19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

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Chapter 7

By: Bobby Greene

Hebrews Chapter 7 talks about Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest, making him a very important and powerful figure. This chapter connects Melchizedek to Jesus, showing how Jesus is similar but even more significant.

Melchizedek was the King of Salem and also served as a priest, but Jesus is called our High Priest forever. This means Jesus is not just a religious leader like Melchizedek; He's the leader forever, and His role never ends. The big point here is that Jesus, as our High Priest, brings us a better agreement or covenant with God than the old one that required regular animal sacrifices.

Jesus' new covenant is better because:

1. **It lasts forever:** Jesus is always our priest, so we always have someone to help us connect with God.
2. **It's complete:** Jesus made one perfect sacrifice for us by giving up His own life, so we don't need any more sacrifices.
3. **It gives us direct connection to God:** We can talk to God directly because of what Jesus did, without needing anyone else to help us.
4. **It changes us inside:** Jesus' covenant works on making our hearts better, not just making us follow rules.

So, Hebrews 7 helps us see how Jesus is the ultimate priest and king who makes a lasting and complete way for us to be close to God. This is something really special and powerful for us as believers.

Melchizedek the Priest

1 This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, 2 and

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Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. First, the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness"; then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace." 3 Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God, he remains a priest forever.

4 Just think how great he was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave him a tenth of the plunder! 5 Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people--that is, from their fellow Israelites--even though they also are descended from Abraham. 6 This man, however, did not trace his descent from Levi, yet he collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. 7 And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8 In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. 9 One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, 10 because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Jesus Like Melchizedek

11 If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood--and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood--why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? 12 For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also. 13 He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.

14 For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. 15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."

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18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.

Greatness of the New Priest

20 And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, 21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.' " 22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

26 Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever.

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Chapter 8

By: Bobby Greene

Today, let's dive into Hebrews 8, which talks about the old and new covenants. In the past, under the old covenant, Jewish priests had to keep offering sacrifices of food or animals to ask for forgiveness from God. This system required continuous sacrifices because it was part of how they followed God's laws.

But Hebrews 8 introduces a big change with Jesus. The key idea here is that Jesus himself became the sacrifice. Unlike the old way where sacrifices had to be repeated, Jesus offered himself once and for all. By giving his life, he covered all our sins and took away our shame forever. That's the new covenant—a permanent, one-time offering that doesn't need to be repeated.

This change is huge. It means that instead of following a system of repeated rituals, we now have a direct, personal relationship with God. This new covenant puts God's laws in our hearts and minds. We're not just following rules; we're living with God's guidance written into who we are.

Because of what Jesus did, we don't have to keep offering sacrifices to be close to God. We're already forgiven through Jesus' sacrifice, which is enough forever. This gives us a freedom to live confidently and joyfully because we're continually covered by God's grace.

So, let's remember and appreciate how Jesus' sacrifice changes everything. It gives us a new way to live—not through our efforts but through his complete and everlasting forgiveness. Let this truth encourage us every day as we live out our faith.

The High Priest of a New Covenant

1 Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in

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heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

3 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6 But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

A New Covenant

7 For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. 8 But God found fault with the people and said: "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. 9 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. 10 This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

Chapter 9

By: Marko Solis

Hebrews 9 gives us a deep look into the new covenant, which is all about forgiveness because of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice, made once for all. This is crucial to our faith and Hebrews 9:24 really highlights an important lesson for our everyday life. It tells us that Christ didn't enter a man-made place of worship, which is only a copy of the real thing, but into heaven itself.

This makes me think about where we look for happiness. We often seek it in people like mentors or loved ones, or in things we enjoy, like sports. But these sources of joy can let us down because they aren't perfect or lasting.

The Bible teaches us that true and lasting joy comes from Jesus—the real deal, not just a copy. By depending on Him, we tap into a joy that is deep and never runs out because it comes from a perfect and eternal source.

Hebrews 9:15 also tells us that Jesus didn't just come to make us feel better temporarily; His sacrifice frees us from our sins and promises us an everlasting inheritance. This is way better than any temporary win or achievement.

So, the big takeaway is that while it's okay to enjoy life and relationships, they shouldn't be where we find our deepest joy. Instead, we should focus on Jesus, who gives us joy that lasts forever and never disappoints. This simple truth can really change how we live and find happiness.

The Earthly Sanctuary

1 Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. 2 A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were

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the lampstand and the table with its consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. 3 Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, 4 which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. 5 Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now.

Limitations of the Earthly Service

6 When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. 7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. 8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still functioning. 9 This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. 10 They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

11 But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by

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his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! 15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

The Mediator's Death Necessary

16 In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, 17 because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. 18 This is why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. 19 When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. 20 He said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which God has commanded you to keep." 21 In the same way, he sprinkled with the blood both the tabernacle and everything used in its ceremonies. 22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Greatness of Christ's Sacrifice

23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a

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sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Chapter 10

I used to visit my grandparents as a little boy, and they had a huge oak tree in their front yard. My brother and I couldn't resist climbing it. There's something about trees and kids—if a tree can be climbed, it seems to draw kids in like a magnet. Every visit, we'd challenge each other to see how high we could climb. Of course, this was after our parents had gone inside and couldn't see us. One day, my brother climbed really high, much higher than I thought I could. Feeling outmatched, I looked down and saw the tree's shadow stretching across the yard. To be "clever," I knelt and pretended to climb the shadow of the tree all the way to the top. Then I stood at the farthest point of the shadow and proclaimed I had beaten him.

As you can imagine, my brother wasn't impressed. He had climbed the tree; I had merely followed a shadow. He had engaged in a real, three-dimensional challenge, while I followed something that was merely two-dimensional.

As we continue into the book of Hebrews, keep this story in mind. Just as the two books of Corinthians serve as "milk" for new believers, Hebrews offers the "beef." It's a substantial book that dives deep into our walk with Christ and can be read and studied repeatedly to unearth the truths it contains. The most important tip for approaching this book is to read it with an open heart, allowing God to shape your ideas and thoughts. Those who read it with preconceived doctrines may struggle to fit their understanding into the text, rather than letting the text inform and transform their understanding. Let's see what the Lord has to say today.

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Christ's Sacrifice Once for All

1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. 4 It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Jesus' Death Fulfills God's Will

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, my God.' " *[Jesus]* 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"--though they were offered in accordance with the law. 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." *[Jesus]* He sets aside the first to establish the second. *[Jesus set aside the Old Covenant and established the New. The New then replaces the Old, He traded the shadow of a tree for the tree itself]* 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Jesus' Death Perfects the Sanctified

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never

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take away sins. *[Working with the shadow and not the reality]*¹² But when this priest *[Jesus]* had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,¹³ and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. 14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. *[Jesus on the cross]*

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: 16 "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." 17 Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." 18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice *[acts of atonement]* for sin is no longer necessary.

A Call to Persevere in Faith

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—*[even the Bible says there is a REAL VALUE in fellowshiping with one another. Whether in "church" or in prayer meetings like we hold (also a "church")]* and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

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The Just Live by Faith

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? *[Since religious sacrifices could only cover and not forgive sin, what hope is there for those who reject the actual TRUE blood of forgiveness Jesus offers. Rejecting Jesus is rejecting the only lasting hope of eternal grace offered to us]* 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. 35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay." 38 And, "But my righteous one will live by

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faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." 39 But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

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Chapter 11

Many people struggle with the concept of having faith in God, preferring to base their lives on "facts," "evidence," and "logic" rather than faith. However, the reality is that we all live by faith, in various forms, every day. We may try to deny it, but at its core, our lives are guided by faith in something—the real question is in what.

A few years ago, I found myself sitting across from a stranger during a job interview. He was assessing what I could bring to his company. I hoped to land the job, so I prepared thoroughly, gave the interview my all, and tried to convince him that I was the right fit. They hired me, and after starting the job, I received my first paycheck a week or two later, and then regularly after that.

Taking that job was an act of faith. I believed that after a week of work, I would receive a paycheck. If I had doubted, I might have demanded to be paid before starting. But my hope—that I would indeed be paid—drove my actions. We all live through similar experiences of faith. We may research a company thoroughly, but ultimately, taking a job there is a leap of faith, trusting in the testimony of others—much like how the Bible and millions of personal testimonies over thousands of years influence believers.

Expressions like “Put your money where your mouth is” or “Your walk needs to match your talk” are about demonstrating faith through action. For instance, claiming airplanes are safe is one thing; actually flying in one is the real test of belief.

Every day, we all exercise faith, whether it's trusting that our car brakes will work, or believing that popcorn will pop in the

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microwave. Living by faith is common to everyone; it's just a matter of what or whom you choose to place your faith in.

As you read the "Chapter of Faith," notice how many examples involve action following a declaration of faith. This is what true faith looks like—not just words, but actions that demonstrate our beliefs.

Faith in Action

1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.

3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

4 By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

5 By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away." For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

7 By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

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8 By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

The Heavenly Hope

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

The Faith of the Patriarchs

17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is

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through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 19 Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

23 By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. 25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

27 By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. 28 By faith he kept the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

29 By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

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By Faith They Overcame

30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. 31 By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, 40 since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

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Chapter 12

When I went to Army Basic Training in 1986, I was just 17 and brimming with excitement, ready to grow up—oh, the ignorance! What began as excitement quickly morphed into a nightmare. The drill sergeants seemed to despise us, and they were relentless! Nothing we did was ever right. The first few weeks were brutal: endless push-ups and every conceivable physical exercise. I loathed the first half of Basic Training.

But then, something shifted. I grew stronger, my steps more precise, and somehow, I even managed to make my bed correctly. The drill sergeants started to ease up a bit. By the last week, there was a noticeable sync among everyone. After graduation, I had a chance to chat casually with my drill sergeants and was struck by how much they genuinely cared about their platoon. They weren't the cruel taskmasters I initially thought; they put us through all that to ensure we made it to graduation—and it worked! That experience fundamentally changed my understanding of discipline.

To the young or inexperienced, discipline might seem like mere punishment. However, the mature understand its true purpose: a tool for strengthening. The pain I endured at the beginning of Basic Training felt like torture, but I later realized that this pain was necessary to strengthen my entire being. For those of you who work out, you know this well—you aim for the "burn" because you understand that this pain builds your body.

God loves you more than any drill sergeant or trainer could. He knows exactly where to apply the "burn" in your spiritual life. We

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can rest assured that His discipline always arrives at the right time in our lives, whether it's physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. God is the ultimate Drill Sergeant and Trainer. When we face His discipline, we can view Him through the eyes of a resentful child, thinking He is harsh, or we can see Him for who He truly is: a Father who loves us immensely and knows our capabilities. Though it may be painful for a moment, if we lean into His guidance and trust His process, we'll emerge stronger and more capable of fulfilling the purpose He has for us.

The Race of Faith

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

God Disciplines His Children

4 In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. 5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

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7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? 8 If you are not disciplined--and everyone undergoes discipline--then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! 10 They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 13 "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

Warning and Encouragement

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

The Mountain of Fear and the Mountain of Joy

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet

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blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

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Chapter 13

The last three chapters of Hebrews are fascinating as they guide us through a spiritual journey. Chapter 11 discusses faith, presenting it as our active belief. Chapter 12 delves into discipline, which represents our hope—it encourages us to persevere and grow stronger. The final chapter, Chapter 13, focuses on love, the fundamental purpose of our existence.

The timing of God's Word in our lives is impeccable. There will be challenging moments when our commitment to love others truly tests our faith. These challenges might arise from a family dispute or an unexpected twist in our life's path. During such times, it's crucial to turn to the Bible. The Scriptures help us stay on course, managing our emotions and reminding us that the greatest form of love is the love of choice. This means choosing to love even when our emotions urge us to act otherwise.

The Bible encourages us to avoid retaliating when we feel wronged, to forgive when it seems justifiable to hold a grudge, and to withhold condemnation even when it seems warranted. It reminds us that we have all been equally culpable at times and that, having received grace ourselves, we should likewise extend it to others.

GRACE – IT IS WHAT WE WERE BORN INTO WITH JESUS
AND WHAT WE LIVE BY DAILY.

Concluding Exhortation

1 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. 2 Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people

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have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. 3 Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

4 Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"

Concluding Religious Directions

7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away [*taken away, moved, swayed, or distracted*] by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods [*religious acts without the spirit of worship*], which is of no benefit to those who do so.

10 We have an altar [*the cross of faith*] from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. 11 The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. [*Outside the camp refers to the place of unclean things. Therefore inside the camp refers to institutional Judaism, or "religious institutionalism"*] 12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an

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enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. 15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

17 Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

18 Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. 19 I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

Benediction and Final Greeting

20 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

22 Brothers and sisters, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for in fact I have written to you quite briefly. 23 I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you.

24 Greet all your leaders and all the Lord's people. Those from Italy send you their greetings. 25 Grace be with you all.

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Chapter 1

Early in our country's history, an enemy attacked us, prompting a surge of patriotism. Bands played, and young men flocked to recruitment offices, eager to defend their nation. Women sent them off with kisses, flowers, and cheers, celebrating these heroes as they marched to war, inspired and confident. Then the first battle came. These brave men, standing in line, felt certain they could defeat the enemy swiftly and return home to dance with their sweethearts in victory. However, as the first shots rang out and friends fell beside them, the horrifying reality of battle set in. The sounds of cries and screams filled the air, overwhelming their senses. Many, unable to bear the shock, dropped their weapons and fled in fear. What started as a confident march to victory turned into a devastating defeat, with many battles still ahead.

We face a similar spiritual battle daily. We might boldly declare, "I am more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus!" with complete sincerity. Yet, how many of us waver when faced with the harsh realities of warfare? Many of the soldiers who retreated in that first battle eventually returned. Their initial fear gave way to a resolved focus not on the glory of war, but on the cause they were fighting for. They re-entered the fray with a changed perspective and purpose. The battles did not get easier—in fact, they got even harder. However, they now fought with a clear view of the finish line, understanding as James writes, "The testing of [their] faith produces perseverance."

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We all face battles. We know that all things work together for the good of those in Jesus. Thus, we can be assured that every battle, fight, or challenge in life is part of God's plan, which ultimately aims for our betterment—perhaps to increase our perseverance, bless others, or bring Him glory in the end.

Trial and Temptations

1 James, a servant *[willful slave by choice]* of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

2 Consider *[deem it, account it, think it, not FEEL IT]* it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever *[notice he did not say IF, but WHEN]* you face trials *[afflictions, persecution, distress]* of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. *[Trials don't produce faith, but when trials are received with faith, it produces patience.]* 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

The Perspective of Rich and Poor

9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. 10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with

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scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

Loving God Under Trials

12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; *[James knew the most people have a tendency to blame God when they find themselves in trials. Yet by HIS very nature, God is UNABLE to either be tempted nor does He Himself tempt anyone. Temptation does not come from God. Though He allows it, He himself does not entice us to evil. Our sin, and the sin of this world give access to us.]* 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire [when we mediate on the temptation is grows] has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. [The wages of sin is death, so ALL sin has an end game of death]

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

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Listening and Doing

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it--not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it--they will be blessed in what they do.

26 Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

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Chapter 2

James, the half-brother of Jesus, speaks very directly in his book. Initially skeptical of his brother's calling, James became a prominent leader of the early Christian church after the resurrection. Known for his straightforward approach, he doesn't mince words in this relatively short book. His main message? It's time to grow up.

Reflecting on this idea, I was pondering the true nature of faith during my commute in rush hour traffic. Faith, I realized, is a by-product of my love for Jesus, active even when unseen by others. As I mused on this, a car zipped in front of me, weaving and bobbing through traffic, cutting people off and causing a cascade of brake lights. Despite the driver's efforts to get ahead, I caught up to them a few minutes later. What struck me was the bumper sticker on their car: "Cross = Mercy." It made my heart sink, thinking about the message this driver conveyed to everyone they had just cut off.

Do we live out our faith even when we think no one is watching? This experience made me reflect on how we all demonstrate—or fail to demonstrate—our beliefs in everyday actions, like driving. Thousands of strangers see us every day. Are we showing love, compassion, grace, and mercy, or are we only vocal about our faith on Sundays and in small groups? Even if your car doesn't bear a religious bumper sticker, imagine driving as if Jesus were your passenger. You never know how a simple act of kindness on the road can impact someone who may be struggling at the end of their tether.

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Favoritism Forbidden

1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. [*based on class, ethnicity, nationality, religion or politically as examples*] 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? [*But also do not go the other side and show only favor to the poor over the wealthy what is knowns class warfare. Rather accept them both as equals*]

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? [*This is in reference to Jesus, and the first believers.*] 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that

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gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Faith and Deeds

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? *[Intellectual faith – what we first start off with. We think of the faith we just experienced. We think and discuss doctrines, theology, and discuss the particulars of this new faith]* 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. *[Emotional Faith – My belief is governed by my emotions. When on an emotional High, my faith is strong, when on an emotional low, my faith is weak.]* 20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. *[Mature faith. The "fruits" of our faith tree.]* 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. *[James highlights that while faith is*

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essential for salvation, its natural by-product is "action" or "deeds." Although we are never saved by our good works, genuine faith naturally manifests itself through good deeds. Faith must come first because no amount of good deeds can earn Heaven on their own. Many people mistakenly believe that their good works will save them, but these deeds can never match the perfect work that Jesus completed or compare to the holiness of God. Thus, our good works will always fall short, and we are saved solely by His grace and our confession of faith in Jesus. This act of faith initiates a change of heart, from which good deeds naturally flow. Conversely, those who profess faith but do not produce good deeds should re-examine their faith to ensure it is genuine. True Christ-centered faith will always yield the fruit of good deeds.]

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

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Chapter 3

I remember the old saying, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." We often used this retort as kids during verbal skirmishes, our go-to defense when we lacked a sharp comeback. I can't recall where I first heard it. It seemed sensible in theory but was quite superficial in practice. In reality, words can hurt more than physical injuries. I'd even argue that all of us have been wounded by words at some point. While words may not break bones, they can hurt, sting, torment, torture, and destroy lives every second of the day.

James begins this chapter by discussing teachers, but the real focus is on our tongues and how we use them. Let's delve into this chapter slowly. Maybe we'll all grasp the wisdom behind why God designed us with two ears and only one mouth.

Taming the Tongue

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. 2 We all stumble [our spiritual progress hindered] in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. 3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. 4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. 5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the

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parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. *[James isn't suggesting that we never speak or take a vow of silence; in many ways, that would actually be simpler than mastering true self-control over our words. He uses metaphors like the bridle, the rudder, and even fire to illustrate how these elements can accomplish tremendous good for God when they are controlled properly.]* 7 All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. *[When we accept Christ into our hearts, a dual nature emerges within us. Although we do not become sinless, as the sin nature still exists, it no longer has dominion over us because the Holy Spirit also resides within us. Maturing in Christ means increasingly embodying the nature of the Holy Spirit and diminishing the influence of our sin nature. Alone, without God's power, the sin nature tends to regain control; we cannot tame it by ourselves. This is evident when we can praise God in church on Sunday morning and then curse the car in front of us on the drive home. It's a stark reminder that without God's strength, our efforts to control our words—and our sin nature—are futile.]* 9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

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Two Kinds of Evil

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, *[the words actually refer to someone who has a critical, contentious, fight-provoking manner]* do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" *[this wisdom is the wisdom claimed by would-be teachers or preachers whose lives contradict their claims, and elevates them and their ideas by worldly standards and makes gain their life's highest goal.]* does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. *[the root of disorder, and EVERY evil practice. Look through history and you can typically find, very clearly selfish ambition and envy]* 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure *[the absence of any sinful motive];* then peace-loving *[kind when you have the right to be stern],* considerate *[gentle, patient, fair],* submissive *[willing to yield, not stubborn],* full of mercy *[full of good will, kindness, clemency]* and good fruit *[works, acts, deeds],* impartial *[fair]* and sincere *[not pretending to be what you are not. Unmasked, real]*. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

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Chapter 4

One of my favorite shows growing up was “I Dream of Jeannie” How wonderful would it be to just have every desire come true? What do you think would really happen to this world if genies did exist? The skies are now jam-packed, and air traffic controllers are local magicians trying to keep track of who wished to fly faster than sound. Meanwhile, the dog wished for endless bones, causing your backyard to look like an archaeological dig site. And yes, chocolate fountains on every street corner, because someone wished to make the world sweeter. At least we forget, homes spontaneously redecorate based on dreams or the latest Pinterest boards.

Submit Yourself to God

1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? *[This question sets the foundation for this sermon. James is going to challenge us all to look at ourself, internally. Self-examination is always one of the first steps toward the Father]* 2 You desire *[lust, covet]* but do not have, so you kill *[murder]* *[perhaps not physically murder, but envy, anger, and bitterness is murder according to Jesus, all these things are the opposite of giving life.]* You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. *[This points to the futility of living for the desires for pleasure. Not only is it a life of conflict, but also an unsatisfied life.]* 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. *[We should remember that the purpose of prayer is not*

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to persuade God to do our bidding, like a genie in a lamp. The purpose of prayer is to align our will with HIS, and to be in partnership WITH HIM, to ask HIM to accomplish HIS WILL in us and on earth.] 4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. *[The "world" spoken here does not mean people, but rather the worldly system of self-focused selfishness, greed, jealousy, hatred etc.... We have to live within this worldly system, but we are to be light in it, showing others the better way of grace, kindness, love and forgiveness through Jesus.]* 5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?

6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

Humility Cures Worldliness

7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. *[Notice the priority listed here. FIRST submit, or humble yourself before God, THEN resist, or oppose the devil. First we must acknowledge WE are powerless to God, THEN he gives us the power, weapons, discernment, sword, to oppose the devil. Thos who say. "I don't need help" or "I can do it myself" or "I am too manly to seek God" are destined to struggle and fall.]* 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

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[And He will lift you up so that others may see God's goodness and praise HIS name. The secret to life is knowing YOU are here for God's glory, not the other way around. When that truth embeds itself into your heart, then you will see your purpose and live in that purpose and feel a victory you never knew possible.]

Do Not Judge a Brother

11 Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you-who are you to judge your neighbor?

Boasting About Tomorrow

13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. *[think of how many people of the past 2 thousand years read this statement, that can now attest to it. We are mortal, though our fleshly mind we sometimes think THIS TIME is the only TIME.]* 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." *[This is a hearts position of our humble position in the world. We are all here for this appointed time. To affect the world while we are here. What impact are you making for the eternal kingdom that awaits us all?]* 16 As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting

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is evil. 17 If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.

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Chapter 5

The Holidays

Who doesn't relish the holiday season? It's almost that time again! Soon, we'll be whipping up a feast, dedicating hours to crafting delicious dishes, and stringing up countless lights as we usher in Christmas. Oh, how I love to decorate with lights! Yes, I'm THAT GUY—though my wife keeps me in check. If it were up to me, I'd have a Clark Griswold-style house! She may not know it, but she goes all out for Thanksgiving, preparing an array of wonderful foods and desserts (which explains my "roundness," haha). But we truly enjoy it. It's astonishing how long the preparations take compared to the eating: weeks to set up, yet only an hour to take down. And just like that, the holiday seems to vanish after all the hard work.

Ever noticed how our eyes often are bigger than our stomachs? In fact, our eyes never seem to get full at all. The more they see, the more they want, and this "want" morphs into desire. Here's a lesson at the fork in the road for today: Our senses really are windows to our hearts (hearing, seeing, smelling, touching). They all can connect to our heart—our desires.

James addresses this point straightforwardly. The wealthy individuals mentioned early on may represent a specific group, but this also challenges all brothers and sisters in Christ who view earthly riches as their main source of happiness and peace. It's a caution against being motivated by worldly possessions rather than focusing on Christ as their source.

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Our Father isn't against wealth. He opposes the love of wealth and the pursuit of worldly means to gain it. Regardless of how much or little we have in our bank accounts, if we prioritize material wealth, we embody these cautioned against in James's message.

Warning to Rich Oppressors

1 Now listen, you rich people [*those who live independently of God*], weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. [*lived for the pleasures of the world, made it your focus and mission. Not storing up treasures in heaven.*] 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. [*living without regards or consideration for others*] The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. [*self-focused, self-absorbed life.*] You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered [*what did Jesus say about murder? That if you hold bitterness in your heart toward another, you are guilty of this sin.*] the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

Patience in Suffering

7 Be patient, then [*for this reason, consequently, instead of this*], brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. [*The farmer does not wait in vain. He KNOWS the fruit of his labor WILL produce. He waits with*

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*expected, and excited anticipation. This is how we should wait. With an expectation!]*⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

9 Don't grumble [*murmur, grieve, groan, grudge sigh*] against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! [*Jesus looks at our heart and motives and will convict us of an improper heart. (Thank the Lord)*]¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

¹² Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear--not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned. [*in this time there were two types of oaths, Binding, and Non-binding. Oaths that did not include the Name of God were considered non-binding and to use those was a way to "cross your fingers behind your back". These were dishonest of course. Jesus tells us we need not to swear at all, simply let honest always prevail and an oath is not required. Your own word should always be credible enough. Be people of strong character. You said you would, so that should be enough to convince someone you will.*]

The Prayer of Faith

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. [*Here we are getting to the Christian source – God should be included in all our actions,*

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troubled or happy.] 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. *[oil has a double reference here. First it was a symbol of the Holy Spirit, but it also referred to the best medical care of that time. Oil was widely used for medicinal purposes. We need not forsake one for the other.]* 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. *[The greatest sickness WILL be forgiven, for that sickness is sin. That healing is a guarantee, regardless of the body, a temporal vessel is made whole. If the spirit is not healed, the body matter not.]* 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

Bring Back the Erring One

19 My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. *[Most people don't deliberately stray off the path. Often, it happens gradually, just one degree at a time. All believers are called to love one another and use that love to guide our brethren—both men and women—back to the truth. There's a special blessing for those with a heart*

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for reconciliation, who help return a wandering soul back to Christ.]

BOOK OF 1 PETER

Chapter 1

I don't like traffic, and I doubt I'll ever meet someone who does. Yet, every day we're stuck in it—freeways at a standstill, inching along. Watching others during these jams, it struck me how similar this is to our spiritual lives. Traffic jams are like the trials of life; they're out of our control, and we must endure them. The Bible often mentions that we will face trials.

How do you handle these trials? Some people try to force their way through as quickly as possible, honking and flashing lights, trying to control the flow. This rarely works. They might advance a car length or two, but eventually, they rejoin the jam, often more frustrated than before, having caused further chaos.

Then there are the "bumper huggers." They accept the jam but stick so close to the car in front that nobody can cut in front. Focused solely on themselves and their destination, they aggressively guard their space, staring straight ahead, avoiding any eye contact as if it were against their religion.

And then there are those who just ride it out. They don't like it, but they find joy even in the jam, knowing it's temporary and they'll eventually reach their destination. They cooperate with fellow drivers, letting others merge into their lane, signaling their moves, showing courtesy and compassion.

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As you reflect on verses 13-16, think about this analogy during your next trial. It may help you maintain your patience.

1 Peter was written after Rome burned in AD 64. Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the fire, leading to severe persecution. Peter wrote this letter to teach these persecuted believers how to live victoriously amidst hostility without losing hope or growing bitter, trusting in the Lord and looking forward to His second coming. He emphasized that by living an obedient life under duress, Christians can witness and evangelize effectively in a hostile world—a lesson still relevant as our world becomes increasingly intolerant of the Christian faith.

Greeting to the Elect Pilgrims

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise to God for a Living Hope

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

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6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Be Holy

13 Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

17 Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. 18

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For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed [bought, purchased from bondage] from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

The Enduring Word

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.

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Chapter 2

I've always enjoyed traveling, seeing new places, and meeting different people. Currently, cruising is my favorite way to travel. It allows me to embark on a journey with minimal worry, letting the ship carry me to various destinations. Whenever we dock at different ports and countries, I am keenly aware that I am a foreigner. I often have excursions booked to explore significant sites, enjoying my purposeful travels with a clear destination in mind. Not every port appeals to me, nor do I visit every shop, because my time is limited and I have specific goals to achieve. Can you see where I'm going with this metaphor?

The chapter below illustrates how our citizenship transitions once we join the nation of God. We become foreigners in this world, pilgrims on a journey. We are called to live respectfully among others, obeying local laws and honoring leaders, yet we are driven by a deeper mission. Our goal is to spread Christ's love as widely as possible and to embody love in every action and interaction.

This is a profound chapter, so I won't belabor the point but encourage you to reflect deeply on your role in it. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what your purpose is and how you might enhance your pilgrimage in this land.

Our Inheritance Through Jesus' Blood

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

BOOK OF 1 PETER

The Living Stone and a Chosen People

4 As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him-- 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8 and, "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Living Godly in a Pagan Society

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and pilgrims, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

BOOK OF 1 PETER

Submission to Government

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. *[Peaceful, lawful protest is a right in this country. However, protests that are imbued with bitterness, discord, hatred, and slander are sinful. For instance, while you may disagree with the current leadership in the state or country, as believers, we should never speak against the character of our leaders. We are allowed to voice disagreements with their policies, but we are not called to curse those in leadership. Yes, pray for them. Yes, refuse to commit immoral acts. Yes, ask God to bless them. But no, do not curse or protest violently. God is aware of who is in leadership and even has a purpose and plan for them. So, trust God to execute His divine will while we walk in love and forgiveness, demonstrating the same grace that Jesus showed us. God will handle the rest]* 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. 16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. 17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Submission to Masters

18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. *[those in authority over you, such as an employer today]* 19 For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 20 But

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how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

BOOK OF 1 PETER

Chapter 3

I was raised without church influence in California with my mom, or as a Jehovah's Witness in Texas with my dad, giving me only a cultish perspective of Christianity. When I finally came to the faith at 20, it was like blinders fell from my eyes! The more I read the Bible and attended church, the clearer I saw the flaws in my past. But I also began noticing flaws everywhere around me. After much confusion, I finally understood the clear grace of salvation, Jesus's open love for me, and the pervasive darkness in the world. I quickly became an outspoken evangelist, calling out anything I perceived as ungodly—T-shirts, records, jewelry, billboards, songs—you name it, I called it out. My heart was in the right place; I wanted others to experience the grace of forgiveness and the liberty of light and love. However, my approach was misguided.

It wasn't until a good friend said to me, "Tim, it's clear you love the Lord with your whole heart. But brother, you're like a flamethrower! You're not just spreading light, but massive heat! You're burning people up. God wants you to be a laser beam, not a flamethrower." This made me pause and reconsider my methods. Then, I read verse 15 of this chapter.

This chapter is WONDERFUL. If you've ever wondered what it means to be a Christian—what to do, how to act, how to live out your faith day-to-day—THIS CHAPTER IS FOR YOU! It's where the rubber meets the road. I pray that you read it with an open heart and let the Holy Spirit guide and speak to you.

BOOK OF 1 PETER

Submission to Husbands

1 Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. *[Back then, and even more so today, a Believer's best tool to witness to others about the saving power of Jesus is through our ACTIONS and Behavior. If you want someone to truly believe, live a life that demonstrates the grace, forgiveness, gentleness and kindness that was shown to us through Jesus. That demonstrates is more powerful than any words you use. Then, once your friend sees the result of your salvation, then words can be used to bring them to direct them to the cross.]* 3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. 4 Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. *[Peter is NOT saying that makeup, hairstyles, and jewelry etc. are not to be worn. He is saying one should not gauge ones beauty on such shallow outward things. True beauty lies within. As the saying goes, "If the fence needs to be painted – PAINT IT"]* 5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, 6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

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A Word to Husbands

7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. *[Men, consider this verse. For it points directly to meeting the emotional needs of your spouse. And notice your wife is called your “partner” not servant, not subordinate. And look at the end result.... “so that nothing will hinder your prayers.” This is where the term, “ministry (servanthood) starts in the home first.” How we as men care for our spouse will have a direct effect on the blessings the Lord will show all throughout our lives.]*

Suffering for Doing Good

8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. 11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." *[What a wonderful PROMISE! Have you ever wondered if God hears your prayers? Here is a key to KNOW that He WILL.]*

Suffering for Right and Wrong

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not

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fear their threats; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Jesus' Suffering and Ours

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits-- 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. *[Now we can understand the whole ark story. Why and what it represented even WAY back then. It foreshadowed the baptism, death in the water (the old man), but being raised to new life (Noah's family)]*

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Chapter 4

The human body is fascinating. For instance, when it goes into shock, an odd thing happens: blood retreats from the extremities—arms, legs, and head—and rushes to protect the heart and vital organs. That’s why they say to cover someone after an accident; their limbs get cold due to reduced blood flow, and they might become lightheaded or confused. The body instinctively knows what’s most important and safeguards it.

When I was about 20, living in Houston, a freak winter storm struck hard. Everything was frozen, roads were impassable, and power was out. To make matters worse, I was recently unemployed. My brother and I sat in our very cold, dark apartment, burning newspaper in the fireplace, trying to make some kind of biscuits from flour and water—not the finest culinary moment for us. With nothing to do and nowhere to go, all I could do was sit and reflect on my life, the path that brought me to that miserable point, and its grim prospects. I guess you could say I experienced a kind of spiritual shock during that quiet, transformative time.

Not long after, I gave my heart to the Lord. Though the ice melted and my circumstances were still dire, life suddenly felt warmer. I had nothing but a Bible, a borrowed tape recorder, and a stack of cassette tapes from a former Green Beret turned preacher from Kansas. It was one of the BEST times and fondest memories of my life, sitting on the floor soaking up hours of teachings about this new faith I had embraced.

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This book of Peter was penned during a time of severe persecution under Emperor Nero, a notoriously brutal leader. Notice how Peter encourages his readers? He reminds them that suffering isn't just about mourning or despair. Suffering brings us back to the center, much like blood rushes to protect the heart. It allows us to reprioritize and refocus on what truly matters. Suffering isn't punishment but an opportunity to realign our lives with God.

Some people dwell on what they've lost, consumed by grief over the past, leading to prolonged suffering with no joy or peace, causing their lives to spiral downward. In contrast, those who grow in faith focus on what remains, using what they have to bless others.

As we enter this holiday season, consider this: joy, peace, and happiness aren't found in abundance but through our love for the Father and the humility we show towards others.

Living for God

1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. 2 As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 6 For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human

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standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.

Serving for Gods Glory

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. *[even in severe suffering, love remains with you. Compassion, forgiveness, mercy, gentleness, kindness, goodness, thankfulness. All the gifts of the spirit are still there with you.]* 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Suffering for Being a Christian

12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

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17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

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Chapter 5

Do you ever feel like our time is shrinking? With so many hours in a day and so much to do, our schedules become packed. Sometimes, it feels overwhelming. The demands of work don't lessen; they seem to grow. We're burdened with lists of tasks and responsibilities, wondering how we'll manage to get it all done. Whew... just thinking about all those items on my "to-do" list is stressing me out. I need to find a mental "happy place" quickly!

I imagine myself at a lake, fishing. I spot the perfect place, and my fish finder indicates a big school just sitting there, about 50 feet away. I don't just drop my line in the water. Instead, I pull back and cast toward the target with ANTICIPATION and HOPE. All I need to do now is reel it in. I don't have to see everything happening under the water. I just do what I can, and let God decide which fish, and when, will strike my bait. Maybe that's why fishing is so relaxing for many. We release control, do our part the best we can, and let God handle the size and timing of the catch.

Hmm, there might be a lesson in "casting" here... perhaps verse 7 will resonate more with you today.

To the Elders of the Flock

1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed:
2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the

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flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Submit to God, Resist the Devil

5 In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes *[the verb used here pictures God as one who places Himself in battle against such individuals]* the proud but shows favor to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7 Cast *[not "lay them", but "THROW THEM" to God. Not with doubtful skepticism, but in joyful release.]* all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

8 Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. *[Peter again confirms that as Believer's are life will not always be one of peace and tranquility. There will be times that we will suffer. But this is temporary, and the results of our suffering will bring us strength and more faith in Him.]* 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

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Final Greeting

12 With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. 13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

BOOK OF 2 PETER

Chapter 1

I've always been intrigued by the idea of baking. As a kid, I even toyed with the idea of becoming a chef. My first job was in a restaurant, albeit as a dishwasher, but still, it felt like a start. From that steamy corner, I could watch the chefs at work, skillfully creating delicious dishes. Inspired, I would head home, dig into my mom's recipe book, and invariably end up in the desserts section. The cake decorations were mesmerizing. So, I gave baking a shot. How hard could it be, right? Just follow the recipe, and voilà—a splendid, beautiful creation awaits. Well, not quite. My cakes turned out more like Picasso's abstracts, and they tasted like a mix of sawdust and axle grease! Clearly, recipes aren't as simple as following the words on a page.

Below, we have a recipe laid out for us, but intriguingly, it's presented in REVERSE. Peter begins with the END PRODUCT—faith—and then works backward to show how to enhance it. Ironically, while faith is both the starting point and the ultimate goal of our journey with Christ, building it is like making a banquet-sized pie from a single-serve one you'd find at a convenience store. Our Father has indeed given us a wondrous recipe. The base ingredient for your faith is Love, on which everything else must be built to grow our fledgling faith. It's a compelling read. Enjoy delving into it and look out for the promises that follow, promising us not to lose sight of our purpose with God or to lose sight of Him in troubled times.

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Background for 2 Peter: This letter was penned as almost a last will and testament by Peter, aimed at exposing and combating the influx of false teachers in the church. Believed to be written from prison in Rome shortly before his martyrdom, Peter wrote this letter to warn his beloved fellow believers about the doctrinal dangers they faced. According to reliable tradition, Peter was martyred by crucifixion, requested to be crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die as his Savior had. This act is claimed to be the origin of what we now recognize as the peace symbol.

Greeting

1 Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: 2 Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Confirming One's Calling and Election

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Fruitful Growth in the Faith

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual

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affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

10 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Prophecy and Scripture

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

The Trustworthy Prophetic Word

16 For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. 17 He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." 18 We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

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19 We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

BOOK OF 2 PETER

Chapter 2

Being a Christian is not for the faint of heart. Many hold the false impression that Christians are weak, passive, and quiet—mere mice scurrying about. However, being a member of the faith is akin to being a rebel, a warrior, someone who goes against the societal grain and persists on an unpopular path. In fact, it is much easier to not be a believer than it is to embark on and remain steadfast in the walk of faith. This has been true throughout history.

Unfortunately, some have infiltrated the faith not to embrace the truth but to sow error, deceive others, or for ill-gotten gain. As a result, many have been led astray from the truth or have fallen prey to self-centered schemes, manipulations, and lies. Subsequently, many have abandoned the faith or pointed to these deceivers as evidence that the truth is a lie.

Over the years, I've met many who have fallen away. Some were bitter, some resentful, others simply in denial or outright hostile toward the church. Invariably, when I've had the chance to engage in meaningful conversation with them, the root cause of their disillusionment was always the church, a pastor, or someone within the church. However, when I asked, "So, what has Jesus done to offend you so much?" they faltered. The usual response was, "Jesus? Offend me? Well, nothing, BUT..."

This brings us to the next chapter of 2 Peter, where Peter warns us, nearly 2000 years ago, about the deceivers who would enter our midst and cause others to stumble. This chapter stresses the importance of leaders having the correct "posture of heart." It reminds

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me of something an old pastor once told me about the three G's that can lead believers astray: 1. Gold, 2. The Girls/Guys, 3. The Glory. To these, I add a fourth: 4. The Guide.

These 4 words can also help us to identify the snakes in our midst.

1. **Gold** – Those teachers, preacher types who focus on growing their own wallets, or their own personal ministries.
2. **The Girls/Guys** – Those Christian leaders who try to redefine moral values away from Biblical moral values. Or who attempts to justify their immoral lifestyle in order to keep from walking the path the Bible defines. (This is not saying they don't love people where they are, but rather they redefine what the Bible says about sin.)
3. **Guide** – Those leaders that use any book or quotes outside of the Holy Bible to establish their teachings. Or use a couple of verses in the Bible to prove their point, instead of letting the full scriptures define Truth. If you go to church and never have to bring or open your Bible – be careful and take a hard look!
4. **Glory** – Those teachers, (and there are many) who would rather preach and promote their ministry or themselves, instead of proclaiming and pointing everyone to the Cross of Jesus and/or worshiping God.

Always remember: a true leader from God will always point you towards God, never elsewhere. For all life's answers lie at the cross and within His Word—the Holy Bible

False Teachers and Their Destruction

1 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. [*A prophet spoken*

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of in the Bible is not only one who tells the future.... But more correctly, someone who proclaims the will and direction of God. Who speaks for God. So a false prophet is someone who falsely speaks God's will and direction to others.] 2 Many will follow their depraved conduct and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.

Doom of False Teachers

4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the depraved conduct of the lawless 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—9 if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. 10 This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the flesh and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, they are not afraid to heap abuse on celestial beings; 11 yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not heap abuse on such beings when bringing judgment on them from the Lord.

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Depravity of False Teachers

12 But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish. 13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. 14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood! 15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. 16 But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey--an animal without speech--who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

17 These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them.

Deception of False Teachers

18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them." [*a logical question to ask yourself for examination.... "what masters me?"*] 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have

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known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud."

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Chapter 3

Remember high school? I certainly do. Even back in the “old days,” there were certain kids who just didn’t seem to “fit in.” They were often labeled as “nerds,” “squares,” “geeks,” “lame,” and so forth. You know the type—thick glasses, pocket protectors, and fashion about 15 years out of date. They typically carried oversized backpacks (long before that became trendy) or even briefcases. One thing they all had in common: they were very, very serious and focused on their academic “careers.”

School could be, and I suspect was, brutal for them. I wasn’t exactly one of them, but I could check a few of those boxes, so I felt some of the sting of bullying too. Looking back, I can admire something they possessed that I greatly lacked back then: FOCUS. They all had their eyes on a bigger prize beyond high school. The very people we mocked are often the ones we admire today, as many have become MDs, scientists, attorneys, or leaders in business and even in our nation. They held the key to the future even then—a determination to focus on what was to come, something they hadn’t yet seen but believed in, rather than what was right in front of them.

As believers, we face a similar situation. Peter addresses this in the last chapter of the final book he wrote before his death. This “deathbed” confession is incredibly powerful. Listen and take to heart his words of encouragement. I pray it strengthens your faith and hope in what we have to look forward to.

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The Day of the Lord

1 Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. 3 Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. [It is no surprise that more and more people ridicule the Bible and it's teaching today. Only 4% of Gen Z (those 24 years old and younger) even claim Jesus today. The number are dropping, and these words that Peter spoke so long ago can be seen easily in our very own country today.] 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. [This is not a literal thousand year to a day, but a hyperbole to describe how "time" is not measured by God as it is for us. And to describe His patience for us. What seems to be "forever" to us, is merely a blink of time to God.] 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

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The Day of the Lord

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Be Steadfast

14 So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. *[Peter reminds us that Scripture CAN BE twisted and distorted. Just because someone quotes the scripture doesn't mean they teach Biblical truth. We have probably all seen or heard this at one time or another. That is why the Bible encourages us to search the scripture out, and to learn how to read the scripture with understanding.]*

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17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

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Chapter 1

When I was in 8th grade, I had to take Biology. I was thrilled at the prospect of finally getting to dissect a frog—funny how such things impress young minds. But my Biology teacher was stern and pretty intimidating; I never saw him smile. His serious demeanor and high-level teaching made me fear being the class dunce. A few months later, a friend invited me to join his Boy Scout troop. To my shock, the Troop Master was my Biology teacher! I braced myself for immediate expulsion but, surprisingly, he welcomed me warmly.

As I attended more meetings and camping trips, I realized he treated me just as well as he did the other scouts. This new relationship changed how I perceived him back at school. He wasn't so scary anymore, and I could listen and ask questions without fear of condemnation. Though some concepts were still over my head, I now knew it was due to my ignorance, not his supposed meanness. He hadn't changed; my perspective of him had transformed through our relationship.

Similarly, God desires a relationship with us. Many of us view Him as a distant Judge, ready to punish every misstep. However, like my experience with my teacher, we don't truly know Him until we engage directly. One way God designs for us to know Him is through our relationships with others. As John says in verse 3, he proclaims

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the Truth so we may have fellowship, and this fellowship extends to God. He created us for relational living because that's His nature.

This might be tough for the introverts—I'm one myself—but God didn't call us to be Lone Ranger Christians. The health of our relationship with God often mirrors our relationships with others. Take a hard look at these relationships; often, God shows us where forgiveness is needed or where we need to extend grace. By confessing and forgiving, we step closer to God, fulfilling His design for relational harmony. (verse 9)

The Incarnation of the Word of Life

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. *[Jesus]* 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our joy complete.

Light and Darkness, Sin and Forgiveness

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

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8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. *[Our denial and claim there is no “sin” means Jesus (God) lied about the need for a Redeemer. That Jesus did not need to come in our place. If we are without sin, then the WORLD itself is without sin. And God is a liar. But, if we acknowledge ANY sin anywhere in the world, then we too must also be guilty of sin. And the world, as well as us, need Jesus to redeem us. For not even one tiny sin may dwell in God presence.]*

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Chapter 2

Throughout my entire relationship with my wife, she always wore glasses. Recently, she bravely underwent cataract surgery on both eyes within a short period. The surgery itself was fairly quick and, despite a slightly annoying recovery phase, she healed beautifully. She's always been gorgeous to me, but I remember her remarking on how much clearer and more vibrant everything appeared afterward. She hadn't realized the extent of her impaired vision until she received her new, clear lenses.

Similarly, holding onto offenses, enduring divisions, and harboring hatred can cloud our vision. Small grievances—like being cut off in traffic, hurt by offhand comments, or irritated when the wrong hymn plays at church—can all smear our lens of perception. And when someone dares to sit in “our” pew on Sunday, heaven help them! These might seem trivial, but they gradually obscure our view.

We see divisions everywhere: national (America versus the world), regional (North versus South), educational (Texas versus OU), economic (rich versus poor), racial, cultural (rap versus country, young versus old), and, of course, political (left versus right). All these divisions, except the biblical division of sheep versus goats, aim to split us apart and conquer our unity.

When we cling to these divisive or offensive views, we wander toward blindness, losing clarity of thought. What do you choose to focus on?

However, there is hope if you've been caught up in these divisive traps. Jesus remains our advocate (verse 1). He offers us new lenses

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every day, starting with self-awareness, confession to Him, and forgiving the petty grievances in our lives. Each act of forgiveness and extension of grace clears our vision a bit more, helping us see the Father more clearly. I encourage you to take a moment to ask the Father if there's any bitterness or cloudiness affecting your perspective. Then, in faith, take the next step towards clarity.

The Test of Knowing Jesus

1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate [*defense attorney*] with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice [*one who already paid the penalty of our Guilty Plea*] for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Love and Hatred for the Fellow Believers

3 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. 4 Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete [*completely accomplished*] in them. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live [*dwell, remain, abide, reside*] in him must live [*conduct oneself, regulate one's life*] as Jesus did.

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true Light [*torch, lamp, which represents the presence of God*] is already shining.

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9 Anyone who claims to be in the Light but hates [*verb, the act of showing*] a brother or sister is still in the darkness [*ignorant of divine things*]. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the Light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 11 But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded [*to obscure, blunt the mental discernment, darken the mind*] them.

Reasons for Writing

12 I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. 14 I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Not Loving the World

15 Do not love [*agape – the free choice to give yourself for something or someone*] the world [*worldly affairs*] or anything in the world. If anyone loves [*agape*] the world, love for the Father is not in them. 16 For everything in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

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Warnings Against Denying the Son

18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. 21 I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.

22 Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ [the Anointed. Savior. Only Path]. Such a person is the antichrist--denying the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.

24 As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is what he promised us--eternal life.

26 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. 27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him.

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God's Children and Sin

28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him.

Chapter 3

While I was in the Army, one of my sergeants yelled at us one day, “STOP! SLOW DOWN, KNUCKLEHEADS! Practice does NOT make perfect! PERFECT PRACTICE makes perfect!” That phrase stuck with me because it encapsulated such truth. His point was that we should slow down when disassembling our weapons, take everything out correctly and in order, clean it methodically, and then reassemble it accurately. Practicing these correct steps in sequence would make us faster and more proficient. Otherwise, we’d merely perfect the incorrect method.

This chapter presents some tough wording, very absolute in our translations: “No one who is born of God will continue to sin... They cannot go on sinning.” Wow, that seems to exclude me from the kingdom of God! However, there's hope when we understand the original context. In verse 4 and verse 6, the phrases “commit” or “continue” to sin are structured in the Present Perfect Tense, indicating an ongoing action—something being “perfectly practiced.” John acknowledges that we all fall short and sin, but he's pointing out that there are those who strive to perfect their sinning without remorse or conviction. This kind of sin that John describes separates believers from non-believers: it is unrepented, unconvicted, unregretted, and celebrated sin. Before we start pointing fingers at others, we should examine our own lives to ensure we're not guilty of this.

John contrasts the practice of perfecting sin with the encouragement to perfectly practice our faith, as shown in verses 10,

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11, 16, 17, 18, and 23. He emphasizes this by acts of love demonstrated towards others, first within the fellowship of believers (our practice ground) and then to the world. Another point stood out to me: God wants us to perfectly practice our faith through demonstration. If we sit on the sidelines, we may not be sinning openly. We might choose not to actively sin, but if we also choose not to actively demonstrate love for one another, we are still making a choice. If we're not actively practicing our faith, we might be passively and quietly perfecting "non-love." Considering that God is love, what then is "non-love"?

So, what are you practicing to perfect?

The Command to Love

1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3 All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Sin and the Child of God

4 Everyone who commits [present perfect tense] sin breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. 5 But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 6 No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues [presence perfect tense] to sin has either seen him or known him.

7 Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8 The one who

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does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 9 No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

The Imperative of Love

10 This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. 11 For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 12 Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

13 Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

The Outworking of Love

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 19 This is how we know that we belong to the

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truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: 20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error

24 The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

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Chapter 4

One day, I watched a TV show about how ice cream is made, and it was truly fascinating. Beyond the machines stirring and freezing the cream, there was a laboratory! Who would have thought that something as simple as ice cream required folks in white lab coats mixing flavors and testing various flavor profiles against each other? Then, they interviewed one man who was the sole taste tester for the entire company. He carried a special 24-carat gold spoon in his lab coat pocket, designed specifically to avoid transferring any metallic taste to the ice cream—it was the Rolex of spoons, the best tool for the job. His palate was so finely tuned that he could detect almost microscopic differences in flavor. It was astonishing to see someone with such refined taste discernment.

John continues his message in Chapter 4, starting with the first six verses where he addresses the issue of discernment for us as believers. He provides practical warnings and cautions. Then, for the rest of the chapter, John presents the "gold spoon" that God has given us all. Here, John elaborates on the words *agape* and *agapeo*, both representing the same concept of unconditional, intentional, conscious choice above personal desires. However, John uses these words as both a noun and a verb. For those who might not recall, a noun is a person, place, or thing—let's think of it as an "item." A verb is an action word—let's call it a "demonstration." I have added these classifications within the text so that as you read, you can clearly distinguish what is being conveyed. The summary is quite interesting and might be convicting for some, as it was for me. It certainly

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motivates me to use (verb) the gold spoon more often so that I may possess (noun) the gold spoon more abundantly in my life.

On Denying the Incarnation

1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

God's Love and Ours

7 Dear friends, let us *[demonstrate]* love one another, for *[demonstrated]* love comes from God. Everyone who *[demonstrates]* loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not *[demonstrate]* love does not know God, because God is *[the item]* love. 9 This is how God showed his *[the item]* love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is *[demonstrated]* love: not that we *[demonstrate]* loved God, but that he *[demonstrated]* loved us and

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sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so [*demonstrated*]/loved us, we also ought to [*demonstrate*]/love one another.

Seeing Through Love

12 No one has ever seen God; but if we [*demonstrate*]/love one another, God lives in us and his [*demonstrated*]/love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 *If anyone acknowledges [*this is beyond a simple “magic formula to speak special words” and get a ticket to heaven. This acknowledgment, or confession, means a heartfelt admission of reliance. This is the broken heart confession of the guilty that one reveals they have no hope except for Jesus. Only you and God knows when that confession is real when it is made.*]/that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.* 16 And so we know and rely on the [*the item*]/love God has for us. God is [*the item*]/love. Whoever lives in [*the item*]/love lives in God, and God in them.

The Consummation of Love

17 This is how [*the item*]/love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in [*the item*]/love. But perfect [*the item*]/love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in [*the item*]/love. 19 We love because he first loved us.

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Obedience by Faith

20 Whoever claims to [*demonstrate*] love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not [*demonstrate*] love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot [*demonstrate*] love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who [*demonstrates*] loves God must also [*demonstrate*] love their brother and sister.

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Chapter 5

I really enjoy fishing, though I wish I were better at it. Growing up in California, I was an avid trout fisher in the rapids. Approaching the Kern River with my gear, I felt a surge of confidence. I had the right bait, the right gear, and the perfect spot. It seemed inevitable that I'd catch a fish. However, bass fishing in Texas lakes turned out to be a whole different ball game. The bait that worked back in California had no charm here. So, I ventured to the store and loaded up on a variety of lures—shiny ones, spinners, rubber ones, even the stinky types. Returning to the lake with this arsenal, my confidence had dwindled to nothing. I switched from one bait to another, hopelessly casting without any real purpose, just to see if anything would bite. Eventually, I reeled everything in and retreated indoors to warm up.

This experience reminds me of how we sometimes approach our prayer life—casting out words and "wishes" without truly believing that God hears us or will respond. We switch up our prayers, altering words and structure, tossing another hopeful prayer heavenward, yet remaining unsure if we're "doing it right." But this isn't what the Father desires for His children. Verses 14-15 highlight this: If we pray according to His will, we can be confident. We can expect to be heard and have our requests granted. But what exactly is God's will? A good starting point for understanding this is to read Romans 12.

Faith in the Incarnate Son of God

1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is

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how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

The Certainty of God's Witness

6 This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. *[Jesus was a real live, flesh and blood human being. Not a mystic spirit that was untouchable. He was 100% human, but 100% God. He also died a real death and was resurrected in a real body.]* 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.

9 We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

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Confidence and Compassion in Prayer

14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

16 If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. *[the implication of the term “brother or sister” is one in the family of God, not an unbeliever, so this is NOT the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This is probably not speaking about spiritual death, but rather physical death of the body. There are also sins in the natural world that led to physical death.]* 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

Knowing the True – Rejecting the False

18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin *[desirable acts of continued, habitual, willful sin.]*; the One [Jesus] who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them *[eternally]*. 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

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21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. *[The enemy of fellowship with God and living in His perfect will is idolatry. Idolatry chokes off our relationship with God.]*

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Chapter 1

There's a well-known saying that if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. I learned the truth of this saying firsthand as a young adult, though it took me a few years to fully grasp it. As a young married man, my wife and I were not particularly frugal. Often, we found ourselves with more month left at the end than our bank account could handle. Frequently, my wife would secretly ask her parents for help, which they provided quietly for years. Eventually, her father decided it was time for a change. One day, he invited me over and sat me down at his kitchen table with a ledger. He explained he was going to show me how to manage money. Initially embarrassed, I soon felt encouraged and empowered as he patiently explained his methods. He wasn't just giving me money—he was teaching me how to manage it myself. That day marked a turning point for me, a true step into adulthood.

In John's very brief letter, he emphasizes two themes: Truth and Love. It's one thing to know the truth—that Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh and sacrificed Himself for us. However, merely knowing this truth isn't enough. Applying love to this truth is what distinguishes us from the world. Love is the practical application that supports truth; it's the equivalent of teaching a man to fish rather than just feeding him once. Love requires a commitment to benefit someone else. It involves having the difficult conversations, like the one my father-in-law had with me. He could have continued giving

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me fish, but instead, he chose to invest his time and effort in teaching me, enabling me to feed my family myself.

Honestly, it's often easier to opt for the quick solution—a quick check, a quick word of encouragement, a quick prayer. But embodying truth through love requires commitment and courage, and it might be awkward, embarrassing, and uncomfortable. Yet, when we embrace truth with love, the results are far more fruitful. As Jesus said in John 8:31-32, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

– Greeting the Elect Lady

1 The elder, To the lady chosen by God and to her children, whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—
2 because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever:
3 Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love.

Walking in Christ's Commandments

4 It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. 5 And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

Beware of Antichrist Deceivers

7 I say this because many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any

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such person is the deceiver and the antichrist [*“Anti” doesn’t just mean the “opposite of” but also “a substitution of”*]. 8 Watch out that you do not lose what we have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully.

9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them. [*The literal meaning is to offer encouragement towards and support for*] 11 Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work.

John’s Farewell Greeting

12 I have much to write to you, but I do not want to use paper and ink. Instead, I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 13 The children of your sister, who is chosen by God, send their greetings.

BOOK OF 3 JOHN

Chapter 1

Several years ago, I was working as a Safety Supervisor at a company that underwent some leadership changes. A new VP of Safety was brought in, and he, in turn, hired a new Director. My fellow Supervisor and I were trying to adapt to these new dynamics when, after work one day, we casually chatted with our new Director. During the conversation, he shared that his previous job involved checking in drivers at a terminal and that he had retired from the Navy as a postal worker. My colleague and I exchanged quick glances. "This guy has absolutely no experience in safety!" we both thought. From that moment, a little resentment began to build in me. I felt superior, knowing more about the job than he did. I even offered to "help him" get acclimated, despite having never been a Director myself.

For five years, this man was my boss. Unbeknownst to me, during that time, he actually surpassed my knowledge in the role. Meanwhile, God was working on me—my ambition, my pride, my arrogance. Ambition is positive when aligned with serving others, as part of the Lord's mission. However, my heart wasn't in the right place then. My pride turned my ambition inward, focusing on myself. I spent most of those years believing I was better than my boss, and God kept me in that position until I recognized my self-focused ambition. God's grace is profound, and His patience is immense. I only regret that it took me so long to learn this lesson.

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Below, you will read one of the shortest and least read books in the New Testament. This small book highlights three men: two with the right heart posture and one without. All are identified as believers. I encourage you to open your heart fully and honestly assess if you can relate to any of these men. Listen to the Holy Spirit, and perhaps, if you find yourself relating to the “one,” you can shorten a lesson that God may have you on as well.

– Greeting to Gaius

1 The elder, To my dear friend Gaius, whom I love in the truth. 2 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. 3 It gave me great joy when some believers came and testified about your faithfulness to the truth, telling how you continue to walk in it. *[There is no greater joy than to hear from a third party of the integrity of a beloved one, demonstrating (walking) in Truth.]* 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Gaius Commended for Generosity

5 Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. 6 They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honors God. *[John is saying, “help fellow Believers in their Godly journey and calling, so that you too will be part of that mission”.]* 7 It was for the sake of the Name *[Jesus]* that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans *[Unbelievers]*. 8 We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

BOOK OF 3 JOHN

Diotrephes and Demetrius

9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, *[PRIDE]* will not welcome us. 10 So when I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, spreading malicious nonsense *[Greek words used here illustrate boiling water full of emptiness and steam – such is gossip. Of no value and only pain coming from it.]* about us. Not satisfied with that, he even refuses to welcome other believers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. *[Diotrephes was so convinced of his “own press release” that he assumed authority where he did not have it. And took steps that were contrary to truth in love, exposing himself. John merely pointed out the obvious, to warn others of Diotrephes influence, in order to protect the flock.]*

11 Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God. *[willful, habitual and self-serving sin causes blindness to see, feel, and discern God.]* 12 Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone--and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. *[In contrast to Diotrephes, John points to Demetrius and recommends him as a trusted Believer to Gaius.]*

Farewell Greeting

13 I have much to write you, but I do not want to do so with pen and ink. 14 I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. 15 Greet the friends there by name.

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Chapter 1

Have you ever bought a car, a house, or signed up for a subscription? Did you notice the “fine print”? Ever wonder why contracts, which could be succinct, turn into endless pages? It’s because people have twisted simple words and phrases to the point that a straightforward agreement now resembles a legal labyrinth. Our history is rife with such legal loopholes.

It’s in human nature to seek loopholes for gain or to serve personal agendas. With that in mind, consider the statement: “God loves me just as I am.” Many preachers worry that discussing grace can be perilous because it’s often misused as a license to sin. However, the concept of grace isn’t inherently dangerous; it’s the human heart that corrupts it.

Based on your heart’s motive, this statement can lead in two directions. One might think, “I am so good that God loves me, and I can do anything I want, and God will still love me. Even if I sin, God must still love me.” This interpretation is inherently flawed and reveals a motive not of living in God’s grace, but of exploiting what one perceives as a loophole in God’s offer of grace.

The other direction acknowledges, “God is so good that He loves even someone as flawed as me. Since He loves me so much, despite my faults, the least I can do is try to be the best version of myself for

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Him. I don't want to disappoint Him who grants such grace. I will strive to honor His gift of grace and forgiveness."

How do you interpret that statement? Do you find yourself looking for loopholes in the Word? Read Jude and consider where exploiting the "loophole of grace" can lead. Searching for an "angle," an "exception," or a "loophole" in His Word is a step towards a dark path away from a personal relationship with the Father.

Greeting to the Called

1 Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James, [*Jude was also the half-brother of Jesus, but rejected Jesus during his ministry. Notice how he now only lists himself as a brother of James. This was a position of humility, not counting himself worthy to claim that close brotherhood, but rather a servant of Jesus.*] To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: 2 Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.

The Sin and Doom of the Ungodly People

3 Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend [*through continued hard work, much like a wrestling match*] for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. 4 For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert [*to turn, change, remove, redefine*] the grace of our God into a license for immorality [*practicing sin without shame, or conviction. Not just sexual sin, but any anti-biblical teaching that*

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denies truth and embraces lies.] and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Old and New Apostates

5 Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling--these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion [*pride, wealth, laziness (Ezekiel 16:49)*]. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

8 In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. 9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" 10 Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct--as irrational animals do--will destroy them. 11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain [*false religion, resentment, anger and hatred*]; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error [*lack of repentance, love of money and greed*]; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion [*jealousy, rebellion and selfish ambition*].

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Apostates Depraved and Doomed

12 These people are blemishes at your love [*agape*] feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. [*self-focused without considering others*] They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; [no rain, and not even remaining long enough to produce shade, seen but worthless.] autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted--twice dead. [*meaning: without fruit the tree only takes nutrients, and produced nothing of value for others*]/13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever. [*busy causing strife and terror*]

14 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones 15 to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."

16 These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

A Call to Persevere

17 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

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Maintain Your Life with God

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

22 Be merciful to those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear--hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Doxology

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.